



# Troubled waters in the Middle East: the process towards the first Regional Water Declaration between Jordan, Palestinian Authority, and Israel

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*Water disputes in the Middle East are not a new phenomenon. For the first time, however, three parties in the region, Jordan, Israel, and the PLO for the benefit of the Palestinian Authority have concluded a "regional water agreement" within the framework of the Multilateral Peace talks. For the first time, the rationale behind the agreement is being made public by the author, who was the "neutral" facilitator of the negotiations. The article discusses some of the main elements, including issues related to water scarcity as a driving force of conflicts; application of a "track-two diplomatic" approach; some lessons learned; as well as some ethical questions related to international negotiation.*  
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When describing the status of fresh water resources at the global level, the international literature, for the most part, presents alarming trends and figures. Addressing local and regional water scarcity is associated with enormous problems, especially due to the complex interactions of the water issues with other factors, such as tense political situations, accelerated population growth, struggle for economic growth, pollution and unequal distribution of water. Often the situation has already resulted in inequities and social unrest.

When considering national and international management of water resources in the Middle East, an alternative perspective can be gained from focusing on the positive rather than negative events. Of course, a realistic approach must include an acknowledgement and factual description of the growing gap between available water supply and growing demand as well as of the increasing risk of conflict arising from competition between agricultural, domestic and industrial sectors—or between neighbouring states.

## Water resource scarcity and distribution

Water scarcity is a relative term. Shortage is perceived differently by the public in Sweden, France, India, and in Jordan. Water shortage must always be seen in

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relation to the actual needs of a society. What then, is the scientific view of water shortage at the international level?

One view relies on market mechanisms as the primary tool for regulation of water use. This approach assumes that since the price of a scarce resource—in this case water—is forced to rise, the market acts to avoid shortages (see e.g. Forrester, 1970; Goldsmith *et al.*, 1972; Meadows *et al.*, 1972). Many international scholars have a leaning towards this view, but in most cases, market mechanisms cannot resolve the problems associated with water scarcity. This view overlooks the fact that all markets are imperfect. Also, water is very unevenly distributed geographically and the quality varies, in addition to the tremendous variations in consumption patterns and supply systems.

A "doomsday" view argues that population growth and shortage of water resources are major barriers to continued social and economic development. This, in turn, can have serious implications for the economic future, in particular of developing countries (Munasinghe, 1992; Trolldalen, 1993). War and social unrest appear to be the inevitable future. This view, however, overlooks man's ability to transform economic capital to water resources (e.g. desalination), to develop technologies to reduce water dependency, as well as the ability of societies to co-operate.

From a pragmatic view, it can be argued that in areas of water scarcity, market mechanisms alone do not appear to guarantee that the rate of water use will not in the

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long term exhaust supply. Economic systems which have been allowed to operate uncontrolled by government regulation or by multilateral agencies, have been known to have significant negative impacts on the environment.

Until now, natural resources have been treated as free goods with little or no market value. There is growing awareness that the effects of unchecked environmental destruction, including depletion of scarce water resources, threaten the prospects for sustainable development both in the North and in the South. Adding to the difficulties is the fact that individual nations and groups of nations are becoming increasingly unwilling to overlook the externalities of using the water resource base (Serageldin, 1995).

Some governments, even in areas such as Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, claim that the water resource base is diverse enough to sustain production of a full range of essential goods and services. Such a strategy is impossible—and potentially dangerous, as it further politicizes the water issue, and misrepresents the real situation to the public.

The degree to which a nation exerts control and sound management over its own water resources varies, but is clearly affected by its developmental level and priorities, future intentions and the domestic and international political climate. Quite often, various issues such as housing, education and economic development compete with water issues. When much water was available on a per capita basis, this was not always a significant problem until the gap between demand and supply increased.

Governments therefore have a tremendous responsibility not to use short-term rhetoric that exceeds the physical and economic realities of its water resource base. Unfortunately, too many instances of such irresponsibility exist, which have led to deep and profound conflicts.

### **Water conflicts at local, national, and international levels**

Because the world's water resources are not evenly distributed, and not necessarily distributed according to man-made political boundaries, water conflicts often cross national borders. Disputes cannot therefore be defined simply in terms of one national interest vs another. Many environmental and water conflicts start at a local level, and then escalate into international conflicts involving more than one nation. We can, thus, speak of water conflicts occurring mainly at two levels, the local level, and the regional/international level.

#### *Local conflicts*

If water resources at the local level are poorly managed, they may deteriorate both in quantity and quality, which, in turn, will impede their sustainable development. There are probably over two hundred

local water disputes in Africa and the Middle East alone. In many instances, the historical use of springs and wells by local indigenous people triggers conflicts with other users, or even with a central government's need for control and management of all its resources.

#### *Regional and international conflicts*

Regional water conflicts often involve one country's national interests being at odds with those of other nations, especially relating to:

- activities within national borders which have regional implications (e.g. pollution of transboundary waters flowing to a downstream country); or
- activities related to access to and control over shared use of water resources.

The factors that lead to a gap between demand and available supply of water are central to the rise of conflicts. However, another set of factors, common to the emergence of conflicts, also have to be taken into account. These are discussed in the following.

### **Generation of water conflicts**

#### *Religious significance of water*

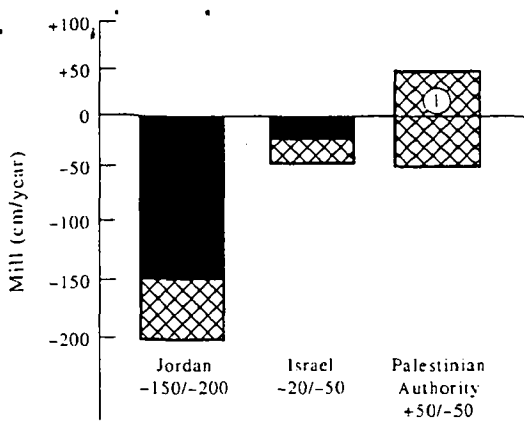
Water plays an essential and pervasive role in every national economy. In the Middle East, however, water takes on an even more complex and strategic importance due to its relations to religion (water as gift from God, rites and daily life); in perception of identity (ownership) and to economic and social well-being. As in every semi-arid nation beset with periodic droughts, the fundamental problem of water scarcity exists both in terms of quantity and quality. The history of the Middle East clearly shows that control and access to water was as important as land when it comes to religious and historic territorial claims (Mansfield, 1991).

#### *Pre-existing political conflict*

There is a misconception that water scarcity and shortage automatically leads to hostilities between nations. There are examples where "problems of shortage" are converted into economic and political terms like "competition over resources" and "optimal joint use of scarce resources" (Le Moigne *et al.*, 1992; Aasand *et al.*, 1996). In this context, a more careful assessment of the growing gap between water supply and demand indicates that, in the Middle East (excluding the African continent) the political relationships prove to be more important than the water shortage *per se* (see also Fisher, 1994a, b) as the driving force of conflicts.

#### *Water-based socio-economic growth*

A first glance at Figure 1 may indicate that the absolute difference between supply and demand of water is greatest in Jordan, followed by Israel and the Palestinian Authority. There are of course many qualifications regarding these figures, but the



**Figure 1** Estimated gap between supply and demand of water resources, 1996/97. There are regional differences: Gaza, deficit both in quantity and quality. Final share with Israel not yet determined (high degree of uncertainty). Source: Compilation of the *Water Atlas*, Trolldalen *et al.* (1995).

purpose of this comparison is to qualify the argument that the socio-economic development to a large degree determines the relative shortage. A more in-depth analysis, however, reveals that all of them are facing severe difficulties if they intend to increase their present agriculture-based social and economic growth (e.g. Lonergan and Brooks, 1994; Trolldalen, 1997a, b). This means that a comparison between nations on water shortage is relevant first and foremost in an academic context as well as politically in the sense that it meets the parties' desire to raise the awareness of their domestic and regional water shortage. Therefore, it is not surprising that under the auspices of the Multilateral Peace talks, one of the most recent and reliable comparisons of demand and supply of water between Jordan, Palestinian Authority, and Israel has been worked out (GTZ, 1995).

**Demand side management**

There are great variations in water quality (including fresh vs saline); the type of water resource available (fossil vs semi-/renewable); the spatial distribution of water resources; the consumption per capita resulting from differences in social and economic development; the type of applied technology, especially in the agricultural sector; and the growth and settlement of people.

However, addressing shortages through technological, engineering, social, and economic means requires a considerable lead time. Until recently, water shortages have been dealt with by attempts at expanding supplies without a commensurate reduction in demand. With increasing costs of supply, lack of financial resources allocated to the water sector, and diminishing sources of new supplies (desalination and recycling of effluents being the main options remaining), focus has to be turned to demand side management, working in conjunction with supply side growth (see also Naff, 1994).

**Existing water disputes**

One may argue that the remaining water disputes should involve those states which were most severely affected by water shortage. At present, the major prevailing water disputes are: (excluding the African continent)

- Syria and Iraq and Turkey over Euphrates and Tigris;
- Jordan and Syria (and Israel) over Yarmouk (although some would argue that this was resolved in a bilateral agreement between the parties in September 1987);
- Israel and Syria over the Golan Heights; and between
- Israel and the Palestinian Authority, especially over the Western Aquifer and the Gaza Aquifer (this is, however, dealt with through the Interim Agreement of September 1995).

One would therefore venture to say that none of the existing water disputes of today are caused directly by water shortages as such. There are, however, some basic features to consider:

- first, water shortage may not be an acute problem right now, but may be so in the near future—especially in case an unfavourable deal is worked out with neighbouring country;
- second, the future trends show that a water shortage (in one way or another) will occur for most of the countries in the Middle East; and
- third, political disagreement and rhetoric, as well as the various nations' plans for utilization of the resources, would fuel generation of such conflicts.

Until a peace accord was signed in 1994 between Jordan and Israel, many scholars expressed deep concern over the tense water disputes going on at that time over the Yarmouk and Jordan rivers. Political rapprochement resolved this dispute to mutual satisfaction of Israel and Jordan (cf. Annex II of their Peace-treaty), but, with the exception of Syria. In the *Declaration of Principles* between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as well as in "the Oslo II-agreement", allocation of water in the Jordan River is not dealt with. There are different views whether or not the "final status negotiation" should include the resources of the West Bank and possibly the Jordan River.

The main challenge to resolving both the problems of water scarcity and water conflicts is to develop a political climate in which these highly sensitive disputes can be addressed constructively. There are, however, different strategies to follow at the national and international levels. In the following discussions, the international level will be dealt with.

**Grasping opportunities**

Obviously, there are no short-cuts to reconciliation and stability in the Middle East. However, over the last eight years, some major political events have created considerable opportunities:

- the break-up of the former Soviet Union and the

- subsequent reduction in strategic interests in the Middle East on the part of the new republics;
- the establishment of the multilateral peace negotiations which started in Madrid in 1991 with the formal establishment of the talks in Moscow in January, 1992;
- increased Israeli frustration over the "deteriorating security situation" caused by the "Intifada";
- the Gulf War and the subsequent weakening of the PLO;
- the "Declaration of Principles" between Israel and the PLO in the Autumn of 1993; and finally;
- the Peace Treaty between Israel and Jordan in 1994.

The signing of the "Declaration of Principles" between Israel and the PLO created a unique opportunity for progress on the highly sensitive water disputes affecting all the three core parties, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority. This was particularly due to the brokering role of the Norwegian Government, and our affiliation with them. Thanks to his status as UN Special Fellow on international environmental conflicts, the author was able to familiarize himself with some of the critical problems of the Multilateral Peace Talks already in late 1992.

At that time, and to some extent still today, one of the major obstacles to progressive negotiations was that the various stakeholders in the Middle East had differing information and data relating to the region's water resources. The information was not only fragmented, but the quality and relevance of the information varied a great deal. The parties did not have enough reliable water data upon which they could agree. Even as recently as 1993, some academic studies on water resources were censored and shelved because they were judged to put national security interests at risk.

#### *Designing an academic study as a basis for negotiations*

In this climate of secrecy and mistrust, it was hard—even for a non-partisan and independent organization such as the Centre for Environmental Studies and Resource Management (CESAR) to gain access to data and win political confidence.

CESAR is an independent and non-profit foundation based in Oslo that has been established to:

- promote prevention and resolution of national and especially international resource conflicts.
- stimulate initiatives aiming to balancing the need for social and economic development with sustainable resource management.
- foster co-operation with all concerned parties and actors—and especially in cases where national governments and international organizations are involved.

CESAR's activities include research, conflict assessment, training, facilitation, mediation, and negotiation assistance. It emphasizes co-operation with international organizations such as the UN and multilateral development banks.

CESAR started with a purely academic study called the *Water Atlas* of the Middle East (Water Resources Data for Decision Making in the Middle East) (Trolldalen *et al.*, 1995). It consists of an 850-page study (three volumes) and an interactive system on CD-ROM where all the related data are stored by location.

The *Water Atlas* was not requested by the parties directly, but was rather a response from the scientists in the region asking for neutral and unbiased information as an input in further deliberations. It is exactly this kind of product which CESAR is tailored to develop.

The *Atlas* aimed to reflect the various needs for information related to water resources as defined by the regional core parties in the region: Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Syria and Lebanon are not participating in the multilateral tasks, and the *Water Atlas* only briefly deals with those two countries. The *Water Atlas* aims to provide the parties with an overview of available scientific information and data related to water resources as a possible basis for deliberation at that time, as well as in the upcoming negotiations.

The data collected include information from hundreds of sources such as national governments, electronic databases, library sources, satellite images, scientific journals, national reports and international organizations.

Some scholars may argue that the role of science is to assess the reliability and the validity of data and make qualified judgements on their relevance and appropriateness for the questions raised. In a realistic understanding of the political sensitivity involved in such a judgement, this product gives an overview of most of the openly-accessible water-related data. The publication is in itself a prerequisite for further assessment of the reliability and validity of the data.

The information is now offered to all regional core parties in a transparent manner. This is important since there has been so much secrecy and mutual distrust about such data in the past.

The *Water Atlas* did not bring negotiations closer to one of the most fundamental questions in the Middle East: How to co-operate on water management at a regional level? But the study did, however, enable the facilitator to gain trust and credibility with the parties, and to develop a scientific and political network to meet the co-operative challenge.

#### *Transforming an academic study into multilateral negotiations*

Most reconciliatory academic tasks, while generally noble attempts, unfortunately are in vain unless the stakeholders are willing to subscribe to the process. As a facilitator, one may, however, choose to take sides and get at least one party on board. This situation will lead towards an advocacy rather than a brokering role.

During the consultations, the parties expressed that the *Water Atlas* was fine, but it was not officially recognized by the parties. The parties' real interest, however, was to develop the existing negotiation

situation<sup>4</sup> towards an international agreement, or a Charter.

Thus, in January 1994, CESAR slowly began to develop a strategy for such an evolution. At an informal level, the technical consultations and data gathering moved fine. CESAR obtained a lot of professional assistance and managed to build some consensus on how to proceed at that level. However, at the same time, CESAR faced a critical challenge: how could the academic consultations move on to a political level where responsible leadership would join the preliminary negotiations.

Through extensive consultations with the parties, a complementary study was designed, and formally approved in April 1994 in a plenary session of the Multilateral Peace Negotiations held in Oman. The new initiative was then called "A Regional Comparative Study on Water Laws, Water Institutions, and Water Supply Economics". At last, the necessary recognition by the parties and an international legitimization had been achieved.

The Multilateral Peace Talks were initiated in Madrid in November 1991 with participation of all the five regional core parties: Jordan, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, and the PLO (in the beginning as part of the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation). Syria and Lebanon decided to stay outside the arrangements of the multilateral until there was some progress on the negotiation at the bilateral level.

The multilateral "Madrid Process" is divided into five workings groups:

- Security and Disarmament;
- Refugees;
- Environment;
- Social and Economic Issues; and
- Water.

The Water Group (Multilateral Working Group on Water Resources, MWGWR) has had eight official meetings and involved about twenty different initiatives ranging from studies to institution building.

The U.S. Government is the Gavelholder of this group.

In the beginning, the work was strictly academic in order to avoid potential misunderstandings or resentment by other parties, as well as to serve as a channel for sensitive negotiations leading towards a water agreement. In addition to CESAR's consultations in the region, about 20 negotiation sessions were held at a solitary hillside hotel on the outskirts of Oslo, as well as in other locations outside Norway with the necessary security arrangements.

It had been impossible to proceed directly with political negotiations towards a water agreement until the negotiating parties had gained more understanding of each other's water management practices through a joint exercise. Again, a lot of the information gathered had never been published before. Another crucial step was to establish some kind of compatibility between

the various national institutional and legal structures for co-operative management.

During the first year of negotiations, the main efforts were directed towards translating highly politicized water issues into concrete technical and academic components. The first phase of the process, therefore, resulted in the assembly of a considerable quantity of previously unpublished material. Some steps in the process were critical:

- The development of a *Terms of Reference (TOR)* was critical in order to make sure the parties had the same perception of the end-products, i.e. the *TOR* would guide the further direction of the deliberations; and
- The transformation of the results from comparing the parties' profiles related to water laws, water institutions, and water economics into basic principles, basic requirements, and common denominators was very difficult and critical for formulation of the principles of the *Declaration*.

It is of course tempting to disclose more details of how the academic exercise was slowly transformed into sensitive political negotiations and the parties' concerns on water-related matters, but it seems prudent to let some more time pass before doing this.

*Final negotiations for the first "regional water agreement" in the Middle East*

After two years of intense studies and negotiations facilitated in this process, the chief negotiators of Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, and Israel agreed on 13 February 1996 on a final text. The agreed and full text was then made public on 12 June 1996 at a ceremony in Oslo.

The water agreement, or the so-called *Water Declaration*, Declaration of Principles for Co-operation on Water-related Matters and New and Additional Water Resources, includes four parts:

- In a Joint Statement, the Core Parties proclaim as objectives of their co-operation to combine their co-operative efforts in the development of new and additional water resources.
- The Common Denominators list eight items which were identified by the parties through the comparative analysis. They form the major elements for specification on co-operation.
- Principles of Co-operation on New and Additional Water Resources includes detailed principles and provisions on co-operation among the participating parties: the following items are of special relevance:
  - Co-operation on new resources would benefit each participating party more than unilateral actions; and
  - A set of detailed legal, economic, and technical provisions are outlined as a basis for actual and concrete co-operation.
- Regional Co-operation on Other Water Related Matters outlines several ways for co-operation such as data exchange, meteorological information, scientific and technical co-operation, and early warning of flooding.

One of the controversies was whether the agreement should be voluntary or not. This stems from the understanding that this was the first regional water declaration ever created among these participating parties. Several other arrangements, such as the "Johnston" or the "Unified" Plan (see Doherty, 1965), the Arab Proposal (by the Arab Technical Committee under the guidance of Mohammed Ahmed Salim), or other "picnic table and bilateral talks" have existed for years and fostered very important and constructive documentation and political results. None of them, however, has been agreed by the respective governments involved.

In this situation, it would not be possible for the letter of the law to enforce the agreement, nor force any involuntary settlement of disputes among the signatories. Emphasis therefore has had to be put on incentives for participation. The first step in implementing the *declaration* is already underway through establishment of a regional electronic water data network.

#### *An Agreement on Co-operation on Water—not on water sharing*

One of the features of this negotiation process, which sets it apart from others, was the recognition that water allocation should not be included in the agreement. Many observers have questioned this point. The reason is quite simple. None of the regional participating parties are prepared to subscribe to a treaty that overrides state sovereignty. For instance, neither Israel nor Jordan is willing to accept the subordination of their bilateral negotiations to an international treaty or a multilateral process. The focus was therefore put on new and additional water resources.

At the time of designing the process for the multilateral negotiations, it was important to recognize that Syria and Lebanon had decided not to participate. Clearly, any equation on water *sharing* that did not include all riparian states would be a dead end. Therefore, the *Declaration* does not cover allocation of water of neither the Upper Jordan River, the Yarmouk River, the Jordan River, nor aquifers.

#### *Benefits of the Water Declaration*

The participating parties are the only rightful commentators entitled to describe and promote the benefits of the *Declaration*. However, the author permits himself, as the shepherd of the process, to outline certain points which have been mentioned by the parties:

- from the political point of view, the *Declaration* is an important symbol of reconciliation in the Middle East;
- the *Declaration* is the first regional water agreement in the Middle East to include more than bilateral concerns;
- the *Declaration* marks the first time that the parties have agreed that they will benefit more from joint action, rather than unilateral pursuits, in getting

new water resources (e.g. including principles of water wheeling);

- the *Declaration* introduces principles of water marketing into an agreement for the first time in the region;
- the *Declaration* marks the first time that the Palestinian Authority is a signatory to a regional water agreement;
- the negotiation process has created a foundation for further deliberations involving all five core parties (the three plus Syria and Lebanon); and
- it might serve as a first step pointing the way towards more comprehensive agreements.

However, "the proof of the pudding" will be in the implementation of the agreement, and the people in the region will be the ones to assess its benefits.

*Water wheeling* means, in this context, joint mechanisms in which the parties use their respective water networks to convey water (for free) under a specific water buying or selling. For example: a joint desalination plant could be built in Gaza. At one time, Jordan wants to buy a certain amount of water from the plant. The water will then be conveyed to the Israeli side (at Gaza) and the same amount will be sent from the Israeli to the Jordanian side up north to the intake of the East Ghor Canal.

#### **Characteristics of a track two diplomatic approach**

A track-two diplomatic approach is an alternative to traditional conference diplomacy or multilateral diplomacy. It typically involves the active role of a scientist, or group of academics (i.e. an epistemic community). Over the last ten years, the epistemic community has been quite active in so-called track-two diplomatic approaches, especially in relation to environmental treaties (Trolldalen, 1993).

- International consensus building; through, e.g.:
  - improving international environmental negotiations; and
  - enhancing regional co-operation and implementation of agreements; and
  - training in substance and in conflict resolution techniques for diplomats and technicians;
- Advisory/co-ordinating capacity (e.g. to CEO); as well as public education and awareness building.

There are also examples of successful involvement by the epistemic communities in other matters related to natural resources such as development of soft laws, national institution building, licensing and authorization, and compensation mechanisms (e.g. in relation to regional developments banks and funds—see Trolldalen, 1993).

Contrary to common belief, most track-two diplomatic approaches are not necessarily based upon institutional co-operation. All it requires is one able person or two (possibly three) persons who must be prepared to perform the duties of a facilitator or

mediator. Experience has shown that personal relations are much more important than institutional affiliation. As negotiations must be built on a feeling of trust. A notable institutional affiliation as well as some kind of political leverage is, however, necessary in order to have the necessary credibility.

### Lessons of experience

Obviously it is not easy to summarize the lessons learned from this negotiation process. CESAR did however apply some guiding principles which have been confirmed during the process:

- (1) *The Principle of Problem Identification:* identification and understanding of positions and interests must be done prior to, and during the negotiations. The most powerful operational tool for a scientist is the attempt to establish a factual basis (e.g. "What are the main questions?"; "What data do we have to answer those questions?"; and, "How reliable and valid are these data?");
- (2) *The Principle of Common Understanding of Collective Concerns* requires that there is some understanding about the information and data which are relevant for the consultations and negotiations related to the conflicts;
- (3) *The Principle of Providing Information and Data for Interest-Based Negotiation* through a transparent process (i.e. in contrast to a bargaining-positioning approach), and;
- (4) *The Principle of Establishing Official Contacts* at a certain stage in the process; i.e. legitimize the efforts in a diplomatic context;
- (5) *The Principle of Connecting Traditional Diplomatic Efforts to "Track-Two" Initiatives:* the "political climate" of a diplomatic track is in many ways influencing a "track-two" initiative. There are instances where traditional diplomatic efforts are in vain, and could enable "track-two approaches" to be developed. In other cases, "track-one" approaches may be the only solution;
- (6) *The Principle of Mobilizing already Existing Experience such as Documentation, Round-Tables, and Data.* Sometimes government agencies, NGOs, and scientists already have worked out substantive products which may be applied directly;
- (7) *The Principles of Involving the Public* could be quite difficult in the sense that most diplomatic efforts (both "track I and II-diplomacy") are in their nature not an "open" and transparent process. The recent political agreements reached in the region have all been developed without public participation, and the implementation show that the public participation could not be overestimated.

When a defined and agreed goal has been reached, quite often, the facilitator or mediator leaves the process, and more regular institutional diplomatic and political activities take over. There are cases, however, especially in very sensitive areas such as the Balkans, Horn of Africa, or in the Middle East, where there is a continued role for the mediator in the implementation

of the agreement (e.g. in the implementation of the Mediterranean Action Plan (a joint World Bank and UN initiative) where several academic institutions stay on into the implementation phase—see Haas, 1990).

The role of scientists in diplomacy is not new. A century-old principle in diplomacy has always been credibility and accountability. Scientists will, and should continue to pursue active participation in traditional diplomacy as well as to develop innovative track two-diplomatic ways of preventing and resolving local and international resource conflicts.

### Ethics in water negotiations

One of the brokers in one of the major Balkan conflicts was once pulled aside by one of the military-generals and asked: "Are you an honest person or a good diplomat?"

The question should of course never have been asked, but maybe there are reasons to raise the question. To act as a facilitator or broker in any conflict challenges your integrity both professionally and personally. There is of course no such thing as complete neutrality, but there are attributes such as transparency, trust, respect and dignity.

The integrity of diplomats and scientists involved in international negotiations should be challenged, but at the same time the ethics and morals of the parties involved in a conflict should be challenged as well. Unless the parties' representatives are able to follow some very basic ethical values such as trust, respect and dignity, no sustainable settlements can be reached unless someone is bargaining from an extremely weak position (equivalent to a loser in an armed conflict).

A process was therefore designed where the negotiators were able to express and communicate such values to the adversaries. Over time, they developed some unspoken principles which were based on genuine respect. However, as in every contentious negotiation, the negotiators have to tread a fine line between mutual respect and trust, while at the same time keeping in mind that they are representatives of national governments.

There are many examples where negotiators have been replaced—either because of the unwillingness to compromise, ethical and moral issues, or because the mutual respect and trust had developed too nicely: the governments may not want to develop such a constructive climate-reconciliation and co-operation may be premature.

Ethics is—nothing more and nothing less—the driving force behind any endeavour for sustainable water management and peace in the Middle East.

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