The Disi aquifer water dispute between Jordan and Saudi Arabia: an application of the TWINS analysis

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THE DISI WATER:
- a shared groundwater basin
- a non-renewable (fossil) water aquifer
- project works starting in 2008
- awarded through international bid by a private company
- no international aid, no donors
- high environmental impact
- one of the largest mega-water projects on earth (325 km long pipeline)

THE DISPUTE:
- pumping race between the two countries
- no agreement on the issue
- no formal talks about joint actions over the aquifer
- Jordan strategy: in the past; accusation of over-exploitation today; prior use strategy
Trajectory of the Jordan–Saudi Arabia Relation over the Disi Aquifer

Conflict Intensity

Cooperation Intensity

Confrontation of Issue

Ad hoc

Technical

Risk-averting

Risk-taking

1. Non-politicized

2. Politicized

3. Securitized / Opportunitized

4. Violized

Trajectory 1: Low conflict intensity, non-politicized

Trajectory 2: Low conflict intensity, politicized

Trajectory 3: High conflict intensity, politicized

Trajectory 4: High conflict intensity, violized
Confrontation of Issue
Ad hoc
Technical
Risk-averting
Risk-taking

Cooperation Intensity

Low
High

Conflict Intensity

Low
High

1. 1980s: a UNDP technical mission evaluates the aquifer

2. 1990s: First Jordanian accusations of Saudi overexploitation

3. 2002: Declaration of Disi as a “state-security issue”

4. Ongoing: SILENTIZATION/time-gaining

Trajectory of the Jordan –Saudi Arabia Relation over the Disi Aquifer
Violized Conflict Intensity
High

Ad hoc Technical Risk-averting Risk-taking

Confrontation of Issue
Low

Non-politicized Politicized Securitized / Opportunitized

Conflict Intensity
High

Cooperation Intensity
Low

1980s: a UNDP technical mission evaluates the aquifer
1990s: First Jordanian accusations of Saudi overexploitation
2002: Declaration of Disi as a “state-security issue”
ongoing: SILENTIZATION/time-gaining

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Confrontation of Issue
Ad hoc
Technical
Risk-averting
Risk-taking

High
Low

Cooperation Intensity

Low
High

Conflict Intensity

Low
High

Robustness of Political Economy

Low
High

1. Non-politicized
2. Politicized
3. Securitized / Opportunitized
4. Violized

THE ECONOMIC NEXUS
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Confrontation of Issue
Ad hoc
Technical
Rise-risk avert
Rise-risk take

Robustness of Political Economy:

RANKING OF GDP PER HEAD from the Highest (1) to the Lowest: n. 195 (195 = TOTAL n. of COUNTRIES worldwide) Source: WB 2007

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As mentioned before: silent conflict and non-acting upon the issue. Time-play as strategy of conflict over a shared resource.
Confrontation of Issue
Ad hoc Technical Risk-averting Risk-taking
Non-politicized
Politicized
Securitized / Opportunitized
Violized

Robustness of Political Economy:

High
Medium
Low

BARGAINING POWER
IDEATIONAL POWER
COERCIVE POWER

THE FACE OF THE POWER: non-violent coercive power
**Confrontation of Issue**

Ad hoc | Technical | Risk-avoiding | Risk-taking

Non-politicized | Securitized / Opportunized | Violized | Low | medium | high

Robustness of Political Economy:

Drivers of Conflict:

- Non-violent conflict
- Economic gap
- Coercive power
- Many drivers of conflicts

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Evaluation of the TWINS analysis:

• good for historical patterns analysis of conflicts
• useful for combining economical and political issues together
• Approximative for the economic part (economic robustness ranking is one-dimension-data only, and this implies the utilization of a one-dimentional indicator)
• good tool for comparing case studies
Thank you for your attention!

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