

Water as a source of contention and cooperation



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Book Reviews Water as a Source of Contention and Cooperation Water

Resources in the Middle East: Israel-Palestinian Water issues — From Conflict to Cooperation edited by Hillel Shuval and Hassan Dweik. Berlin: Springer, 2007. 454 pp. Olli Ruohomaki Dr. Olli Ruohomaki. former deputy representative of Finland to the Palestinian Authority, is currently . senior advisor with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Finland. The arid landscape of the Middle East and the expanding human settlements suggest that water scarcity is one of the most pressing issues that need to be addressed.

The diminishing water resources are often evoked as potential sources of violent conflict in the coming decades. While it is true that there are many communities in the region with dire needs in terms of access to clean water, the resources themselves do not necessarily have to pose an obstacle to peace. Water Resources in the Middle East: Israel-Palestinian Water Issues — From Conflict to Cooperation tackles the thorny questions behind the discourse on Israeli-Palestinian water issues and demystifies the politics around the debate. It is a much-needed analysis of the state of affairs surrounding the region's water issues.

The volume is a result of the 2004 Israeli-Palestinian-International Conference on Water for Life in the Middle East held in Antalya, Turkey, in October 2004. The majority of the papers are by Israeli and Palestinian experts, but there are important contributions by water scientists from outside the region. This is imperative in the Israeli-Palestinian context as my experience in the region has been that there is a need for inputs from comparative perspectives to inform and enrich the local debate which can, at times, be rather parochial and entrenched.

<https://assignbuster.com/water-as-a-source-of-contention-and-cooperation/>

The book is divided into nine parts containing altogether 44 articles, ranging from the geopolitics of water issues and trans-boundary regional issues to the economics of water trade and markets to legal issues on international water law. Water resources management issues are not forgotten, and there is a whole section on water and water technology issues 16. 3&4 167 in the Middle East context. The Middle East will witness the harsh impacts of climate change and, therefore, the role of climate change in the region is also explored.

In addition to an analysis of the topic under scrutiny, most of the articles offer lessons and advice to policymakers. The 454 pages reveal a rich journey into the world of the region's water resources. The quality of the articles in such a collection inevitably varies from excellent, lucid, in-depth analysis to some less exciting descriptive articles on the state of affairs of the water issues in the region. Nonetheless, the volume must be judged as a whole, and it is certainly an up-to-date reference book on water issues and reflects some of the latest thinking in the field.

I could have picked out many interesting articles, but three pieces of work stand out in my view, particularly because of their implication visa-vis future water resource management and lessons learned in terms of conflict resolution for the region. First, Hillel Shuva's article on meeting vital human needs and the analysis of how both Israelis and Palestinians are equal partners in sharing the water derived from the Mountain Aquifer is an outstanding piece of work that deals with the very heart of regional politics of water resources.

The author gives a compelling argument which states that giving priority to meeting the vital human needs regardless of geographic considerations and historic claims should be the basis of shared water management. He argues that Israel should relinquish to the Palestinians a portion of the natural waters of the Mountain Aquifer and that the water-rich riparian countries of Lebanon and Syria should relinquish a 168 PALESTINE-ISRAEL JOURNAL portion of their Jordan River water to the Palestinians.

Hence the Palestinians would have their Minimum Water Requirement satisfied. Secondly, Jan Selby's article on reappraising the Oslo Water Regime offers a good critique of the Oslo II regime for the joint management of the West Bank's water resources, systems and supplies. The author pinpoints how the Oslo II regime was a license for environmental destruction and calls for the establishment of a proper joint management regime that would truly enable the Palestinian authorities to create a well-regulated water sector.

Thirdly, David Brooks and Sarah Wolfe offer useful insights into water demand management with lessons learned from the Middle East and South Africa. The authors argue that water demand management should not only be treated as a technology to apply or a program to deliver water, but as a form of governance that is as critical to improving social, economic and environmental conditions as it is to saving precious water resources. The editors of the book claim that the papers play "an important role in what is called 'second track' diplomacy. This is certainly true. Scientists and technical experts can help to tackle political problems by objectively deconstructing issues they work with on a daily basis. During my term as <https://assignbuster.com/water-as-a-source-of-contention-and-cooperation/>

deputy representative of Finland to the Palestinian Authority, Finland was active in supporting the development of the Palestinian water sector. I found that, despite very difficult obstacles at institutional levels between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities, experts on both sides were able to fruitfully discuss technical matters of mutual interest and concern.

I recommend this important book to researchers, policymakers and anyone interested in the politics of water resources in the Middle East. 16. 3&4 169
Copyright of Palestine - Israel Journal of Politics, Economics & Culture is the property of Palestine-Israel Journal and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.