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BOOK REVIEW

Trondalen, J.M. 2008. *Water and peace for the people: Possible solutions to water disputes in the Middle East*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing. ISBN 978-92-310-4086-3, €38.

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INTRODUCTION

Politically driven squandering of precious water resources may be nowhere more inexcusable than in the Middle East. Water quantity and quality decline as populations and tensions rise, in one of the globe's best-documented failures of international action to avert environmental destruction. Yet political will to address the trans-boundary water crises seems scarcer than the resource itself. Those concerned with resolution of the water conflicts require courage to grapple with the entrenched politics, and a will to stick your neck out. Jon Martin Trondalen's *Water and Peace for the People* is a reflection of these qualities, applied through years of negotiations on the water sub-conflicts that exist along the Jordan, Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Readers are treated to previously unpublished insight and decades' worth of lessons learned the hard way. Trondalen contextualizes his recommended solutions for each conflict upon a sober and appropriate view that hydro-politics are subordinate to the broader political picture, and that each context is unique. The flexibility of solutions that water conflicts may draw upon make them more readily resolvable than conflicts over land or ideology, at least in theory. 'Demand-side' solutions, for example, focus on reducing pressure on freshwater supplies through wastewater reuse or through water demand management. 'Supply-side' solutions rely on the import of 'new' water (from desalination), or the enhancement of water-related benefits, such as increased food trade and economic arrangements over hydroelectricity to reduce competition over freshwater.

Trondalen's proposals to resolve the conflicts rely on a mix of both approaches. They are likely, however, to fall prey to the stifling broader political context within which the conflicts occur, unfortunately. Insufficient attention is given both to incentives for the more powerful actors to concede in negotiations and to the real-life grievances of those actors living the outcome of the allocative conflicts. The proposed solutions takes as their starting points the status quo, which in every case is both deeply entrenched and asymmetrical. Suggested reallocations are based upon different admixtures of customary international law, international water law, water rights, human right to water, water needs, and sovereignty. Nonetheless, the proposals are uniquely concerned with water quality as well as quantity, and generally thought-provoking. As a whole, they serve to shine a bright light on a shadowy topic. The book is therefore recommended to the national policy makers and negotiators in each country, international policy makers, and students of water conflicts globally.

SECTION REVIEWS

The book first covers sub-conflicts on the tiny Jordan river, suggesting three bilateral treaties between Israel and Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians (to add to the Jordan-Israel agreement of 1994). The first sub-conflict covered is on the upper reaches of the Jordan river – the Syrian Golan Heights that Israel has occupied since 1967. Draining into the Lake of Tiberias, the surface water and groundwater resources of the Golan are significant for the sustenance of agriculture in the area, and for their potential to pollute the lake if not managed properly (thereby putting at risk roughly a third of the total Israeli water supply). Following a brief review of previous negotiations (see also Daoudy, 2008), Trondalen presents what may be called a 'land for water' swap whereby Israel withdraws from the Golan in exchange for Syrian agreement not to alter any of the current Israeli water use. Future water use by the anticipated return of Syrian citizens to the Golan would be piped in from elsewhere in Syria, while the tributary flows themselves would flow uninterrupted to Israel.

The upper reaches of the Jordan river are also the setting of a section on the Lebanon-Israel conflict over the Hasbani tributary. The author describes the interests of each side during the near-war in 2002, following attempts by the Lebanese government to implement a minor drinking-water project in an area from which Israel had withdrawn from 2 years earlier. Talks led by the US, UN and EU managed to calm the tensions, and resulted in the acquiescence for Lebanon to proceed with the project, without formally resolving the conflict. The author suggests resolution be based on an allocation formula (a combination of sovereignty, rights, and law) granting the Lebanese side an unquantified but greater share of the flows than it currently withdraws. Lebanon would then have the option to lease to Israel the volumes it chooses to.

The unsuccessful water clauses of the 1995 Oslo II Agreement between Palestinians and Israelis are the concern of the third Jordan river conflict. The terms of that agreement cemented in a 90–10% allocation of all trans-boundary flows, which include four groundwater aquifers and the Lower Jordan river. The resolution suggested is a very complex enhanced version of the 1995 agreement – what may be regarded as 'Oslo plus.' A 'sovereignty formula' conflating sovereignty, rights and needs is suggested applied to the western and eastern aquifer basins. The Palestinian side would be granted an unquantified but greater share of the western basin, and could then lease water to the Israeli side. The Israeli side would retain control over the Jordan river flows, and assist with the supply of 'new' water to the Palestinian West Bank (partly through desalination pumped uphill from the Israeli coast).

The fourth and final water conflict reviewed occurs between Turkey, Syria and Iraq on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. (Tributary flows from Iran are excluded from the analysis.) This section of the book stands out for presenting new data and quantified allocations, based on recent models of both the 'twin-basin' approach favoured by the Turkish side, and the 'separate-basin' approach favoured by Iraq and Syria. The interests and positions of each of the three sides are engagingly recounted, and reflect years of objective consideration and insider knowledge. The design irrigation water demand of Turkey's GAP project is shown to be higher than the optimal, and reduced flow volumes are suggested – long-term yearly averages of 781 m³/s and 671 m³/s at the Turkish-Syrian and Syrian-Iraqi borders, respectively.

EVALUATION

For not grappling with existing power imbalances, the proposed solutions seem more directed at conflict management than at resolution. The suggestion of pumping freshwater to the Golan and desalinated water to the West Bank are valid attempts to 'enlarge the pie.' From a perspective of both justice and economic efficiency, however, the import of expensive water in order to ensure that the water available at the residents' door is left to flow to others is much less likely to satisfy the farmers than it does the negotiators. It is furthermore not clear why the Israeli side would be persuaded to relinquish control in exchange for such economic arrangements, or agree to purchase Hasbani flows

from Lebanon. On this basin, the reader may like to see the author's consideration of how 'new' water and demand management could be combined into a more inclusive basin-wide 'win-win' solution (e.g., Phillips et. al., 2007). Such an approach may lead to a more enduring resolution and, for the water security it brings, actually be more politically feasible. The benefits of demand-management, food trade and hydro-power purchases are also disappointingly downplayed on the conflict on the Tigris and Euphrates. Absent is any discussion of the motives for the Turkish side to accept reductions in its ambitious GAP project. The success of the proposals seems based on a hope that the more powerful actors have sufficient good will to sacrifice control and funds in order to reach amicable settlements over water with their neighbours.

And it is here that land disputes and ideology return to haunt, and where Trondalen's book is perhaps most useful of all. By reading that each of the water conflicts is in fact entirely resolvable technically, we are obliged to confront where the keys to resolution lie. Short-sighted political decisions made secretly from within entrenched adversarial political contexts are likely to multiply the conflict, destruction and suffering. Long-term political leadership expressing the concerns of the people is never impossible, however, and it helps when the facts are known. UNESCO is to be commended for publishing Jon Martin Trondalen's engaging volume, which is a step in the right direction, and an asset to all of us interested in ending – not just mitigating – wasteful Middle Eastern water conflicts.

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