DRAFT ABSTRACT

Jordan Case Study:
Water shortages, strategies and alternative solutions: a political perspective

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One of the most arid countries in the world, Jordan faces the serious challenge of water scarcity. Like the rest of the Middle East, land-locked Jordan is suffering from multiple-year drought. While the World Bank cites climate change and population growth as the main reasons for a predicted halving of water available by 2050 in the Arid Middle East, the political climate makes things worse for Jordan, complicating potential solutions. Jordan shares most of its surface water with its neighbours, whose building of dams upstream on major rivers partially deprives Jordan of its share. With current use exceeding renewable supply, Jordan's water deficit is covered by overdrawing aquifers - expected to run dry within 20 years. The gap between water supply and demand threatens to widen - on current trends per capita water will decline from 145 cm/year to 91cm/year by 2025 – far below the international water poverty level of 500 cm/year.

Current and alternative strategies:

Jordan's 2009 Water strategy[1] is multi-faceted encompassing medium- term projects - reducing demand and increasing supply - to reduce the water deficit from the current 565 MCM to 284 MCM by 2022. It entails significantly reducing reliance on underground water and increasing use of treated wastewater and dependence on desalination (Red-Dead Project). The strategy thus looks beyond the Jordan River basin and its contested water supply as the appropriate spatial unit for addressing medium to long-term water scarcity. Success, however, will still depend on a degree of regional cooperation over water which has so far proved elusive and which in the absence of peace cannot be guaranteed for the future.

This paper would therefore revisit alternative policies that might contribute to alleviation of water scarcity including the international trade in water – the trading and transfer of water from water-plentiful regions such as Turkey to water-scarce Jordan – and the potential role of WTO and GATS in opening water sector to new private sector service providers.

Second, with increasing trade between states, could the import of water through imported commodities, known as "virtual water",[2] alleviate water scarcity at acceptable economic and social cost? What does Jordan's water-use foot print tell us about its likely dependency on external sources of water and what would the implications in terms of adjustment be, particularly for agriculture? Would these alternative solutions be non-starters in the absence of Arab-Israel peace or might they help expedite the peace process by reducing competition over regional water resources? In a global perspective, would countries adopting such strategies be effectively

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[1] Water for Life: Jordan's Water Strategy 2008-2022. http://www.idrc.ca/uploads/user-S/12431464431JO_Water-Strategy09.pdf

[2] Allan, J. A ., 'Virtual Water – Part of an Invisible Synergy that Ameliorates Water Scarcity' in Botin, Marcelino, *Water Crisis: Myth or Reality*, Water Forum 2004

exporting their environmental problems? Does the overall global availability of plentiful water support these potential solutions?