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**Prospects for Regional Water Cooperation
Guiding Interests**

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I Overview

1) Prospects are mixed. The quid pro quo underlying all issues and questions in the region, including cooperation, is the accomplishment of a sustainable political settlement among the Israelis and various Arab parties. Without it, no amount of confidence building measures will produce sufficient trust among the principal actors for stable, long-term hydrological (or other kinds of) cooperation basin or region-wide. While confidence building measures are a good and necessary negotiating tactic, they are limited in their effectiveness; too much reliance must not be placed in them lest they become ends in themselves at the expense of the primary goal.

2) Among the reasons for this circumstance, are two basic, interrelated factors: a) The Middle East is a multiaxial region, that is, there are several axes of power relationships that are not only variable, but unstable. Even in the best of circumstances—and recognizing what constitutes “best circumstances” in any given situation in the Middle East is in itself a major feat of divination—this factor makes negotiations, let alone cooperation, complex and difficult. b) For this reason, and because of the political culture of the area, every event or movement—whether perceived as positive or negative—in one part of the region will sooner or later impact on every other part, thereby spreading and multiplying political risks and reinforcing the barriers to long-term cooperation when the influence is regressive.

3) Because of these factors, particularly regarding the instability of political relationships, an instability which is exacerbated by militant religio-political movements that are now pervasive, regional cooperation is less likely than more modest efforts along a single basin. It is within the primary and proximate relationships of a basin that the essential experiences of cooperation need to be built up before larger, perhaps more complex, undertakings are attempted. Strive for regional cooperation, but focus on basin-wide efforts first for as long as it takes to lay the basis for the broader program.

II Interests

Whether each party will be attracted to bi-or-multilateral cooperation in solving mutual water problems will be determined by the nature and size of the *interests* they perceive to be involved and whether by joint efforts those interests can be realized with sufficient payoff. In few instances will those interests be constituted purely of water issues unalloyed by political, economic, and security considerations which are integral to water. Water being inherently political is another reason why attempts to use water as a matrix within which ideology and politics can be subordinated enough to achieve cooperation, is a very difficult trick to bring off successfully—particularly as in the instance of the Jordan basin where there exists little trust and where there is a significant disparity (or asymmetry) in power and control among the basin's actors. In such circumstances, full fledged cooperation would require powerful incentives and very probably mediation and international assistance.

Therefore, one should not assume in the absence of treaty agreements among the Arabs and Israelis (accords that would have to be underpinned by some kind of international guarantees) that more than marginal basin cooperation can be achieved. Treaty agreements with the necessary legal obligations and structures to uphold them are the key to successful hydropolitical basin and/or regional cooperation in the Middle East.

Within this context, we can identify in a general way some of the larger hydropolitical objectives of the Jordan basin negotiants:

1) Israel. Israel controls or is in a position to control virtually all of the basin's major water sources which provides the country with an unprecedented degree of water security. Israel's hegemonic military power enables it to maintain that control. The current Labor leadership appears to understand that giving up some of that control is requisite to achieving a peaceful settlement with its adversaries. Thus, its objective is to retain as much as possible of the hydropolitical status quo, especially in the Golan and Occupied Territories, while getting the Arabs to sign a peace treaty. Most important is the retention of control of the water resources of the Occupied Territories which are now seen as integral to the maintenance of its national water balance and essential to water security. For this reason, and because water is always a terrain security problem, a secure, stable settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation will depend on a satisfactory resolution of the hydropolitical issues in the Territories.

On another salient, the Yarmouk, the Israelis will almost certainly reject attempts to restrict their withdrawals to the old Johnston Plan allocation. They have frequently extracted as much as 100 mm³/yr and on average between 70 and 80 mm³/yr for many year. Because about 85% of this supply has been used to replenish water taken out of Lake Kinneret for the purpose of recharging the Coastal Plain aquifer—most of the remainder has been used to maintain the settlements on the Golan—Israel will probably insist on retention of such withdrawals. However, this may be an issue where the Israelis could show flexibility, that is, would be willing to trade-off to achieve an objective of higher priority.

Should Israel yield anything on the basin's water fronts—a prospect which at this juncture appears to be remote—a secondary objective would be assurances that it can continue to receive sufficient quantities of water supplies it currently holds; a tactic in achieving this objective would probably

be to prolong implementation of an agreement until it feels the situation is safe. Another related objective will be to gain as much economic and security rewards from the U.S. (and possibly Europe) for its cooperation as possible.

2) Syria. Syria's hydropolitical objectives are in some respects more complex and difficult to discern than the other Jordan riparians because not only are they deeply embedded in Syria's larger strategic and ideological designs, but because Syria is the pivot that links the Euphrates with the Jordan basin, and what transpires in the one basin reciprocally impacts on what happens in the other. Syria's water policies are to a significant extent shaped by this situation.

As regards water, should Israel agree to restore part of the Golan Heights—the prerequisite for Syrian agreement to a settlement—Syria wants that portion to include the Mount Herman springs which feed the Jordan River thereby restoring Syria's status as an upper riparian. Syria's determination to maintain influence in Lebanon either by its continued presence or by other de facto means is in part motivated by hydrological considerations. A major, but little appreciated, factor in Syria's Lebanese policies is its concern for what happens to the sources of the Orontes River which rise in Lebanon. In addition to strategic considerations, the Syrians believe that Israel's continued presence in south Lebanon so close to the Litani and Awali River would enable the Israelis to exert an as yet unarticulated influence on Lebanese recovery plans in that region. Moreover, they know that the Israelis would like to see the Litani River included in any schemes for basin-wide apportionment of water. This the Syrians perceive as a challenge to their own influence in Lebanon.

On the Jordanian front, because the Syrians badly need to increase their hydroelectric power supply, they want to develop the sources of the Yarmouk River on their side of the border with some two dozen or so small dams. This is a potentially serious complication for Jordan, because Damascus appears to be violating a Sept. 1987 agreement with Jordan by which Syria would ensure a sufficient downstream flow that 195-200 mm³

could be captured behind the planned Wahda Dam, on which Jordan has pegged much of its economic future. If the Syrians play their hand poorly here—e.g. take so much water out that, combined with the Israeli withdrawals there wouldn't be enough water to fill Wahda—the results could be economically destabilizing to Jordan and create serious political and strategic problems along the Jordanian border.

Syria, is in serious need of economic and technological assistance from the international community not only to carry out its hydrological development plans, but to bolster its economy as a whole. Water development is a key sector, so Syria too will expect to be rewarded with assistance for its cooperation should the negotiations succeed.

All of Syria's hydropolitical interests in the Jordan basin are made more intense by its failure so far to arrive at a satisfactory apportionment agreement with Turkey over the Euphrates, its most important source of water. If Turkey's GAP project eventually reduces the flow to Syria by 30%-40%, as John Kolars has shown could be the case in the absence of an agreement, Syria will certainly need to turn to the Jordan basin and full development of the Orontes for more water. Damascus hopes that a side effect of a successful negotiation over the Jordan basin will be some form of assistance in its efforts to get a better allocation of Euphrates water from the Turks.

3) Jordan. Apart from the Palestinians, Jordan's situation is the most urgent. Its already fragile economy was decimated by the Gulf War, it lost its international credit rating, and is receiving miniscule assistance from the west. Its water situation, which was already in crisis before the war, has grown worse and could have become desperate were it not for the precipitation of winter 1991-2, and better rains this past winter too. Jordan's primary objective in the negotiations is to generate as much economic assistance as possible by arriving at a settlement as soon as possible in order to proceed with the Wahda project which is the principal hydrological program. As already indicated, Jordan must secure its interests on the

Yarmouk by dealing with both the Israelis and the Syrians, but the former are perceived as the chief problem. Another important objective is to achieve an equitable apportionment of the Jordan River from which it presently gets virtually no useable water, and as a subsidiary of this objective, to persuade the Israelis to clean up the lower stem of the river by diverting the polluted waters around below Kinneret into the Dead Sea rather than using the lower stem to flush them into the sea. Among the riparians in the Jordan basin, the Jordanians are likely to be the most forthcoming and to be the most willing to cut deals on such projects as the Dead-Red canal in which the Israelis are interested. Since Jordan has given up any claims to the Occupied Territories, the waters of the Territories are no longer a direct issue. A looming problem for the Jordanians with another party to the multilaterals is sharing the Qa Disi aquifer with Saudi Arabia. The precise configuration of this aquifer has not been mapped, but Jordanians privately claim that the Saudis are depleting the Jordanian supply by overpumping on the Saudi side of the border.

4) The Palestinians. The immediate, overriding goal of the Palestinians is autonomous (ultimately sovereign) control over the water supplies of the Territories. This goal is a precise concomitant of their main political objective. As an interim target, they want a larger, more equitable allocation of water for all sectors, but especially agriculture. This would include removal of all strictures on development and usage and lower taxes on their water. Without even limited control, the Palestinians believe they will never have a chance for independent economic growth and will always be treated as a hydrologic and economic fiefdom by Israel. Though the Palestinians are in the weakest negotiating position (or perhaps because they are), they are likely to be very persistent in pursuing these interests.

5) The Lebanese. The Lebanese are forced by circumstances to follow the lead of Syria in the negotiations. Unlike the Jordanians, Palestinians, and Israelis, the Lebanese do not suffer from water scarcity, but they worry about perceived designs on the waters of south Lebanon. Although Jordan wouldn't mind a transfer of Lebanese water into its part of the basin, it is the

Israelis who worry the Lebanese authorities. They want them out of south Lebanon and easy striking distance of the Litani and Awali Rivers. Though Israel is not diverting water from the Litani and has not stated that a requirement of withdrawal would be an allocation of water from the Litani, because of Israel's history of claims regarding the Litani, the Lebanese are wary and assuming the worst. They fear that the Israelis will somehow disrupt or complicate plans for developing south Lebanon which revolve around full utilization of the region's water. Hence, despite mistrust of the Syrians, the Lebanese authorities willing to stay close to Syria in the matter of their hydro-policies in the south.

III. The Paramount Hydropolitical Question of the Negotiations

In light of this overview, the paramount question arising out the hydropolitical phase of the negotiations is this: Given Israel's control of virtually all of the basin's major water resources, its overpowering military superiority, together with a deep reluctance to give up any of its territorial and hydrological advantages (except, perhaps, some marginal or symbolic areas), at least for the foreseeable future, what incentives or power can the Arabs use, singly or collectively, to persuade the Israelis to accept significant changes in the status quo?

IV. Some Proposals

Certain steps can be taken in the direction of cooperation even in the absence of sufficient trust or treaty arrangements, steps that would, at all events, be necessary for eventual full cooperation. At least two factors make these actions possible: All the key actors finally appear to be serious about preferring negotiation to confrontation, and the mounting scale of the basin's water crisis—aggravated by rising populations and declining economies—has been a compelling motive. Like the main issues, interim actions must involve the principles of flexibility, equitability, proportionality, data sharing, law, and a sense of fairness. And, since all of the negotiants, especially the Arabs, are practicing what I call "side-effect" diplomacy, and

seek to use the tactic of "strategic discrepancies" in making trade-offs, outside assistance and/or mediation will be required even for preliminary measures.

Recently, I have elsewhere offered in print a dozen proposals that would lay the bases for eventual cooperation without absolutely requiring a prior political settlement and should even help promote one. I want here to focus on only two reciprocal ideas which are salient because they involve real cooperation in areas where all parties agree common grounds exist. These will sound familiar to most of you.

1) Since it is unlikely that cooperation can be coerced or induced at the highest political levels, the most promising approach would be to encourage cooperation at a lower but still significant level, among scientists and technical experts. If scientists and technocrats in the area, together with the officials they advise, can communicate sufficiently to develop shared understanding of the water situation, of available and new technologies, and of potential solutions, they could constitute a community of informed specialists throughout the region, and become a strong force for cooperation by pressing for and guiding effective water policies.

2) For the creation of such a community of experts, it would be necessary to constitute a technical infrastructure for hydropolicy that addresses water problems at both basin and regional levels by establishing two types of water institutes: one for river basins and another for comprehensive regional hydrological issues. They would be so situated either within the region or, if necessary, outside but proximate for an interim period, so as to reduce ideological barriers to participation. The work of these institutes would emphasize science and technology. These institutes, comprising staff, fellows, trainees, and other personnel from the region and from other of the world's major basins, would perform several functions: conduct basic and applied research, they would provide the expertise, research, educational opportunities, and data necessary to develop the entrepreneurial, human, and technical resources presently lacking; they

would generate databases and hydrologic, economic, and other social scientific analytical tools; act as conference settings; serve as centers for accurate record keeping and information dissemination; and foster interaction among basin and regional specialists.