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HOW TO IMPROVE WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST?
The Call for a Locally-Based Water Security

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Due to multiplier factors such as climate change, desertification, rapid population growth and industrialisation, water has become increasingly scarce in the Middle East and is considered an expensive natural resource (Zdruli, 2011). When states are water-scarce, their food supply, public health and economic growth are increasingly at risk with limited effective counter-measures (FAO, 2011; Maddocks, Young & Reig, 2015; Iceland & Otto, 2017). As a result, across the Middle East, and especially in the countries facing severe water scarcity, water has been framed as an existential threat, leading governments to use and justify highly concentrated emergency measures to confront it.

This categorisation of water security as an existential "threat" gives the state a licence to use exceptional measures to address the water scarcity. This includes securitising the field and diminishing measures of transparency and accountability while promoting large-scale infrastructure projects, such as desalination plants, water carriers and major dams. As in times of a growing pandemic, the urgency and emergency measures often lead to the exclusion of civil society, academia and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from the decision-making process (Buzan et al., 1998; Fischhendler, 2015). Furthermore, in conflict-torn areas, the increased securitisation of water is used as political leverage in ongoing disputes. As such, unilateral management schemes, which may increase the risk of violent conflict and discourage cooperation, are more prominent in transboundary watersheds which, as a result, become more militarised (Trombetta, 2008).

The question regarding the impact of securitisation has become acutely central in the recent global pandemic. The securitisation of public health has resulted in intensive national involvement and emergency regulations in all aspects of health services and the

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public sphere. While in several countries such as Denmark, New Zealand and Germany the mitigation policies focused on the expansion of health services and economic support, in others like Hungary, Taiwan and Israel the emergency measures and securitisation have permitted previously unimaginable practices such as technological monitoring and surveillance of civilians, severe limitations on freedom of movement, and governmental intrusion into personal privacy. Moreover, in some countries, these emergency policies were the responsibility of security and military services and thus lacked transparency and accountability. Although not all countries have implemented a severely securitised approach, many have discussed this option, including the United Kingdom (UK), Germany and the United States (US).

As water is a central security issue in a desertified region, a critical view of securitisation is necessary. In this policy brief, we highlight the process of water securitisation and the need for de-securitisation to achieve sustainable and just water security for all. As a part of this document, we list the political methods that can promote – or threaten – water security and the specific steps that can enable de-securitisation through locally-based water security.

Securitisation and De-Securitisation

The most widely-cited definition of water security comes from Grey & Sadoff (2007), who describe it as "the availability of an acceptable quantity and quality of water for health, livelihoods, ecosystems and production, coupled with an acceptable level of water-related risks to people, environments and economies" (Zeitoun et al., 2016). In contrast to water security, water securitisation is a process embedded in a socio-political context. Nation-states' conceptions of security expanded after the Cold War to include more non-traditional sources of threat (Patman, 1999). As a consequence, environmental security arose as a discourse that binds ecological protection, human safety and state security together (Fischendler, 2015). The issue of water availability and accessibility shifted to become one of national security and was examined through a securitised lens. Consequently, water securitisation has a structural impact that often leads to the erection of physical and institutional buffer zones around water infrastructures, and the creation of management systems that exclude local communities from accessing water resources. These processes distance them from decision-making spaces by removing the issue from the standard democratic, transparent public sphere (Aggestam, 2015; Coskun, 2015).

Water securitisation is a phenomenon that divides scholars. Some experts promote securitisation when framed as a national security interest, as a way of favouring or hastening the decision-making process and thus having a positive impact on cooperation with the state, persuasion of state actors and sense of urgency in intra-state and inter-state procedures (Balzacq, 2005). On the other hand, water securitisation can be seen as a negative phenomenon due to its effects on just water governance and efficient

management. Accordingly, a wealth of studies show that securitisation hinders cooperation between states and fosters a zero-sum mentality, encouraging unilateralism, militarised policies and the risk of violent conflict (El-Fadel et al., 2003; Trombetta, 2008; Coskun, 2009; Nathan & Fischendler, 2016; Pahl-Wostl, 2016).

Thus, defining securitisation operations as positive or negative in themselves is not possible. Instead, they should be assessed based on the consequences they have on local actors or stakeholders (Floyd, 2010). In confronting the negative impact of securitisation, experts from the Copenhagen School, who coined the term securitisation, argued about the importance of de-securitisation and brought several scholars to advocate for the importance of this process in relation to water issues (Buzan et al., 1998; Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Aggestam, 2015; Coskun, 2009).

The goal of de-securitisation is to achieve a reality where the resource is no longer defined and analysed in security terms. It thus no longer allows exceptional measures to be promoted (Coskun, 2009). However, unlike securitisation, or the transition of public issues to the secure, central and confidential lenses, merely declaring an issue as de-securitised would not remove it from the "high politics" and *securitised* levels (Behnke, 2006). As securitisation follows a consistent rationale with specific supportive policies, the same reasoning should apply to de-securitisation, which cannot be advanced arbitrarily (Walschot, 2018). A systemic process that promotes transparency, civil participation, accountability and even de-centralisation should be developed. As the main challenge is to find the right methodology to shift an issue from a securitised discourse to a de-securitised arena, each de-securitised process should be designed specifically for the subject matter and its environment, while taking into consideration the specifics of the local system.

Policy Recommendations

In 2010, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly recognised access to water and sanitation as a human right. The resolution acknowledges the role of states and international organisations in contributing financially and in fostering capacity-building to assist countries in ensuring safe, clean, affordable drinking water and sanitation for all (United Nations, 2014). Furthermore, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015 highlights the need to provide sustainable management of water at the highest level (SDG 6) (United Nations, 2018). It was also recognised that water sustainability might help achieve other sustainable goals related to poverty, inequality, peace, ecosystems, energy and food security. Complementary to this process, the Council of the European Union (EU) adopted in 2018 conclusions on Water Diplomacy (13991) that acknowledge water scarcity as a key factor in peace and security. According to this document, the EU committed to promoting regional water agreements, multilateral cooperation and effective transboundary water management (Council of the European Union, 2018).

In the Middle East, and especially in the Eastern Mediterranean, local communities and ethnic minorities are volatile and often experience an ongoing conflict with centralised state actors or the most significant community (Chainoglou, 2019) as the region suffers ongoing desertification and water shortages, and centralised water management approaches politicise water and damage the ability to ensure sustainable and just water management.

Thus, this policy brief asserts that the high level of securitisation of water resources in the Middle East led to centralised systems and high involvement of security agencies in matters relating to water. As securitisation promotes a national and centralised non-transparent approach to water management at the expense of neutral and accessible monitoring, data collection and the participation of local stakeholders and civil society, it politicises water and undermines the possibility of ensuring water security for all.

As water is categorised as a human right and should be examined at the individual and community level, the creation of secure, sustainable and transparent access to water is crucial. To achieve this in a conflict-torn region such as the Middle East, de-securitisation of water must occur from the local community to the regional level by including the previously silenced "other" (Coskun, 2009). This de-securitisation should follow a community-based approach that celebrates transparency and the participation of civil society, cross-sectoral cooperation with a broader range of stakeholders, and regionality, which denationalises water and promotes a regional agenda. This approach will improve local water management, and will be central to reducing the harmful effects of water shortages and building the foundations necessary to encourage regional cooperation.

1. **Community-based approach:** In this social environment, droughts and water insecurity can increase and expand political strife. As national focal and securitised strategies failed in ensuring water security at the community level, a decentralised approach is necessary to broaden the active participation of all stakeholders surrounding water sources and expand the responsibility for it to include the local community, which is defined as the most "functional level" in regards to water management by Magsig (2015).

   In achieving this community participation, participatory mechanisms with the inclusion of local organisations and communities are required, applying a term used in international environmental law: "common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR) (Magisg, 2015). This approach should be applied horizontally, in mechanisms that combine the state, the communities and civil society (Walschot, 2018).

   These mechanisms will be responsible for monitoring local water sources, informing national-level decision-making while empowering local communities with data and responsibility for their water resources. Such community involvement will allow

increased education and awareness about water sources, connecting local communities to their shared water resources while creating the framework for inclusive decision-making and shared responsibility within the watershed and across community lines and national borders.

2. **Cross-sectoral cooperation:** While it is argued that de-securitisation leads to more efficient and equitable water management, its success depends on the approach of the actors involved in the process (Aggestam, 2015). Technocratic approaches, for example, seek to "depoliticise" water management, but this fails to address essential dimensions of political conflicts, such as power imbalance that can lead to reinforcement, rather than transformation, of the status quo. Therefore, the creation of cooperative institutions, organisations and joint projects across sectors and communities is needed for sustainable water management (Coskun, 2009). In this way, and while adopting a shared discourse, a culture of cooperation with the "other" will be promoted, thus contributing to the cultural changes needed for de-securitisation to occur, while strengthening processes necessary for the promotion of accountable governance and civic participation (Coskun, 2009; EcoPeace Middle East, 2019).

3. **Regionality:** As water scarcity is a regional challenge, and as watersheds spread across national lines, de-nationalising water is crucial for promoting sustainable regional cooperation. In a new paradigm, an expanded narrative about regional interdependence on water issues may promote regional solidarity, which can lead to the foundations of new regional mechanisms. For this regional paradigm to be improved, it is essential to organise regional conferences, training and network gatherings focused on it. Following this effort in the fields of academia, culture, policy and tourism, resources should be invested in creating a new conceptualisation, framework and human capital for shared regional governance and decision-making structure and institutions.

   As Magsig (2015, p.135) argues, "framing water security as a regional common concern opens up the enormous potential on including actors and interests beyond the basin." These regional mechanisms will be based on the participation of local communities and inclusive representation in addition to traditional national representatives. In this way, this approach promotes a much more comprehensive understanding of water and human security, which includes other nations and the environment (Froehlich, 2012).

   Track II water diplomacy is an increasingly important mechanism in the process of de-securitisation. A sustainable and effective Track II process encompasses both elite diplomacy and civil society involvement. Based on Cuhadar and Dayton's paper (2012), a multi-level approach that includes both official public diplomacy led by

international institutions and direct local action to encourage and impact the national government is needed for successful Track II processes to move into Track I. In the collapse of the formal peace process, organisations including the Israel/Palestine: Creative Regional Initiatives and the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies have taken the lead in creating a culture of cooperation with the "other", with environmental experts, academics and civil society, thus contributing to the societal changes needed for de-securitisation to occur and local communities to become more informed and active participants (Coskun, 2009; EcoPeace Middle East, 2019). Water diplomacy led by non-governmental representatives can act as a strong facilitator for cooperation between otherwise conflicting parties. True de-securitisation occurs as a political process achieved both at official political levels and the local community civil society level.

The Role of the European Union and other Third Party Stakeholders

In ensuring water security through de-securitised measures, the EU has an important role. Currently, water security and climate security are not a distinct policy field within the EU but rather a cluster of different policies linked together by its ambition to respond and prevent climate-related security risks. A Joint Policy Study published by EuroMeSCo on "Climate Security in the Sahel and the Mediterranean: Local and Regional Responses" suggests that even though the EU has advanced rapidly in terms of developing responses to such risks, it is still not entirely clear what this entails in practice (Bassou et al., 2019). Though *A European Green Deal* was published in 2019, a direct recommendation that stems from this analysis is that the EU should articulate a clear and overarching foreign policy resolution on climate and climate-related issues such as water.

As a part of this policy, it should encourage and insist on cooperation between neighbouring countries to ensure a sufficient regional response to climate crisis, highlighted and manifested through water shortages and scarcity. As a part of this support, the EU could explore the possibility of strengthening the role of the EU. A Special Representative for the Middle East could raise awareness of water-related security risks among stakeholders in the region as well as reporting more systematically on how stakeholders are addressing the nexus between water, security and development. It would be essential to include research and data on possible impacts and worst-case scenarios foreseen due to lack of cooperation and regional approaches. Solutions should be sought to create a dialogue between different stakeholder levels around this common concern.

When taking into account the results of the recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2018), which suggests increases in intensity and frequency of droughts, the analysis presented above implies that the EU should intensify its support for resilience-building in countries in the Middle East. As a part of this, the EU can promote the creation of local governance structures that support water security and decentralised

resilience at the community level through physical and institutional infrastructure. Local water security solutions are more adaptive to complex and changing environments. The process of de-securitisation requires a participatory approach that presents a new concept of win-win strategies to increase trust and allow parties to engage in benefit-sharing (Turton, 2005). This is further amplified in the post-pandemic recovery strategies. Recovery plans should not build on business as usual but rather on new cross-sectoral integration, innovative growth strategies where water is a pertinent pillar for sustainable economic recovery and resilience.

To empower local communities and stall a further process of centralisation, the EU can stress the approaches to water rights, water independence and water accessibility on the local rather than just the national level. This can done, for instance, by providing incentives such as funding for new desalination plants or for building participatory mechanisms as a requirement for securing loans or participating in international conferences. Moreover, it can require and bind official conventions and contracts to include representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs) and local communities in the various components from initial negotiation to planning and implementation to ensure authentic and sustainable water security. Additionally, technological solutions should only be applied as one part of a system of supporting local governance and social frameworks. EU policies should promote and support this approach to actively demystify the issue and the lack of transparency surrounding water management.

Besides requiring the involvement of CSOs in international conventions and in structures focused on water management, the EU can support local organisations financially through the creation of grants dedicated to confronting water scarcity, environmental transboundary cooperation and climate change. This can strengthen CSOs involved in water security and those that partner across borders of conflict.

In 2017, several member states and the European Investment Bank (EIB) committed about €20.4 billion to climate change mitigation and adaption measures in developing countries. The Commission also stated that the main channel for EU support for policy dialogue and specific, targeted climate action in developing countries is the so-called Global Climate Change Alliance Plus (GCCA+). Since 2008, the GCCA+ has invested about €450 million in more than 60 country-based and regional actions (Bassou et al., 2019). According to Bassou, Chmielewska & Ruiz-Campillo (2019), the allocation of climate change funds to include water security and water localisation measures as a direct form of community water resilience is needed. A significant impact could be made by focusing resources on environmental/water diplomacy and water-based organisations to develop practical water de-securitisation measures. Furthermore, the EU's focus on promoting water diplomacy and transboundary cooperation on water places it as a primary actor to foster a regional approach through the aforementioned policies, encouraging much needed Middle East regionality on water-related issues.

All of these recommendations are crucial for the promotion of de-securitisation in the water sector in the Middle East. They should become central in the foreign policy of the EU and its support of different Middle East countries and should be at the core of its work cross-sectorally. As Middle East countries tend to over-securitise, the EU is crucial in enabling the de-securitisation while providing genuine long-term water security for all.

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