



Summer Intern Model Arab League

July 9, 2016

BACKGROUND GUIDE

Special Council on Water

ncusar.org/modelarableague

National
Council
on US-
Arab
Relations



Created by contributions from the staff and volunteers at the
National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations

Topic 1: Assessing concerns regarding sustainability and water management in the Middle East and North Africa, including sharing of resources, desalination, desertification, and consumption patterns.

I. Introduction

A. General Background

Water resources in the Middle East have become gradually more limited as population increases and the advent of technology increase demand for water. The severity of water shortage in the Middle East requires global attention. Despite the wealth that some countries have amassed through the sale of oil, the harsh climate of the Middle East has resulted in continuing difficulties in obtaining water, and has damaged the standard of living for many in the Middle East.

The Middle East is in desperate need of water resources as well as arable land for agriculture, as increasing desertification has made vast swaths of land unsuitable for farming. The environmental effects have taken a large toll on places like Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Iran. Jordan and Yemen are both enduring severe water shortages. Jordan's average freshwater withdrawal has now become less than 10% of Portugal's average withdrawal, a country the same in size as Jordan. The cost of water has also gotten high, as over the last ten years water prices have increased by 30%. Lack of water and desertification has made producing food in Yemen harder; thus, Yemen now suffers one of the highest rates of malnutrition in the world, with over 30% of the population not meeting their food needs.

More wealthy states such as the United Arab Emirates are also facing serious depletion of their water resources – in 2005, it was discovered that the UAE had the highest per capita consumption of water in the world.

***Sources:** <https://thewaterproject.org/water-crisis/water-in-crisis-middle-east>
<http://large.stanford.edu/courses/2013/ph240/rajavi2/>

B. History in the Arab World

Water has historically played an important role in developing relations between people in the Middle East. In recent years due to population growth, the lack of rainfall – aggravated by poor planning by those responsible for conservation – has left water supplies limited. Predictably, this has also created conflict over the meager amounts of water that are left. One such example is the role that plans by Jordan and Syria to divert headwaters of the Jordan River, and the opposing Israeli exploitation of water resources in the West Bank, played in sparking the conflict in 1967 that developed into war between Israel and the Arab world.

There has also been some tension surrounding the Nile. In 1991 Egypt warned Sudan and Ethiopia (two countries in which the Nile passes through) that they were prepared to “use force” to protect the head waters. Thankfully, no fighting has broken out amongst the countries over the river. There has also been some tension between Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran over a similar interest in the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The tensions originated during the 1960s when Turkey began the Great Anatolia Project, which intended to harvest water from the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers which required 22 dams to be built, thus causing tension with other countries such as Syria and Iraq who perceived the project as a threat. As of 2009, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq seem to have reached a mutual agreement over the river to help one another as droughts became more severe.

***Sources:** <http://www.medeia.be/en/themes/geopolitics/water-problems-in-the-middle-east/>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_politics_in_the_Middle_East
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tigris%E2%80%93Euphrates_river_system

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

With rainfall in the Middle East being as low as 20-40cm per year, compared to the 72cm the rest of the world receives, droughts are prominent in the region, forcing people to look at alternatives to acquire fresh water, including as water desalination. Desalination is the process in which minerals are removed from saline water, more commonly known as salt water or sea water. In the last two decades desalination plants have emerged in different parts of the world, and have evolved significantly. Today, at least 150 countries now depend on desalination for some portion of their fresh water. As consumption patterns make water an even rarer commodity in the Middle East, the region finds itself at the forefront of water desalination: roughly 70% of the world’s desalination plants are located in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia alone produces about 20% of the world’s desalinated water.

Delegates should assess the concerns regarding sustainability and water management in the Middle East and North Africa, including sharing of resources, desalination, desertification, and consumption patterns. Delegates will also address threats to water security, particularly in the context of climate change, pollution, and armed conflict. They must also establish a legal framework regarding trans-boundary water sources in order to prevent future conflicts between member states.

***Sources:** <http://www.natureasia.com/en/nmiddleeast/article/10.1038/nmiddleeast.2014.273>
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desalination>
<http://large.stanford.edu/courses/2013/ph240/rajavi2/>

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What are the pros and cons of desalination?
- How are relations between neighboring countries?
- What methods of water conservation does your state use?
- Are there any environmental impacts to the Middle East's methods of receiving water?
- Will new methods to receive water help better country relations?

Topic 2: Addressing threats to water security, particularly in the context of climate change, pollution, and armed conflict.

I. Introduction

A. General Background

In history, water in the Middle East was used to develop relations between neighboring countries and was a source of cooperation rather than conflict. Despite minor clashes between countries regarding entitlement to common water sources, these traditionally did not overshadow the important role water plays in Middle East society, the birthplace of modern civilization.

Unfortunately, the Middle East has recently seen a growing trend amongst terrorist organizations to use water as a “force of destruction,” as some groups have begun using the water as a target in violent conflict, and still others employing it as an instrument of violence. This has begun to make water security an increasingly important concern. In recent years, water has become a target of non-state actors in a way to wage war because of water's high vulnerability. The ease with which this scarce resource can be contaminated or otherwise restricted from populations in need puts water security near the top of many Arab governments' agendas, particularly those in close proximity to regional conflict.

***Source:** http://www.strategicforesight.com/publication_pdf/63948150123-web.pdf

<http://www.americansecurityproject.org/the-middle-east-struggles-with-water-security/>

B. History in the Arab World

Though water security has become a top priority in recent years due to the number of terrorist organization in the Middle East (and the issues of water scarcity becoming exceptionally serious), water security was brought up during times when neighboring countries were feuding.

In the 1960s Israel attacked a diversion infrastructure that was being built by Syria at the Jordan River, to prevent the infrastructure's completion. This caused increased tension between the two and ultimately became one of the causes for the Arab-Israeli war in 1967. In 1981, Iraq dealt with widespread blackouts in its Kurdistan region when Iran bombed a hydroelectric station and 70% of all transformers. When the United States later invaded Iraq in 2003, the water infrastructure had been damaged extensively. Those actions then led to 40% of Baghdad's water network to be destroyed, in which half the city lost its water supply. In the first half of 2014, ISIS captured the Fallujah Dam and then continued to capture the Haditha Dam and the Mosul Dam. Both ISIS and the Iraq military have made a habit of using water as a weapon to disrupt the settlements of opponents, causing economic and agricultural loss, as well using it to terrorize civilians.

***Source:** http://www.strategicforesight.com/publication_pdf/19317hydro-insecure.pdf

http://www.strategicforesight.com/publication_pdf/63948150123-web.pdf

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

While water security includes the threat posed to drinking water in the Middle East by terrorist and extremist groups, it is hardly the only context the issue can be viewed in. As dams and similar infrastructure are critical to power and agriculture, these strategically important assets must be maintained and secured. Additionally, problems posed by climate change and industrialization threaten to even further impair the ability of Arab governments to provide sufficient water for their people's needs. A sound water security strategy will take all of these disparate aspects into account, and formulate a plan to best utilize and preserve this precious resource.

***Source:** <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Papers/2012/11/iwf-papers/Water-web.pdf?la=en>

<http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/planetpolicy/posts/2015/01/16-water-security-jordan-middle-east-gorelick>

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- How are relations with other countries?
- What country's need the most help?
- How has the government been managing its countries water?
- What methods of water security does your state use?
- What countries have the best relations?

Topic 3: Establishing a legal framework regarding transboundary water sources in order to prevent future conflicts between member states

I. Introduction

A. General Background

Water is one of the most essential resources for life, but it is one of the least readily available in member states. For many Arab states, one of the primary sources of water for agriculture and drinking comes from natural rivers or aquifers that cross state boundaries. Tensions have previously risen in the region over which countries have the precedence to utilize these water sources. A “legal framework” or procedural steps should be established by this council in order to “prevent” a reescalation of tensions surrounding the existing water supply.

This council should consider methods that the Arab League can utilize for preventing the escalation of tensions and conflict surrounding water sources. Such a framework will enable the League of Arab States to diplomatically resolve issues while protecting member states right to water use. Several of the water sources in question cross the boundaries of non-member states as well, however, this council should prioritize means to maintain peace and stability “between member states.”

B. History in the Arab World

Several water sources within the Arab World span multiple member states including the Nile River, Nubian Sandstone Aquifers (NSA), and the Disi Aquifer. The Nile River has especially been a point of contention between the Egyptian and Sudanese governments as well as nine other non-member states. Despite an agreement made in early 2015 between Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia tensions over who controls the Nile remain high.¹ For the NSA there has been more success in joint management and much of the water resource remains unexploited because of this.² The Al-Disi or Al-Sag Aquifer is between Jordan and Saudi Arabia, two of the most water-

¹ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/03/egypt-ethiopia-renaissance-dam-water-storage-nile-dispute.html>

² http://www.unesco.org/water/news/transboundary_aquifers.shtml

scarce countries. Both countries began utilizing this resource as soon as it was discovered until an agreement made in 2015 that established regulations on joint use.³

The issue of water rights and the distribution of this resource are of utmost importance to the Arab League because conflict can damage existing water structures. Such an event would push water-poor states into a heightened state of scarcity, and elevate the likelihood of conflict. 80% of the Arab World's renewable water flows from external sources, and has been a source of political tensions between countries upstream and downstream countries (e.g. Turkey, Syria, and Iraq on the Euphrates).⁴ With the escalation of conflict in the region and the growing need to meet water demands, it would not be unprecedented for states to fight for control of such an important resource for life, agriculture, and development.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

The Arab States have already taken several multilateral steps to combat this issue. The majority of signatories on the 1997 UN resolution on Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses and the UN Resolution on Transboundary Aquifers were Arab States. These resolutions have promoted cooperation between states and establish that each state should manage their own resources responsibly.⁵

Additionally, the charter of the Arab League states that the organization should function as a mediator between member states. Consequently, this council should also consider other preemptive measures that are applicable to all member states to potentially prevent the need for mediation. Such measures could include the conclusion of water subsidies for larger farms, the use of technology to decrease water loss, and the implementation of deterrents for those with personal access to transboundary water sources.⁶ This council should explore in what ways such a legal framework for settling disputes would approach non-member states.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What are my country's primary sources of water? Does that water cross an international border? If so what are my country's relations with that country?
- Has my country been a signatory to any UN or interstate agreement on transboundary water sources?
- Has development or agriculture changed the way my country interacts with its water sources?

³ <http://www.internationalwaterlaw.org/blog/2015/08/31/the-newest-transboundary-aquifer-agreement-jordan-and-saudi-arabia-cooperate-over-the-al-sag-al-disi-aquifer/>

⁴ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2014/WAT/06Jun_11-12_Tunis/presentations/2.3.C.Ksia_LAS_ArabWaterConvention.pdf

⁵ http://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/draft_articles/8_5_2008.pdf

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/aug/27/middle-east-faces-water-shortages-for-the-next-25-years-study-says>

III. Questions a Resolution May Answer

- What should the Arab League's approach be regarding non-member states and transboundary water sources?
- What kinds of preventative policies can prevent the escalation of tensions between countries?
- How can the League of Arab States expand its purview on mediation efforts in the future? How can such efforts be improved?
- How can the Arab League continue its cooperation with UN to prevent water conflict?