Re-Framing Transboundary Water Politics:
Opening

Building the Water Agenda:
Policy responses to scarcity and shock
Chatham House, 9-10 July 2012

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Yes, there are no water wars...

... but there are many tense and destructive water CONFLICTS
Absence of War does not mean the Absence of Conflict

= Tensions causing destruction (for the most vulnerable in the weakest states) and worsening international relations
Reframing Transboundary Water Politics

ULTIMATE CHALLENGE:
Reconciling basin and aquifer boundaries with state borders
(sovereignty vs common resources and community)

✧ (How) can transboundary waters bring peace or conflict?
✧ What are the drivers of conflict and cooperation?
✧ What policies and institutions can lead to agreements?
✧ What are the flashpoints for transboundary water conflicts?

To “Reframe” – first RE-THINK each of the above
Re-Framing Transboundary Water Politics: 
What Really Matters for effective diplomacy

Building the Water Agenda:  
*Policy responses to scarcity and shock*  
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What Matters?

POWER matters
→ good analysis must incorporate
→ interventions must confront

NORMS matter
→ interventions require a benchmark

1. Some helpful theory
2. Tigris and Euphrates
3. Policy responses
1

Some helpful theory

a) Politics driving water interaction

b) Cooperation & Power

c) Levelling
1a) Politics driving water interaction

‘Environmental Determinism’:  
Water can lead to peace  
We can learn from North America and Europe  

→ environmental peacemaking  
→ supposedly apolitical interventions, in very political contexts  

‘Political Economy / Ecology’:  
Water and society co-produced (Physical and Social water scarcity)  
Water is subordinate to larger forces (ideological, political, economic)  

→ enhancement of classic politics, diplomacy, international relations  
→ + look ‘outside the box’ at economics, finance, food trade (i.e. the *nexus*)  

→ learn from mistakes made in other basins  

- Western-centric  
- ignores / wishes away politics  
- liberal assumptions about power and equality  
- little evidence of success
1b) Cooperation

Cooperation is poorly theorised, or understood

either Conflict or Cooperation

Wolf (2007)
1b) Cooperation

**BUT**

✧ Dataset quality and interpretation issues...

✧ Conflict and cooperation co-exist

✧ Liberal interpretation of ‘cooperation’

*Cooperative efforts can be part of the problem*

(teaties on Jordan and Ganges) – because of *power*
Power asymmetry is a fact of life... but can be used to *lead* or to *dominate*.

**Forms of Power:**

**Hard Power** (upstream position, military, economy)

**Soft Power** (ideology, allies, discourse, etc)
‘Hegemon’s prerogative’:
✧ Selective policy engagement (‘cherry-picking’ responsibilities)
✧ Emphasise conflictive or cooperative face of interaction

→ Agenda of basin hegemon (bully or leader) followed… while alternatives offered by non-hegemons are ignored as not ‘pragmatic’ or ‘realistic’ (e.g. Bangladesh, Palestine… )

...→ hurried diplomacy can lead to perpetuation of conflict

Zeitoun, Mirumachi, Warner (2011)
Effective diplomacy requires:

→ ‘Cooperation’ to be evaluated in the specific political context

→ Confronting power and power asymmetry
  
  a) **Influencing Power** (moving from basin bully to basin leader)
      → Positive-sum outcomes, benefit-sharing, etc
      → seek standards, not just political pragmatism

  b) **Challenging Power**
      → Level the players
      → Level the playing field

Sadoff and Grey (2002)
Phillips and Woodhouse (2010)

Zeitoun and Jägerskog (2011)
1c) Levelling

→ **Level the players**
  
  e.g. Capacity-building

  → especially *negotiations* and *law* (not just techno-managerial capacity)

→ **Level the playing field**

**Objective Standards** (to inform *treaties*):

International Water Law

→ 1997 UN Watercourses Convention
  
  ‘no significant harm’;
  ‘prior notification’;
  ‘equitable and reasonable use’

In absence of agreed standards and principles, space for effective diplomacy is **closed down**
Tigris & Euphrates
With uncoordinated upstream ‘development’: is this the future also of Cambodia, Egypt, Bangladesh?

**Development context:**
- Abstractions upstream
- Effect on livelihoods

**Political context:**
- Turkey as Basin Leader
- Tri-lateral committee... often bi-lateral
- Talk of benefit-sharing, ‘oil for water’
- Joint training, etc (soft power)
- How effective is the cooperation?

**Interventions** by UNDP, UNESCO, others:
- Levelling the players without levelling the playing field?
- **What standards** are brought to the table (along with inducements)?
3
Policy Responses
1. Ask who says Power and Norms do NOT matter (i.e. who benefits from status quo)?

**POWER matters**
- good analysis must incorporate
- interventions must confront

**NORMS matter**
- interventions require a benchmark

> look for evidence of and interpret soft power

a) **Influencing Power**
   - moving from basin bully to basin leader

b) **Challenging Power**
   - Level the players
   - Level the playing field

Thank –you

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References


Sadoff C W and Grey D 2002 Beyond the river: the benefits of cooperation on international rivers. Water Policy 4 389-403.


Misc Additional Slides
2c) POWER

Power asymmetry is a fact of life...

... and can be used to *dominate* or to *lead*.

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**FORMS OF POWER**

**HARD**
- MILITARY FORCE
- ACTIVE STALLING
- KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION
- INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

**SOFT**
- COVERT ACTIONS
- INCENTIVES
- TREATIES
- SANCTIONING THE DISCOURSE
- FINANCIAL MOBILIZATION
- HUMAN CAPITAL
- RIPARIAN POSITION

*International Context:* weak International Water Law; global political trends
2b) Cooperation

Cooperation is poorly theorised, or understood

Wolf (2007)
Zeitoun and Mirumachi (2008)

Either Conflict or Cooperation

Figure 1  Three continua of conflict ↔ cooperation: (a) NATO’s ‘stages of conflict development’ (1999), (b) Delli-Prisco’s ‘continuum of alternative dispute resolution techniques’ (1996), and (c) Yoffee et al.’s ‘water event intensity scale’ (2003)

Zeitoun and Mirumachi (2008)
Fig. 3 The TWINS matrix of conflict and cooperation, applied to hydropolitical bilateral relations over time between Sudan and Egypt.
KNOWLEDGE

Water Security through INTERDEPENDENCE

OBJECTIVITY (in interests, and in standards)
## Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Climatic and social context</th>
<th>very context-specific, with unique local topography, use, traditions, issues, etc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political context</td>
<td>regional or bi-lateral, often hegemonic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of science</td>
<td>rivers – <em>good</em> groundwater – <em>high uncertainty</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form of conflict</td>
<td>Distribution, Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Issues</td>
<td>Scarcity (or surplus)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Used together, the concepts can serve to **maintain** a water conflict, or (in theory) **resolve it**.
Destruction of Water Infrastructure

• Palestinian water cistern in the West Bank, demolished by the Israeli Military.

International Committee of the Red Cross (Michael Talhami)
Growing Insecurity

- 30 years of instability;
- Growing Sectarian Divide
- Reduction in transboundary flows;
- Drying of the Marshlands;
- Resource deterioration;
- Climate Change;
- Food and energy security – growing dependence on neighbors;
- Decline in technical and managerial capacity;
- Severely weakened negotiations position; and
- Limits economic development.

Case Study - Iraq

International Committee of the Red Cross (Michael Talhami)
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