



# **SIGNS OF THE TIMES**

**News Articles for Episode 292**

# [Western Europe No Longer Dependent on Russian Oil | Newsmax.com](#)

#bibleprophecy, #oil, #russia, #europe

Feb 25, 2024

Western Europe has reportedly broken free of direct Russian oil imports for good — a shift that could ultimately be a blow to Vladimir Putin.

Analysts at the European energy consultancy [RystadEnergy](#) found the U.K. and much of Europe reversed a yearslong rise in reliance on Russian oil and gas before the Ukraine conflict — shifting to other suppliers like the United States and Canada, [The Telegraph](#) reported Sunday.

“Just before the war, just the idea of, 'We're going to stop buying oil and gas directly from Russia,' would have been crazy,” Jorge Leon, Rystad's senior vice president for oil markets, told the outlet. “But it has largely happened.”

The U.K. relied on Russia for about 30% of its diesel, 27% of its coal, and up to 10% of its gas — which arrived partly on ships as liquid natural gas and partly via trans-European pipelines, the outlet noted. That's now fallen to practically zero, the outlet reported.

Even though quantities of Russian fossil fuel have still been arriving via refineries in other countries, Leon told the outlet overall amounts are diminishing.

The key to breaking Russian dominance was a surge in supply from other sources outside OPEC, the cartel of mainly Middle Eastern countries to control supply and prices.

“Non-OPEC supplies do not usually grow that much but 2023 was a massive year,” Leon told the outlet. “The stars aligned and you had new projects come in from Brazil, Argentina, Canada, Norway, and so on. So that saved us in a sense.”

“And then you look at the U.S., growth has continued very, very strongly through 2023,” he said.

The economic slump in the U.K. and Europe since 2022 has also decreased overall energy demand.

“Demand in the OECD [a group of rich developed countries] has actually decreased last year and likely in 2024,” Leon told [The Telegraph](#). “So in a sense, we were kind of lucky that our economic growth in 2023 was lower.”

Cutting off Russian supplies has been slow — and Leon cautioned some of the apparent decline in trade with Russia could be illusory since the Kremlin was selling more crude oil to countries like India, where it could be processed into products like diesel and sold to the U.K. and Europe.

“Oil that was initially flowing from Russia into Europe is now going to China and India, from where suppliers are shipping to Europe,” he told the outlet.

Ashley Kelty, director of oil and gas research at Panmure Gordon investment bank, told the outlet despite the U.K.’s halt of direct imports of oil from Russia, the reality is more complex.

“So the reliance on Russia is largely broken but they still remain important to global supply, as China and India buy much of their products now — albeit at large discounts,” he said. “If they were forced to exclude Russia, then there would be another energy crisis with huge shortfalls in crude and [liquefied natural gas] supplies.”

# [Attacks against churches doubled in 2023, report warns: 'Growing disdain for Christianity' | Fox News](#)

#bibleprophecy, #church, #christian, #persecution

Feb 25, 2024

There were 436 hostile acts against Christians in the U.S. in 2023, a new report claims.

[Anti-Christian](#) hatred is accelerating in the United States, according to a Christian nonprofit that has tracked violence against U.S. churches since 2018.

The Washington D.C.-based Family Research Council released its annual Hostility Against Churches [report this week](#), finding there were 436 hostile incidents against churches in 2023. This is more than double the number tracked in 2022 and more than eight times as many as the group found in 2018.

The group said it used publicly available data to track 915 acts of hostility against churches over the past six years. Most of the incidents were acts of vandalism. The report also found gun-related incidents, arson and bomb threats used against churches.

"From January 2018 to November 2023, there were at least 709 occurrences of vandalism, 135 arson attacks or attempts, 22 gun-related incidents, 32 bomb threats, and 61 other incidents (assault, threats, interruption of worship services, etc.). In 39 cases, multiple types of hostility occurred (e.g., vandalism and arson)," [the report states](#).

## [ANTI-CHRISTIAN HOSTILITY REACHING 'UNPRECEDENTED' LEVELS IN CULTURE, GOVERNMENT UNDER BIDEN, OBSERVERS WARN](#)

Vandalism against churches may be a sign of the culture's increasing irreverence for places of worship and the Christian [religion in general](#), the report said.

"Americans appear increasingly comfortable lashing out against church buildings, pointing to a larger societal problem of marginalizing core Christian beliefs, including those that touch on hotbutton political issues related to human dignity and sexuality. Attacks on houses of worship may also signal a discomfort with religion in general," the report continued.

FRC president Tony Perkins claimed the hostility towards Christians displayed by the Biden administration was mirrored by the growing [persecution against Christians](#), worldwide.

"There is a common connection between the growing religious persecution abroad and the rapidly [increasing hostility](#) toward churches here at home: our government's policies," Perkins said in a statement. "The indifference abroad to the fundamental freedom of religion is rivaled only by the increasing antagonism toward the moral absolutes taught by Bible-believing churches here in the U.S., which is fomenting this environment of hostility toward churches."

## [WORLD LOOKS OTHER WAY AS CHRISTIANS 'KILLED FOR SPORT BY JIHADISTS' IN NIGERIA](#)

Some of President Biden's critics have accused his administration of [waging a war on Christians](#), after several pro-life activists were charged with violating federal law for protesting at an abortion clinic in 2021. The activists could face up to 11 years in prison.

FRC report author Arielle Del Turco believes the documented incidents show there is a "growing disdain for Christianity and core Christian beliefs" in the United States.

"Although the motivations for many of these acts of hostility remain unknown, the effect is unmistakable: religious intimidation. They send the message that churches are not wanted in the community or respected in general. Our culture is demonstrating a growing disdain for Christianity and core Christian beliefs, and acts of hostility against churches could be a physical manifestation of that. Regardless of the motivations of these crimes, everyone should treat churches and all houses of worship with respect and affirm the importance of religious freedom for all Americans."

The White House didn't respond to a request for comment.

# [Netanyahu Pushes Back on Biden's Claim of Waning Support | Newsmax.com](#)

#bibleprophecy, #united states, #israel, #support

Feb 27, 2024

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pushed back Tuesday on President Joe Biden's claim that Israel will lose support around the world if its "incredibly conservative" government continues its Gaza campaign.

On Monday, Biden told NBC's "Late Night With Seth Meyers" that "Israel has had the overwhelming support of the vast majority of nations."

But if it continues its current course of action "with this incredibly conservative government they have, and Ben-Gvir and others ... they're gonna lose support from around the world, and that is not in Israel's interest," Biden said, referring to Israel's National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir.

However, "there is a path forward," Biden said, which he couched as a cease-fire coupled with a hostage deal during the month of Ramadan.

"That gives us time to begin to move in directions that a lot of Arab countries are prepared to move in," he said. "For example, Saudi Arabia's ready to recognize Israel."

In a [statement](#) on Tuesday, Netanyahu pushed back, claiming that he's led a successful effort "to block pressure designed to end the war prematurely, and to secure strong support for Israel."

The Israeli leader cited a recent [Harvard-Harris poll](#) that found more than 80% of U.S. respondents support Israel over Hamas in the current war.

"This will help us continue the campaign until total victory," Netanyahu said.

According to a recent [AP/Norc poll](#), 50% of U.S. adults in January said Israel had gone too far in its Gaza Strip offensive, which was up from the 40% who said so in November.

Netanyahu's comments highlight the increased friction between the two world leaders as the conflict grinds on.

For his part, Biden has grown increasingly frustrated with his Israeli counterpart and the Jewish state's actions during the seemingly interminable war.

Earlier this month, he described the Israeli military operation as "over the top" and told Netanyahu in January that he didn't sign up for a year of hostilities.

# [US opens investigation into Israeli company making Iron Dome parts \(msn.com\)](#)

#bibleprophecy, #united states, #israel, #iron dome

Feb 29, 2024

In an unprecedented legal proceeding, the American government opened an investigation into [Finkelstein Metals](#) and is examining the government's conduct, *Maariv* reported Wednesday morning.

According to the American authorities, grants received by the company due to activities in a development zone constitute a prohibited government subsidy, and they allowed the company to sell its products in the US at inflated prices. The decision to open the investigation and sanctions against Finkelstein has puzzled Israeli officials.

The scope of Finkelstein's activities in the US is minimal compared to the American complainants, and it holds less than 3% of the market share in the US. However, this is about 75% of its sales volume. The American administration's claim also contradicts the trade agreement between the two countries, which has existed for decades.

## Imposition of sanctions

Sanctions and customs duties have already been imposed on the company, which significantly impair its ability to operate regularly and may endanger the supplies required for the defense industry, such as the [Iron Dome](#). As a result, the Foreign Affairs Ministry and the Association of Manufacturers entered the picture.

In the past, a lawsuit was filed against [Dead Sea](#) factories for over-the-top exports, which was ultimately rejected. In an ironic twist, the same parties suing Finkelstein previously defended the Dead Sea factories. Ron Tomer, the President of the Manufacturers' Association, contacted the relevant authorities in the Economy Ministry and warned of the unusual situation that could lead to damage to other companies.

According to Tomer: "This is an unfounded lawsuit, which may lead to the closure of the factory. If this case is successful, it may harm other Israeli companies and is contrary to existing trade agreements."

## Finkelstein's production

Finkelstein is defined as an essential enterprise for the industry and is the only Israeli company that produces brass, bronze, and copper alloy products. It employs 80



workers from the northern region, and its products are used by defense companies. The company operates in the Alon Tavor industrial zone near Afula.

The company is Rafael's sole supplier of metal bars for the purpose of producing ammunition for Iron Dome batteries. The company is controlled by the family, but about a decade ago, half of its shares were purchased by Leader Investments, owned by Dan David's heirs, for NIS 25 million.

#### Potential effects on trade relations

The precedential investigation procedure could have a dramatic impact on the entire trade relationship between Israel and the US and have broad implications for Israeli exporters to the US, including the defense industry.

Government benefits for industrial plants in development areas are often a necessary condition for the establishment of the plants. If the American government does decide that benefits of this type constitute a prohibited subsidy and therefore require the imposition of customs duties on the products exported to the US, this could lead to a wave of additional lawsuits by Israeli exporters to the US.

US sanctions on Israelis and Israeli firms are becoming more familiar, as it was recently announced that the US imposed sanctions on settlers who attacked Palestinians, and as a result, their bank accounts were restricted. As these new policies become realities for Israel, there may be deeper implications for Israel's economic sphere.

# [Israel must be kicked out of international bodies – Palestinian Authority tells UNHRC - The Jerusalem Post \(jpost.com\)](#)

#bibleprophecy, #israel, #palestinian, #anti-semitism

Feb 26, 2024

PA FM Maliki accused Israel of “genocide” against Palestinians due to its war in Gaza, charging that it enjoyed immunity for its “crimes against humanity” because the US protected it.

Israel should be ousted from international organizations, [Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki](#) told the United Nations Human Rights Council as he accused the Jewish state of acts of “genocide” against his people.

Steps must be taken in “challenging and isolating [the Israeli brutal regime](#) through boycott, the prohibition of engagement with products and companies associated with settlements, and the suspension of Israel’s membership to international organizations,” he said.

It was a statement that alluded to efforts by the PA to oust Israel from the United Nations.

[Maliki](#) spoke at the start of the 55th UNHRC session which is held in Geneva through to April 5. He was one of over 100 high-level diplomats slated to address the UNHRC this week.

## Further accusations against Israel

He called for a permanent ceasefire to the Israel-Hamas war, charging that Israel’s military actions in Gaza “offend our humanity.”

Maliki accused Israel of “genocide” against Palestinians due to its war in Gaza, charging that it enjoyed immunity for its “crimes against humanity” because the United States had continued to use its veto power to protect Israel from United Nations Security Council sanctions.

The war in Gaza must be ended immediately, he stated. There must be unimpeded humanitarian aid to that enclave and there can be no forced displacement of Palestinians, he stressed.

The Foreign Minister broadened his charges to include Israeli actions against Palestinians in the West Bank and east Jerusalem as he called on Israel to withdraw to the pre-1967 lines and its “occupation” of its territory.

These actions “cause both existential and strategic threats to the Palestinian cause,” Maliki said. “I urge the international community to respond strategically and decisively by taking positive, irreversible steps, including by recognizing the state of Palestine and granting it full membership to the United Nations,” Maliki said.

He did not mention his government’s resignation in Ramallah on Monday, as he stated that the PA was “ready to continue taking up its responsibilities in the Gaza Strip, [and] the West Bank including east Jerusalem, and is eager to collaborate with the international community to revive life in Gaza.”

Maliki charged that “the Israeli apartheid regime serves as the root cause of all crimes hindering the Palestinian people from exercising their fundamental rights and freedom.”

The speakers were given free rein in the opening session to speak about any compelling human rights issue. Many chose to condemn the IDF’s military campaign to oust Hamas from the enclave which it has forcibly controlled since 2007.

A number of the speakers, including Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, also accused Israel of genocide and apartheid. He also charged that the United States was complicit in these atrocities.

The UNHRC opened its sessions as the international community has increasingly called for a permanent ceasefire out of concern for the fate of the Palestinians in Gaza.

Hamas has asserted that close to 30,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza war-related violence. Israel has said that some 11,000 of those are combatants.

Some of the speakers mentioned the Hamas-led invasion of Israel in which over 1,200 people were killed and 253 were seized as hostages, of which 134 are still being held in the enclave.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock spoke about domestic violence and the attacks against women in the Israel-Hamas war and the Russian-Ukrainian one.

On October 7, “Hamas specifically targeted Israeli women and girls using sexual violence as a weapon.”

She also called on Hamas to release all the hostages.

Baerbock cautioned, however, that while “Israel has the right to defend itself, “it must do so within the framework of international humanitarian law and human rights laws.”

“The humanitarian situation in Gaza is simply catastrophic; mothers like us, like me, running from the fighting dragging crying kids behind them in panic, in despair; children [that are often seen] wandering the ruins of their homes, barefoot, hungry, alone,” Baerbock said.

United Nations chief Antonio Guterres on Monday deplored the UN Security Council’s deadlock over the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, saying divisions among its members had “perhaps fatally” undermined its authority.

Guterres said the UN Security Council often found itself “unable to act on the most significant peace and security issues of our time.”

“The council’s lack of unity on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and on Israel’s military operations in Gaza following the horrific terror attacks by Hamas on 7 October, has severely – perhaps fatally – undermined its authority,” he said.

“The council needs serious reform to its composition and working methods,” he said without elaborating.

Asked later if the Security Council could eventually be considered brain dead, Guterres told reporters: “If the Security Council one day shows that it is incapable of doing anything, then it will be very close to this medical condition.”

Separately, the International Court of Justice at The Hague in the Netherlands wrapped up six days of hearings on the legality of Israel’s “occupation” of territory it captured from Jordan and Egypt during the 1967 Six Day War.

On Monday Turkey’s Deputy Foreign Minister Ahmet Yildiz told judges the occupation was the root cause of conflict in the region.

Yildiz said “The unfolding situation after October 7 proves once again that, without addressing the root cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there can be no peace in the region,” he said, describing the occupation of Palestinian territories as “the real obstacle to peace” and urging the judges to declare it illegal.

The Arab League’s secretary general Ahmed Aboul Gheit described the “occupation as an affront to international justice” in a statement read out in court by a representative.

A handful of states, including the small island of Fiji, argued the ICJ should refuse to give any advisory opinion on Monday.

The United States urged the court last week to limit any advisory opinion on the matter of occupation and not order the unconditional withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Palestinian territories.

The ICJ hearings closed on Monday and a date for a decision will be announced in due course, the court said. The 15-judge panel is expected to take roughly six months to issue their non-binding opinion on the occupation.

# [French lawmakers demand ban on Israeli flag, anthem at Paris Olympics](#) [\(ynetnews.com\)](#)

#bibleprophecy, #france, #olympics, #anti-semitism

Feb 25, 2024

26 French lawmakers, belonging to three left-wing parties, signed a petition sent to the president of the International Olympic Committee, Thomas Bach, calling for the imposition of sanctions on Israel in the upcoming summer games following its 'war crimes' in Gaza

Several left-wing parties in France have been calling on the International Olympic Committee in recent days to impose sanctions against the Israeli athletes who will participate in the Olympic Games in Paris 2024.

Some 26 French lawmakers, belonging to three left-wing parties, signed a petition sent to the president of the International Olympic Committee, Thomas Bach, calling for the imposition of sanctions on Israel for what they say are its "war crimes" in the Gaza Strip.

The same legislators demand that the Israeli athletes participate in the games without the symbols of the state - the Israeli flag and national anthem - and compete neutrally, as the Russian and Belarusian athletes competed in the Tokyo Olympics.

At the beginning of this month, 12 soccer associations from the Middle East – led by Jordan – applied to FIFA with a request to exclude Israel from any international competition. Iran made an official announcement of the attempt, stating that "the Zionist entity should be completely suspended from any activity related to soccer." According to the announcement, Iran expects "immediate and serious measures" from FIFA and its member states to prevent, according to it, the continuation of "the crimes of the Zionists in Gaza."

The general secretary of UEFA, Theodore Theodoridis, dismissed the possibility that sanctions would be applied against Israel. "There is no intention to suspend Israel, its situation and Russia's are completely different," Theodoridis said.

"Israel is under attack by Israel haters all over the world and since October 7 even more so, when the face of Hamas was revealed in the murder, kidnapping and rape of innocent women, children and men. We are working and maintaining the representation and status of Israeli sports at the highest levels and so we will continue. It is important to understand that in this case it is a group of extreme jurists associated with a radical leftist party in France that refused to condemn the October 7 massacre, is

a supporter of Hamas and its position does not reflect the position of the French government," the Olympic Committee of Israel responded.

"We are in constant contact with the Israeli embassy in France and consult with them on the matter as well. The Israeli delegation to the Olympic Games is preparing for the largest sporting event in the world, an event of human excellence and we are excited for the privilege of leading the delegation and representing the State of Israel," according to the committee.

# [Anti-Israel Activists Pressure China to Increase Pressure in Middle East \(breitbart.com\)](#)

#bibleprophecy, #china, #israel, #anti-semitism

Feb 26, 2024

The *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) on Monday [reported](#) Palestinian leaders, and advocates of their cause, are increasingly turning to China as their last hope to end the Israeli military campaign against Hamas.

The Palestinians want China to pay more than just lip service to the “two-state solution” and speak out more forcefully against Israel’s planned incursion into the southern Gaza border city of Rafah.

China has constantly [repeated](#) its mantra that only the creation of a Palestinian state can bring stability throughout the current crisis, and it has done nothing to interfere with the Hamas-allied, Iran-backed Houthis of Yemen as they attack shipping in the Red Sea, despite Beijing’s [clear interest](#) in keeping those shipping lanes open.

Palestinian leaders and allies, such as researcher Razan Shawamreh to Eastern Mediterranean University, think China could “do more” to push for a ceasefire in Gaza.

“The Palestinian sense of marginalization and vulnerability, stemming from U.S. policies that support Israel’s crimes, have prompted them to find potential alternatives for support and solidarity, and they find it in China,” Shawamreh told the *SCMP*.

Like all Palestinian advocates, Shawamreh forgot about the 10/7 atrocities completely and did not dwell on how the actions of Hamas might have contributed to that “Palestinian sense of marginalization and vulnerability.” As far as he was concerned, the situation in Gaza is purely a power play and Chinese dictator Xi Jinping could be leaning harder on Israel to end “the collective punishment against the people in Gaza,” as he described the Israeli response to Hamas terror in November.

“I contend that [China] can engage in serious bilateral discussions with both parties, extending beyond its peace proposals, given the positive regard in which both sides of the conflict hold China, in recognition of its rising influence,” Shawamreh said.

Research fellow Zoon Ahmed Khan of Beijing’s Center for China and Globalization agreed that Xi could do more, crediting China with being “historically sympathetic towards the Palestinian cause while maintaining pragmatic relations and broadened engagement with Israel.”



Shawamreh implied the United States is the big stumbling block for China becoming Gaza peacemaker because, while the Palestinians strongly prefer Beijing as a mediator for negotiations, Israel gets \$300 billion a year in U.S. military and economic aid, so the Israelis would not allow Beijing to muscle Washington away from the negotiating table.

This cynical analysis willfully ignores the fact that Israel is fighting Hamas to avenge thousands of sadistic rapes and murders, and to prevent thousands more, so altering its military trajectory is not a matter of either Xi Jinping or President Joe Biden tugging on the right strings.

China has also openly expressed support for Hamas terrorism, as the *SCMP* duly noted:

*On Thursday – the fourth day of hearings at the International Court of Justice – China expressed support for the right of Palestinians to engage in “armed struggle” against Israel, stressing that it could not be equated with terrorism.*

*“In pursuit of the right to self-determination [the Palestinian people have the right to the] use of force to resist foreign oppression and to complete the establishment of the Palestinian state,” Ma Xinmin, a Chinese foreign ministry legal adviser, said.*

This would be roughly comparable to Israel insisting the oppressed Uyghur Muslims have a right to wage an “armed struggle” against the brutal Chinese regime and then expecting China to let Israel mediate negotiations with the Uyghurs. To put it mildly, the Chinese would not go for that.

Another thing Hamas apologists miss about China’s position in the Middle East is that Beijing worked very hard to cultivate influence with various regional powers and some of them have far more maximalist positions on the Palestinian question than Beijing does. If the Chinese did assert themselves as brokers, they would find themselves choosing between rejection by Israel, or alienating the hardline anti-Israel powers they have been romancing for years.

Rula Shadeed, co-director of the Palestine Institute for Public Diplomacy, missed this point when she told the *SCMP* that China could leverage its economic relationship with Israel to gain political leverage.

“The trade relationship between China and Israel has been ongoing, for example. There has not been anything that was stopped, no calls for summoning the Israeli ambassador. There was not even mentions or threats of cutting ties,” Shadeed said – prompting her *SCMP* correspondents to point out that China did talk about cutting off shipments to Israel last month, and the Israelis immediately summoned the Chinese ambassador to complain.

China is unlikely to use economic leverage on behalf of Hamas precisely because it knows the Israelis are serious about neutralizing the threat to their security and China

would only embarrass itself by trying to bully or buy them off. As seen in the comments above, China has gone remarkably far on behalf of the Palestinians already; pushing any harder would have sharply diminishing returns.

Tricontinental Institute for Social Research director Vijay Prahasad amusingly thought it was “perplexing” that Hamas allies like China have not been able to talk the U.N. into declaring a “no-fly zone over Gaza” or a “full arms embargo” against Israel. Beijing is unlikely to fritter away its carefully accumulated credibility by making such delusional and futile proposals. Imagine the split screens as China demands an arms embargo against Israel while the latest gigantic cache of illegal Hamas weapons is hauled out from beneath a school in Gaza.

China is doing what it can to tip the scales in favor of Hamas, such as by speaking in favor of Palestinian terrorism at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and painting the rape-and-murder spree of October 7 as a legitimate act of “resistance to foreign oppression.” Hamas wholeheartedly applauded the Chinese emissary’s remarks on Saturday.

The *Jerusalem Post* [saw](#) this provocative speech to the ICJ as part of China’s “pivot” to the Palestinians after trying to develop “warmer relations with Israel.”

The Israeli government [responded](#) by essentially telling the Chinese to be ashamed of themselves for making such an “unfortunate statement.”

“The laws of war do not permit the systematic and deliberate attack of civilians or the use of civilians as human shields, two war crimes that Hamas commits in the name of ‘armed struggle,’” the Israeli Foreign Ministry pointed out.

“At the present time, the Chinese statement could be interpreted as support for the murderous terrorist attack committed by Hamas on October 7th,” the Foreign Ministry added.

This heated exchange suggests China has already lost whatever influence it might have over the Israelis.

*Foreign Policy* [suggested](#) in early February that, at this point, China is mostly putting on a pro-Palestinian show to milk the Israel-Hamas conflict for more political credibility with the “Global South” developing nations, which are not pleased with America’s energetic defense of Israel. The last thing China wants is to get dragged into making security commitments to the Palestinians. It wants to carp at the United States and use the situation to push developing nations further out of the American-European orbit.

“They feel that this is going to further undermine the U.S. in the eyes of the rest of the world, in the parts of the world that they care about. This plays right into their strategy for the Chinese – to show how isolated the Americans are, to show how they’re out of

sync with the rest of the world, and just show the hypocrisy of the Americans,” Eric Olander of the China Global South Project said.

# [Mexico City may be just months away from running out of water | CNN](#)

#bibleprophecy, #water, #mexico city, #drought

Feb 25, 2024

One of the world's biggest cities may be just months away from running out of water

Alejandro Gomez has been [without proper running water](#) for more than three months. Sometimes it comes on for an hour or two, but only a small trickle, barely enough to fill a couple of buckets. Then nothing for many days.

Gomez, who lives in Mexico City's Tlalpan district, doesn't have a big storage tank so can't get water truck deliveries — there's simply nowhere to store it. Instead, he and his family eke out what they can buy and store.

When they wash themselves, they capture the runoff to flush the toilet. It's hard, he told CNN. "We need water, it's essential for everything."

Water shortages are not uncommon in this neighborhood, but this time feels different, Gomez said. "Right now, we are getting this hot weather. It's even worse, things are more complicated."

Mexico City, a sprawling metropolis of nearly 22 million people and one of the world's biggest cities, is facing a severe water crisis as a tangle of problems — including geography, chaotic urban development and leaky infrastructure — are compounded by the impacts of climate change.

Years of abnormally low rainfall, longer dry periods and high temperatures have added stress to a water system already straining to cope with increased demand. Authorities have been forced to introduce significant restrictions on the water pumped from reservoirs.

"Several neighborhoods have suffered from a lack of water for weeks, and there are still four months left for the rains to start," said Christian Domínguez Sarmiento, an atmospheric scientist at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).

Politicians are downplaying any sense of crisis, but some experts say the situation has now reached such critical levels that Mexico City could be barreling towards "day zero" in a matter of months — where the taps run dry for huge swaths of the city.

**Historic lows**

Densely populated Mexico City stretches out across a high-altitude lake bed, around 7,300 feet above sea level. It was built on clay-rich soil — into which it is now sinking — and is prone to earthquakes and highly vulnerable to climate change. It's perhaps one of the last places anyone would choose to build a megacity today.

The Aztecs chose this spot to build their [city of Tenochtitlan](#) in 1325, when it was a series of lakes. They built on an island, expanding the city outwards, constructing networks of canals and bridges to work with the water.

But when the Spanish arrived in the early 16th century, they tore down much of the city, drained the lakebed, filled in canals and ripped out forests. They saw “water as an enemy to overcome for the city to thrive,” said Jose Alfredo Ramirez, an architect and co-director of Groundlab, a design and policy research organization.

Their decision paved the way for many of Mexico City's modern problems. Wetlands and rivers have been replaced with concrete and asphalt. In the rainy season, it floods. In the dry season, it's parched.

Around 60% of Mexico City's water comes from its underground aquifer, but this has been so over-extracted that the city is sinking at a frightening rate — around 20 inches a year, according to [recent research](#). And the aquifer is not being replenished anywhere near fast enough. The rainwater rolls off the city's hard, impermeable surfaces, rather than sinking into the ground.

The rest of the city's water is pumped vast distances uphill from sources outside the city, in an incredibly inefficient process, during which [around 40% of the water](#) is lost through leaks.

The Cutzamala water system, a network of reservoirs, pumping stations, canals and tunnels, supplies about 25% of the water used by the Valley of Mexico, which includes Mexico City. But severe drought has taken its toll. Currently, at [around 39%](#) of capacity, it's been languishing at a [historic low](#).

“It's almost half of the amount of water that we should have,” said Fabiola Sosa-Rodríguez, head of economic growth and environment at the Metropolitan Autonomous University in Mexico City.

In October, Conagua, the country's national water commission, [announced](#) it would restrict water from Cutzamala by 8% “to ensure the supply of drinking water to the population given the severe drought.”

Just a few weeks later, officials significantly tightened restrictions, reducing the water supplied by the system [by nearly 25%](#), blaming extreme weather conditions.

“Measures will have to be taken to be able to distribute the water that Cutzamala has over time, to ensure that it does not run out,” Germán Arturo Martínez Santoyo, the director general of Conagua, said in a statement at the time.

Around 60% of Mexico is experiencing [moderate to exceptional drought](#), according to a February report. Nearly 90% of Mexico City is in severe drought — and it’s set to get worse with the start of the rainy season still months away.

“We are around the middle of the dry season with sustained temperature increases expected until April or May,” said June Garcia-Becerra, an assistant professor in engineering at the University of Northern British Columbia.

Natural climate variability heavily affects this part of Mexico. Three years of La Niña brought drought to the region, and then the arrival of El Niño last year helped deliver a painfully short rainy season that failed to replenish the reservoirs.

But the long-term trend of human-caused global warming hums in the background, fueling longer droughts and fiercer heat waves, as well as heavier rains when they do arrive.

“Climate change has made droughts increasingly severe due to the lack of water,” said UNAM’s Sarmiento. Added to this, high temperatures “have caused the water that is available in the Cutzamala system to evaporate,” she said.

Last summer saw brutal heat waves roil large parts of the country, which claimed at least 200 lives. These heat waves would have been [“virtually impossible”](#) without climate change, according to an analysis by scientists.

The climate impacts have collided with the growing pains of a fast-expanding city. As the population booms, experts say the centralized water system has not kept pace.

### **‘Day zero?’**

The crisis has set up a fierce debate about whether the city will reach a “day zero,” where the Cutzamala system falls to such low levels that it will be unable to provide any water to the city’s residents.

Local media widely reported in early February that an official from a branch of Conagua said that without significant rain, “day zero” could arrive as early as June 26.

But authorities have since sought to assure residents there will be no day zero. In a [press conference](#) on February 14, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said that work was underway to address the water problems. Mexico City’s mayor, Martí Batres Guadarrama, said in a recent [press conference](#) that reports of day zero were “fake news” spread by political opponents.

Conagua declined CNN's interview requests and did not answer specific questions on the prospect of a day zero.

But many experts warn of a spiraling crisis. Mexico City could run out of water before the rainy season arrives if it carries on using it in the same way, Sosa-Rodríguez said. "It's probable that we will face a day zero," she added.

This doesn't mean a complete collapse of the water system, she said, because the city isn't dependent on just one source. It won't be the same as when Cape Town in South Africa came [perilously close to running totally dry](#) in 2018 following a severe multi-year drought. "Some groups will still have water," she said, "but most of the people won't."

Raúl Rodríguez Márquez, president of the non-profit Water Advisory Council, said he doesn't believe the city will reach a day zero this year — but, he warned, it will if changes are not made.

"We are in a critical situation, and we could reach an extreme situation in the next few months," he told CNN.

### **'I don't think anyone is prepared'**

For nearly a decade, Sosa-Rodríguez said she has been warning officials of the danger of a day zero for Mexico City.

She said the solutions are clear: Better wastewater treatment would both increase water availability and decrease pollution, while rainwater harvesting systems could capture and treat the rain, and allow residents to reduce their reliance on the water network or water trucks by 30%.

Fixing leaks would make the system much more efficient and reduce the volume of water that has to be extracted from the aquifer. And nature-based solutions, such as restoring rivers and wetlands, would help provide and purify water, she said, with the added advantage of greening and cooling the city.

In a [statement on its website](#), Conagua said it is undertaking a 3-year project to install, develop and improve water infrastructure to help the city cope with decreases in the Cutzamala system, including adding new wells and commissioning water treatment plants.

But in the meantime, tensions are rising as some residents are forced to cope with shortages, while others — often in the wealthier enclaves — remain mostly unaffected.

"There is a clear unequal access to water in the city and this is related to people's income," Sosa-Rodríguez said. While day zero might not be here yet for the whole of Mexico City, some neighborhoods have been grappling with it for years, she added.

Amanda Martínez, another resident of the city's Tlalpan district, said for people here, water shortages are nothing new. She and her family often have to pay more than \$100 for a tank of water from one of the city's water trucks. But it's getting worse. Sometimes more than two weeks can go by without water and she fears what may be coming, she told CNN.

“I don't think anyone is prepared.”



# Newsom's California is a mess of crime and a huge warning to the nation | Fox News

#bibleprophecy, #drugs, #crime, #lawlessness

Feb 29, 2024

California's crime, drugs and homelessness show Newsom opposed to what citizens want.

As [California Governor Gavin Newsom](#) not so subtly presents himself as a presidential candidate-in-waiting, he has taken to calling our state a "a model for the nation." Nothing could be further from the truth. A striking example is the breakdown of law and order in California during Newsom's governorship.

The situation is so dire that Newsom himself recently announced a "[law enforcement surge operation](#)" in Oakland to try to restore some semblance of order. Yet the rampant crime in that city is nothing new. It can be traced back to 2014, when Newsom and other California political leaders supported a new law called Proposition 47, the so-called "Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act."

Prop. 47 took a hatchet to the state criminal code. It reclassified a [number of offenses from felonies](#) to misdemeanors, including shoplifting and related theft offenses, along with the use of drugs like methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine and fentanyl. The result, over the last decade, has been chaos in California's streets – with soaring homelessness, rampant theft and an overdose epidemic.

At the moment, roughly half the unsheltered homeless in the entire country are in California. Proposition 47 is largely to blame. By reclassifying offenses from felonies to misdemeanors, Prop. 47 thrusts many individuals into a never-ending cycle of homelessness.

With limited housing availability, treatment options and community-based support systems, many prisoners who were released early became homeless and struggled to reintegrate into society.

In the decade before Prop. 47's enactment, the state homeless population decreased by 38.5%; in the decade since, it has steadily increased while the national average has remained constant or gone down. Last year's homeless count represented a 40% increase in just the last five years, despite the state record spending on homelessness and declaring a state of emergency on homelessness.

Proposition 47 has also led to a rampant increase in theft throughout the state. Reclassifying many of California's theft-related felonies to misdemeanors, and doing

away with increased consequences for habitual shoplifters, has predictably emboldened thieves.

Stealing merchandise less than \$950 is now a low-level misdemeanor that usually does not even result in an arrest. Individuals are cited and released, with no increased consequences for "frequent fliers."

Perversely, many of these repeat offenders are stealing in order to buy hard drugs. It has become common to see thieves enter large box retailers, steal items, turn around and sell those items on either Craigslist, Facebook Marketplace, or Offer Up, and then use the proceeds to buy heroin, cocaine, and fentanyl.

This has made many items prime targets for theft due to their accessible re-sale markets, like tools, Legos, vacuums, appliances and basic household items. To combat this trend, we now see stores locking up these goods, with large cages and pick-proof locks for razors, baby formula, soap, shampoo, clothes and Stanley cups.

Many businesses, especially big-box stores, have simply stopped reporting the thefts. In fact, theft related crimes reclassified under Proposition 47 are so underreported that experts have labeled the data unreliable.

To add insult to injury, politicians in Sacramento shamelessly point to the official theft numbers as an excuse for not taking action, while citizens deal with locked containers and cages for basic grocery store items.

The darkest consequence of Proposition 47 has been the surge in overdose deaths throughout the state. In 2021 alone, there were 10,898 drug related overdoses in California, 7,175 of which were opioid related. In Sacramento, California's capital city, deaths among the homeless have nearly tripled in the last decade, with nearly half attributable to drug use.

Prop. 47 made hard drugs cheap and accessible, without any incentive or requirement for treatment. Individuals found in possession of hard drugs are misdemeanor offenders who, when convicted, receive one-year of informal probation, without any form of drug treatment program. Before Prop. 47, California had drug courts for crimes of simple possession, yet these programs no longer exist.

To this day, Newsom stands by Prop 47. But Californians have taken matters into their own hands. We are closing in on the signatures needed to qualify an initiative for the November ballot that will give voters the chance to end the Prop 47 era.

*Proposition 47 has also led to a rampant increase in theft throughout the state. Reclassifying many of California's theft-related felonies to misdemeanors, and doing away with increased consequences for habitual shoplifters, has predictably emboldened thieves.*

The measure is called The Homeless, Drug Addiction, and Theft Reduction Act. It increases consequences for habitual shoplifters, mandates treatment for hard drug users, allows those who enter treatment to have their charges dismissed, and implements greater consequences for hard drug dealers.

If this measure passes, it will go a long way toward improving the quality of life in California. It will also send an important message to the rest of the country about the reckless agenda that has degraded our state. When it comes to public safety, Gavin Newsom's California is far from a model for the nation. It is a warning to the nation.

# [Tennessee allows officials not to perform same-sex marriages | Politics News \(christianpost.com\)](#)

#bibleprophecy

Feb 27, 2024

A new Tennessee law will allow public officials to refuse to perform same-sex marriages if their religious beliefs make them unable to do so in good conscience.

Tennessee's Republican Gov. Bill Lee signed into law House Bill 878 last Wednesday.

The Republican-controlled Tennessee Senate approved the bill in a [27-5 vote](#) earlier this month after the House of Representatives passed the legislation in a [74-22 vote](#) last year.

While the vote fell along party lines, one House Democrat joined all House Republicans in supporting the legislation.

The bill's text declares, "A person shall not be required to solemnize a marriage if the person has an objection to solemnizing the marriage based on the person's conscience or religious beliefs." The legislation amends [Tennessee Code Annotated Section 36-3-301](#), which outlines the requirements for solemnizing a marriage in the state.

A [fiscal note](#) from the Tennessee General Assembly's Fiscal Review Committee found that "The proposed legislation is not expected to have any significant impact on the number of marriages solemnized in Tennessee nor on the number of marriage licenses issued; therefore, any fiscal impact to state or local government is estimated to be not significant."

The bill's legislation comes nearly nine years after the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* established a right to same-sex marriage.

Following the bill's passage in the Senate, LGBT advocates rallied on Capitol Hill in Nashville in opposition to the bill allowing government officials to refuse to perform same-sex marriages.

"Marriage equality was settled by the Supreme Court in 2015, reaffirmed by a bipartisan majority in Congress in 2022, and there is overwhelming support nationally for same-sex marriage," Molly Whitehorn, an organizer with the Human Rights Campaign, told [The Tennessean](#).

"All Tennesseans have a right to marry the person they love regardless of gender and should not be turned away by a government employee based upon that employee's personal beliefs."

Republican Rep. Monty Fritts, who sponsored the bill, argued before a subcommittee last year that "officiants must be able to refuse to solemnize marriages that are contrary to their beliefs" even as "societal views change about what constitutes a marriage."

"The government has a responsibility to protect the exercise of religious beliefs," he said. "Those with the authority to perform civil ceremonies would also be permitted to refuse to solemnize marriage for reasons of conscience."

Following the *Obergefell* ruling, a county clerk from the neighboring state of Kentucky received national attention for refusing to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples due to her religious belief that marriage is between a man and a woman.

Kim Davis of Rowan County was [arrested and spent five days in jail](#) in 2015 and continues to face [legal challenges](#) to this day, including fines, after declining to issue same-sex marriage licenses.

After becoming governor in late 2015, Republican Matt Bevin [changed Kentucky requirements](#) to make it so that county clerks would no longer be required to sign off on marriage licenses.

A [report](#) compiled by the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty last year identified additional states where public officials can opt out of performing same-sex marriages as Mississippi, North Carolina and Utah.

Davis is not the only person to face consequences for refusing to perform same-sex marriages following the *Obergefell* decision. [Yanicka Parker](#), a court specialist in Broward County, Florida, was fired from her position in 2016 after refusing to issue same-sex marriage licenses due to her religious beliefs.

Similarly, in 2018, Root, New York, Town Clerk [Laurel "Sherrie" Eriksen](#) was subject to an investigation by the state after declining to provide a same-sex couple with a marriage license because of her beliefs about marriage.