AMBA STAFF

Selig Taubenblatt
12/11/87

Interview Notes - T. Naff & RM

Selig Taubenblatt served for 29 years (9 yrs State, 20 AID), mostly in ME/NA. He left government service in 1983.

From 1975 until 1980, he was involved in the planning and financing of the Maqarin Dam, assessing regional impacts and funding feasibilities. The roadblock until last summer was the Syrian boycott. Now Syria and Jordan have agreed on the Unity Dam (upstream and smaller than Maqarin).

In Israel, key water people:

Yacov Vardi -- their best technocrat, retired two years ago but should still be very knowledgeable and up on things.

Meir Ben Meir -- sometime minister of agriculture, a politician not a technocrat.

In Syria, much has happened in the last five years. They have undertaken major development work, with canals for purposes both of development and of security.

Technologies:

Reuse of water -- Recycling primarily for agricultural uses. Israel does this extensively; Jordan is starting to reuse.

Recharge of aquifers -- Catching the excess winter flood waters and pumping them into the ground for storage in aquifers for use in the summer. Helps relieve the overpumping of the aquifers. Replenishes the water stored; when pressure in aquifer is lowered you get saltwater intrusion, which results in permanent damage to the aquifer. This is especially serious on the Mediterranean shelf. Israel gets 25-30% of its water from the Western Slope aquifers that underly the West Bank (the Yarkon-Tanninim and Northeast aquifers): of this water, 95% goes to Israel and 5% is used on the West Bank.

Conservation -- The use of sprinkler, drip, and other improved irrigation techniques.

Economics -- Allowing the price of water to rise toward its production cost (lowering subsidies) makes investment in conservation technologies more attractive.

Efficiency -- Dams and barrages (large and small) to allow better use of surface water for irrigation.

New water -- Desalination of sea water and of brackish water by various technologies (RO, MED, MFD, etc.) will be economically feasible when the price of water gets high enough. Taubenblatt was involved in construction of Israel's Ashdod MED plant.

The crisis in the Jordan basin will come after the year 2000. Must plan today to have plants on line to meet that need. Also, emphasize efficiency. Techniques are available to produce more in agriculture with less water. Although Israel is reducing its subsidies, agricultural production per unit of land or water is going up. Jordan still needs agricultural development to employ people, but more efficient use of water is feasible. Food security is a big issue for both Israel and Jordan.

Maqarin Dam:

The original dam was to have been 170 m high, the new Unity Dam (for which Harza is doing feasibility study) will be 100-115 m high. This reduced height means significantly reduced amount of water stored. Less water will be available for use downstream. Jordan has two demands for downstream water: (1) the East Ghor Canal and Jordan Valley irrigation, and (2) domestic-industrial water for the northern plateau. Israel still wants the water for the Adassiya Triangle, which was allocated under the Johnston Plan, plus water for the West Bank.

Israel now gets more than the 25 Mcm of Yarmuk water that is guaranteed by agreement; it uses more like 100 Mcm. It is likely that what Israel is now drawing off the Yarmuk for Israel and West Bank would be cut off and stored behind the dam in winter. The Unity Dam will have the same problems among upstream-downstream riparians as the Maqarin Dam, except it will control a smaller amount of water. In the Middle East, water is politics, and politics will govern any negotiations. The question is whether any downstream riparian will allow the gates to be controlled by any third party.

[On the legal implications of the Maqarin Dam, a USAID study was done by Dick Baxter of Harvard.]

Groundwater technologies:

New technologies for drilling and extracting groundwater are experimental and will not be a significant factor between now and the end of the century. Not likely that significant new sources of groundwater will be found, or that known sources will yield greater amounts. The new Mukheiba field in Jordan is proving to be less than was first thought. The water was under pressure so the first taps were gushers, but the steady production rate is less than was hoped. The problem-solving potential of new extraction technologies rates a "two" on a scale of "ten".

Remember that the Johnston Plan covered only surface water, it did not assess groundwater or count that into its allocations. For example, the major western slope (Yarkon-Tanninim and Northeast) aquifer was not figured in as part of Israel's share, although it was known to be a significant contributor. The calculation of Israel's share is therefore an under-estimate.

As incomes rise, so does water consumption!

Policy making takes account of indigenous uses and international uses, the latter requiring negotiation.

More people to see:

Meir Rosenne, legal advisor, Israeli foreign ministry.

Roscoe Siddarth, U.S. ambassador to Jordan.

Thomas Pickering, U.S. ambassador to Israel.

Morris Draper, U.S. consul-general in Jerusalem.

All are old water hands.

Much water writing from the U.K.

Tom Neff and Ruth Mathson

INTERVIEW FORM

DATE DEC 11, 1988 TIME _____

1. NAME SELIG TAUBENBLATT

2. POSITION RETIRED IN. 1983

3. OCCUPIED SINCE 1944 STATE DEP. MEINE

4. PREVIOUS POSITION [illegible] AID

5. OCCUPIED SINCE 1954

6. PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE FOREIGN SERVICE

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Ch I

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Economics -- Allowing the price of water to rise toward its production cost (lowering subsidies) makes investment in conservation technologies more attractive.

Ch II

Efficiency -- Dams and barrages (large and small) to allow better use of surface water for irrigation.

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Ch 5

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