
2 The Historical Record: Pre-Madrid Regional Cooperation

The Arab-Israeli multilaterals are not only distinct from the bilateral peace process, but they are also a departure from previous peace-making efforts focused on the substantive issue areas included in the multilateral talks. Before proceeding to the emergence and development of the multilaterals, it is worth highlighting some of these historical differences in order to understand the unprecedented nature of this process and the extent to which regional relations changed after the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. At the same time, these pre-Madrid efforts also foreshadow many of the difficulties the multilateral working groups would face despite the altered global and regional environments. Examples from the arms control, economic development, and water and environment issue areas will illustrate both the contrasts and continuities in addressing regional cooperation in the Arab-Israeli context.

Arms Control

Pre-Madrid efforts to address regional arms control underscore the difficulty of creating such processes in the polarized security environment that existed during the Cold War. Such efforts can be divided into two types: (1) *supplier restraint initiatives*, or efforts by extraregional powers to limit the supply of arms and technology (conventional and unconventional) to the region; and (2) *regional initiatives*, focused on developing demilitarized

zones or limited military deployments in sensitive border areas, or other confidence-building measures (CBMs) between Israel and its Arab neighbors, including proposals to establish regional nuclear and weapons of mass destruction free zones (NWFZ/WMDfZ). The supplier initiatives did not involve coordination among Israel and Arab states, while regional efforts consisted primarily of bilateral arrangements mediated by an outside party or unilateral initiatives presented to international bodies. In this sense, both types of previous arms control initiatives are distinct from the multilateral ACRS process.

This brief review of previous arms control initiatives illustrates the difficulty of establishing a regional arms control process without a conducive global and regional security environment. The historical efforts, while by and large failures, also reveal the extent to which extraregional pressures and leadership were necessary for attempts to establish regional arms control measures. The variety of past initiatives also offered U.S. policymakers several alternatives for promoting regional arms control after the Gulf War, and raises the question of why policymakers favored ACRS over other options, a question which the next chapter will consider.

Supplier Restraint Initiatives

Before ACRS, extraregional powers made several attempts to address the arms control problem by restricting the flow of arms and technology to the region. However, none of these efforts succeeded, and the difficulty of establishing a supplier regime led many to emphasize the need for regional initiatives, like ACRS, that could potentially curb the demand for what seemed an endless supply of weapons to the Middle East.

The first supplier initiative to address the problem of the arms race in the region, the Tripartite Declaration of May 25, 1950, was an agreement among the United Kingdom, France, and the United States to regulate the flow of arms to the Middle East.² The declaration led to an enforcement mechanism two years later, the Near East Arms Coordinating Committee (NEACC), which monitored arms transfers until the arms race escalated with the Soviet-initiated Egyptian-Czechoslovakian arms deal in 1955. This deal, along with cleavages among the Western powers, undermined the initiative and led to a renewed regional arms race.

Subsequent supplier efforts, including several Soviet initiatives in the

1950s³ and President Lyndon B. Johnson's proposal for an arms shipment register in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War,⁴ also failed and continued to underscore the difficulty of establishing such regimes and the need for additional arms control strategies. While Johnson's arms register idea eventually resurfaced, albeit over twenty years and several conflicts later,⁵ the Cold War environment led the Americans and Soviets to utilize arms sales as a means to balance regional players and enhance superpower influence. The United States, for example, sold over \$30 billion in arms to Egypt and Israel alone between 1979 and 1990.⁶ Even with détente in the 1970s, renewed efforts to limit conventional weapons to the region, such as the Carter administration's Conventional Arms Transfer Talks (CAT) from 1977 to 1979, deteriorated along with political relations between the U.S. and Soviets.⁷

Finally, even one of the most serious efforts to create supplier restraints in the Middle East—the Bush Arms Control Initiative of May 29, 1991—faced the same fate as all previous efforts in this area.⁸ Despite the highly visible efforts by President George Bush and Secretary of State James A. Baker III to promote regional arms control in the wake of the Gulf War,⁹ divisions among Western suppliers could not be bridged. Moreover, the end of the Cold War (and the presidential election of 1992) led to increasing pressure from the defense industry for continued, and even increased, arms exports, undermining the rhetoric of supplier restraint.¹⁰ Thus, this high-profile attempt to institutionalize a multilateral supplier restraint regime for the Middle East region among the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (the United States, the Soviet Union, China, Britain, and France) unraveled by the fall of 1992 after a series of unsuccessful follow-up meetings among the permanent five.¹¹

Regional Arms Control Initiatives and Arrangements

Before ACRS, there had been some successful attempts at regional arms control, but most of these examples were limited, bilateral arrangements springing from either bilateral peace treaties or disengagement agreements on disputed borders between Israel and its Arab neighbors. While another set of regional proposals focused on creating a zone free of weapons of mass destruction (including nuclear weapons), the proposals were unrealistic in the absence of an Arab-Israeli political accommodation, particularly since

no negotiating forum to discuss them existed before the Madrid process. Still, these limited precursors to ACRS set the stage for a more ambitious multilateral arms control agenda.

Indeed, since the 1948 Arab-Israeli war Israel and its immediate neighbors have engaged in both formal and informal security arrangements to minimize the prospects for conflict. Such arrangements include: armistice agreements between Israel and each of its Arab neighbors (Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon) from 1949 to the mid-1950s; Israeli-Egyptian demilitarized zones and zones of limited military deployment on the Golan Heights from 1974; the de facto demilitarization of the Sinai from 1957 to 1967 and the creation of buffer zones through the Sinai I and Sinai II agreements (1974–75); and finally, the establishment of the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) to verify security arrangements in the Sinai in the wake of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979. An extensive tacit security regime also developed between Israel and Jordan beginning with the Black September crisis in 1970, leading to cooperation to maintain stable borders as well as information and intelligence exchanges and even conventions to regulate aerial activity and maritime commerce from Aqaba and Eilat.¹² Together, these bilateral security arrangements and CBMs contributed to limited stability despite the absence of a comprehensive regional peace.

However, these types of arrangements were largely limited to the military realm, and were always bilaterally based in terms of regional participation. Unlike the ACRS experiment, the purpose of these agreements was well defined: the prevention and limitation of armed conflict on border areas between Israel and its immediate neighbors. In many cases, these agreements were viewed as an alternative to peace agreements rather than as a complement, as was the intention with ACRS.¹³ Moreover, with the exception of the Israeli-Egyptian security agreements embodied in their peace treaty and the tacit Israeli-Jordanian security cooperation, these bilateral security arrangements did not require direct Arab-Israeli cooperation, but rather were mediated by outside parties.

A second type of regional arms control initiative is exemplified by proposals for nuclear (NWFZ) or weapons of mass destruction free zones (WMDFZ) that, unlike the limited bilateral security arrangements, were intended to reduce or eliminate dangerous unconventional weaponry from the entire region.¹⁴ Since 1974, Egypt has been the most persistent and vocal advocate for nuclear arms control, offering initiatives for both a Middle Eastern NWFZ and a WMDFZ at the United Nations.¹⁵ For the Egyptians, the

preferred arms control sequence is to address the nuclear question first, and the political dimension second—the exact opposite to the Israeli preference. Moreover, Egyptian proposals traditionally called for Israel to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and to place its nuclear facilities under the inspection of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

However, since the mid-1960s—when Israel is believed to have acquired a nuclear weapons capability—Israel's official position on nuclear weapons has been the simple statement that Israel will not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into the region. This policy of ambiguity has served Israeli interests in maintaining an existential deterrent while avoiding conflict with the United States on the proliferation question.¹⁶ Thus, Israel has refused to sign the NPT although it has signed other global conventions on unconventional weapons, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in January 1993. Not surprisingly, Israel tends to stress the need to establish a WMDFZ, which by its definition includes not only nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, but also destructive conventional weaponry, such as certain missile technology.¹⁷ Neither the Egyptian nor the Israeli initiatives were expected to produce serious discussions because they were largely viewed as attempts to score “points and counter-points in the Arab-Israeli propaganda battle . . . While both sides could claim the moral high ground for their proposals for NWFZ, they knew that the whole exercise was futile, no more than diplomatic posturing.”¹⁸

These previous efforts at regional arms control illustrate both the challenges and the promise for a process like ACRS. The challenges were many, but the most fundamental problem centered on the contrasting approaches to the nuclear issue between the Egyptians and Israelis. Yet in contrast to the past, the Cold War no longer dictated competitive regional security relations and for the first time, regional parties could engage in a dialogue, rather than a debate, on security structures for the region. In the context of the conflictual history of Arab-Israeli security relations, ACRS emerged in an environment that seemed to offer the promise of taking on the tremendous challenge of regional arms control.

Economic Development

Arab-Israeli economic cooperation efforts before the Madrid conference underscore their limited nature and the economic and political impedi-

ments to Arab-Israeli cooperation in this issue area. This background reveals that to the extent that Arab-Israeli economic interaction did occur, it was largely orchestrated from the outside in conscious attempts to impose cooperative relations in the region, particularly in the wake of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of 1979. The limits to such cooperation have been primarily political, but even without political impediments, the economic foundations for cooperation between the developed Israeli economy and the developing Arab region are not conducive to integration proposals or to region-wide free trade areas (although subregional zones, particularly among Israel, Jordan, and a Palestinian entity, are feasible).¹⁹ The past record of Arab-Israeli economic relations serves as a contrast to the post-Madrid environment, where many of the political and economic obstacles of the past were consciously overcome in efforts to foster unprecedented Arab-Israeli economic cooperation.

Proposals Under President Eisenhower

In late November 1954, U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden met in Paris informally to discuss proposals to end the Arab-Israeli conflict through a comprehensive peace settlement. These talks led to a secret U.S.-British project, also known as operation ALPHA,²⁰ the outlines of which were made public by Dulles in an address before the Council on Foreign Relations on August 26, 1955.²¹ The plan envisioned Israeli territorial concessions in the Negev and the resettlement of Palestinians in neighboring states, as well as some limited repatriation. These conditions required significant economic aid packages for Israel to compensate the refugees and development schemes to facilitate the refugees' resettlement, including water development. Moreover, the authors of this peace proposal envisioned economic dividends for Israel in terms of new trade opportunities with Arab states and the end of the Arab secondary boycott of Israel. Had the ALPHA plan succeeded, the potential for Arab-Israeli economic cooperation might have been tested. However, with both Israel and Arab states opposed to the plan, ALPHA never materialized, nor did the development plans associated with it.

Yet the Eisenhower administration continued to focus on the lack of economic development in the Middle East as a source for continued regional conflict. To this end, in 1958 the administration offered one of the

earliest proposals for a regional development bank, the Middle East Economic Development Fund. As in the case of ALPHA, the proposal sought in part to address the Arab refugee problem resulting from the Arab-Israeli conflict. The basic idea was to transfer funds from the Arab “haves” to the Arab “have nots” in order to create a more stable regional environment.²² However, due to concerns over how American oil companies might be affected by a regional funding mechanism²³ as well as a belief that bilateral assistance programs would provide the United States with better leverage with which to promote its interests in the region, the proposal was not pursued.²⁴ Despite the dormancy of this idea for over thirty years, political considerations—namely, further attempts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict—again brought the proposal to the attention of American policy-makers. Indeed, these early ideas for regional economic development to improve the political climate planted the seeds for future proposals like the Arab-Israeli multilaterals which carried a similar causal premise. However, in the absence of political accommodation, regional schemes involving Israel and Arab states were restricted to limited and often secret channels.

The Arab Boycott

With no comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace—which seemed increasingly distant after the 1956 Suez war—economic relations were viewed as yet another tool in the regional conflict rather than a means to promote peace. The Arab League economic boycott of Israel, which became institutionalized with the 1951 creation of the Central Office for the Boycott of Israel (CBO) in Damascus, was the clearest expression of the impediments facing Arab-Israeli economic cooperation.²⁵ The boycott created a taboo on Arab-Israeli commercial contact, which has been difficult to break even in the post-Madrid/post-Oslo period, particularly within the Arab private sector. The boycott worked at several levels to prevent Arab-Israeli economic contact.

The primary boycott prohibited any direct trade or commercial contacts between Arab states and Israel. The secondary boycott prohibited trade with companies that conducted business in Israel, while the tertiary boycott targeted firms (such as suppliers) doing business with companies operating in Israel. The secondary and tertiary boycotts led to a comprehensive “black list” of foreign firms which did not comply with the Arab boycott’s terms

(which in turn led to comprehensive antiboycott legislation in the United States beginning in 1977 to prevent American firms' compliance with the boycott). Other restrictions also resulted from the boycott that went beyond sanctioning Israel, such as the widespread travel ban on Jews by denying entry visas to Arab states, which prevented both Israeli and Jewish tourism and business contacts within the Arab world. Yet the primary Arab boycott of Israel proved to be far more symbolic than economically painful. While vastly different accounts of the economic impact of the boycott on Israel make it difficult to quantify its effect, most analysts agree that the secondary and tertiary aspects of the boycott (with over 6,300 foreign firms blacklisted by the CBO) proved far more detrimental to the Israeli economy than the lack of direct Arab-Israeli commercial ties.²⁶

The threat of losing business in the Arab world discouraged many foreign companies from pursuing commercial interests in Israel, particularly since antiboycott legislation was not enforced and even nonexistent in most of Europe and Asia. In fact, during the growth of the Israeli economy in the years following the Madrid conference, the primary boycott was still technically in place. The central difference during these years—in addition to domestic economic reform policies in Israel—was the growth of foreign direct investment in the Israeli economy and growing exports to areas that were formerly restricted under the secondary boycott, primarily in Asia.²⁷

According to an Israeli Ministry of Finance study for 1972–1983, Israeli exports would have been 1 percent higher if the boycott was not in place, costing Israel \$6 billion. The Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott study estimates an annual loss of \$258 million from 1951 to 1980, averaging from 2.3 percent of Israel's GNP (1951–60) to 5.9 percent (1973–80).²⁸ While the figures vary, few doubt the serious economic effects of the secondary and tertiary boycott on Israeli economic growth, and the rather limited effects of the primary boycott. Thus, the history of the Arab boycott underscores the relatively low potential for direct Arab-Israeli commercial relations on *economic grounds* (with the exception of the Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian triad)²⁹ and the need to consciously foster these types of contacts to further political ends given the lack of economic incentives to build economic ties even under conditions of peace. Unlike in the security realm where Arabs and Israelis encounter genuine security interdependencies, their economic dependencies on a region-wide basis (as opposed to subregions) are few, and provide a weak foundation for building a wider cooperative economic framework.

Israeli-Egyptian Economic Cooperation

An excellent example of the impediments to wider Arab-Israeli economic cooperation is the Israeli-Egyptian experience in the wake of their peace accord in 1979. Even at its peak in 1981, Egyptian-Israeli trade relations were minimal, with Egyptian exports totaling \$550 million and Israeli exports to Egypt totaling just \$115 million.³⁰ Moreover, the majority of Egyptian exports were in the oil sector, with none of the other export sectors surpassing \$1 million.³¹ While Israel has repeatedly attempted to expand bilateral economic relations with Egypt and implement other measures included in their peace treaty, the Egyptians have resisted, arguing that normalization is dependent on progress on other political fronts (primarily with the Palestinians).³² Private sector contact between Egyptians and Israelis before the Madrid process was nearly absent. However, even after the Israeli-Palestinian Oslo agreement, the limited nature of Egyptian-Israeli trade relations did not fundamentally change, raising questions about the potential for comprehensive regional economic cooperation, even under peace conditions, beyond periodic joint ventures.

Israeli-Palestinian Economic Relations

The Israeli and Palestinian economies are the most interdependent in the Arab-Israeli context. After Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in the 1967 conflict, the Palestinian economy became inextricably linked to and dependent upon Israel. Many debate the impact of the Israeli domination of the Palestinian economy. Some point to its positive effect in leading to rapid economic growth due to access to the large Israeli market, which had been closed before 1967. Others note the negative socioeconomic effect of dependency on the Israeli market where political crises disrupt its economy (particularly the dependence of the Palestinian labor force on the Israeli market).³³ In fact, both effects have played out on the ground, leading to mixed results. For example, the combined per capita GNP of the territories rose from 13.8 percent of the Israeli GNP in 1970 to 22.7 percent in 1986.³⁴ By 1987, the combined per capita GNP of the West Bank and Gaza was comparable to middle-income economies (at \$1717) according to the World Bank's classification, making it higher than the per capita GNP of both Syria and Jordan.³⁵ But this growth was the result of extreme dependence on Israel,

with over one-third of the combined labor force of the territories employed in Israel in 1986 and the wages earned there accounting for nearly one-fourth of its GNP.³⁶

The dependence of Palestinian labor on the Israeli market has created one of the greatest setbacks to Palestinian economic development, particularly during politically unstable periods. Because of lower wages and poor employment opportunity in the territories, Palestinians have had to rely on these volatile external labor markets (often in unreliable labor sectors like construction) despite the devastating economic risks of such dependence. After the intifada (beginning in December 1987) and then the Gulf war, Israeli restrictions on Palestinian labor increased as Israelis, because of security concerns, began substituting foreign workers from Asia and Eastern Europe for Palestinian labor. The lack of indigenous development from either public or private sector foreign investment because of political uncertainty and legal restrictions also created tremendous challenges for future attempts to develop a viable Palestinian economy.³⁷

While the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza left the Palestinians little choice in economic affairs, it is likely that even in the wake of a final status agreement on the nature of the Palestinian entity that the Palestinian economy will remain linked to Israel given its proximity and labor needs, although both sides will want to limit Palestinian labor dependence on Israel for political and security reasons. The protocol governing Israeli-Palestinian economic relations under their interim agreement (signed in April 1994 in Paris) already established a virtual customs union, although its implementation was greatly impeded by the delays in extending Palestinian self-rule and by Israeli closures of the Palestinian territories in the wake of terrorist incidents.³⁸ Consequently, the Israeli-Palestinian experience is not exemplary of the overall pattern of economic cooperation in the region, which is far more limited, and provides one of the few cases (along with Jordan) of high potential for expanded economic cooperation, albeit by necessity more than by desire.

Summary

Before the Madrid and Oslo peace process, Arab-Israeli economic cooperation remained limited and largely theoretical, restricted to academic debates identifying sectors where economic cooperation could one day take

place to support peace, often citing areas like water development, tourism, and regional infrastructure projects. Even after the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, the potential for regional economic cooperation remained unfulfilled, and the Arab boycott continued to prevent efforts to further regional cooperation through trade and commercial contacts. In fact, one of the few examples of Arab-Israeli economic interaction before Madrid—the Israeli relationship with the Palestinian territories—created a negative image of Israeli domination.

Still, academic conceptualizations and external government efforts (particularly by the United States) outlining the cooperative potential of the region were important in providing many ideas that would later appear as regional projects across various sectors in the Regional Economic Development working group (REDWG), particularly in areas like water development, communications networks, and tourism.³⁹ Yet before a peace settlement, these plans could not be attempted on the ground, particularly given the absence of any regional economic forum to foster such initiatives. But even with a peace settlement, the above overview of Arab-Israeli economic relations suggests a note of caution for those promoting Arab-Israeli economic cooperation. While the economic basis for Arab-Israeli cooperation—at least on the broad regional level—has always been questionable, political roadblocks proved the most serious impediment for even limited joint ventures. With the removal of some of these political roadblocks at the Madrid conference and the establishment of the multilaterals, the potential of many of these joint economic schemes could be tested on the ground.

Water and Environmental Cooperation

As was the case in the arms control and economic issue areas, Arab-Israeli water and environmental cooperation faced political obstacles despite the more technical nature of these issue areas where mutual gain from cooperation is perhaps most obvious. Attempts before Madrid to forge cooperative arrangements in these areas either failed or were limited to bilateral agreements, largely between Israel and Egypt and, in secret fashion, Jordan. Any regional multilateral cooperation that did occur (through the United Nations, for example) did not promote direct Arab-Israeli contact as did the Madrid multilaterals. As in the economic case, however, earlier cooperative attempts provided ideas and frameworks that would

serve as a basis for many of the later projects which emerged from the Arab-Israeli multilateral talks.

One of the earliest and most prominent attempts to establish an Arab-Israeli regime which would regulate water usage focused on the Jordan River basin and became known as the Johnston Plan. In an effort to alleviate tensions plaguing the region in the aftermath of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the Eisenhower administration began to promote a basin-wide project (the Unified Development of the Water Resources of the Jordan Valley Region) that included four riparian states—Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. The plan was based on a proposal by Charles T. Main of the Tennessee Valley Authority and suggested a formula for the equitable distribution of waters in the basin.⁴⁰ Eric Johnston, President Dwight D. Eisenhower's special envoy, met with technical teams from the four riparian states and Egypt from 1953 to 1956 in an attempt to secure a water sharing agreement. Eventually, the parties agreed that as a technical arrangement the basin-wide project was acceptable, a success largely achieved because the negotiations were limited to technical personnel and avoided publicity.⁴¹ However, despite technical agreement, the political implications of the plan (i.e., Arab recognition of Israel) proved unacceptable for the Arab parties. They could not approve any collaboration with Israel prior to a political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. As Miriam Lowi explains, "the experience of the Johnston mission elucidates the fact that profound geopolitical and security-related concerns, emanating from historical circumstance and the character of relations in the basin, often dominate the seemingly technical issue of allocating water resources."⁴² Despite the failure of this agreement, the plan guided Jordanian and Israeli actions with regard to their water supplies and contributed to a tacit water regime between these two adversaries.⁴³ Still, until Madrid, such cooperative arrangements remained both secret and bilateral.

Despite the failure of the Johnston Plan, the United States government continued to promote water cooperation schemes in the region, largely to serve the political purpose of promoting Arab-Israeli political accommodation. For example, in May 1967 (on the eve of the Arab-Israeli war) the United States sponsored an international water conference and, following the war, former President Eisenhower proposed a "water for peace" program which envisaged the construction of several nuclear reactors (in Egypt, Israel, and Jordan) to provide power and to desalinize seawater for the development of agro-industrial centers.⁴⁴ However, these conferences and plans

ultimately did not produce direct Arab-Israeli interaction nor tangible projects because of the adverse political climate in the region.

The United States made efforts once again in the 1970s and early 1980s to develop cooperative water plans for the Jordan River basin. At issue was the Jordanian plan to dam the Yarmouk River to enable Jordan to utilize the winter flows that had been running into the Dead Sea. The Carter administration announced it would fund the project if an agreement with Syria and Israel were reached. Over a three-year period Assistant Secretary of State Philip Habib shuttled among the parties but failed to reach an agreement. The Syrians would not respond to any overtures regarding a trilateral water sharing plan and would not agree to a project which involved cooperation with Israel.⁴⁵

One of the only successful programs to promote Arab-Israeli water and environmental cooperation—the Middle East Regional Cooperation Program (MERC)—was established in 1979 in the context of the Egyptian-Israeli peace process, and was thus limited to largely bilateral initiatives. The MERC program was mandated by Congress and given to the Agency for International Development (AID) to administer; its declared purpose was to “reduce political and social tensions in the Middle East by designing, promoting, and executing cooperative technical projects.”⁴⁶ The program promoted bilateral and trilateral cooperation among Israeli, Egyptian, and American scientists in areas like food, water, and land protection. To the extent that other regional actors were involved (e.g., Jordan and Saudi Arabia), Egypt worked with them on a bilateral basis. Until Madrid, this program was not able to promote broader regional Arab-Israeli cooperation in these issue areas.

The United States was not the only body involved in promoting environmental cooperation in the region. The United Nations Environment Program was responsible for the coordination of a regime—the Mediterranean Action Plan (Med Plan)—aimed at improving the environmental conditions of the Mediterranean Sea and the surrounding countries, including Israel and a number of Arab states.⁴⁷ The Med Plan is comprehensive in nature, involving everything from the establishment of regional centers to coordinate oil spill management (an idea later discussed and implemented in the multi-lateral environmental working group) to the adoption of legal arrangements to preserve endangered marine species. The plan established the Land Based Sources Protocol which sets limits on industrial, municipal, and agricultural emissions into the Mediterranean and controls wastes transmitted by rivers

and through the atmosphere. Interestingly, traditional sources of interstate conflict in the Mediterranean region did not derail the agreement, in part because Arab recognition of Israel was avoided in the larger Mediterranean context (e.g., Syria ratified the plan with the qualification that its ratification did not constitute recognition of Israeli sovereignty). While multilateral, this forum did not promote direct Arab-Israeli interaction at the regional level as did the Madrid multilateral process. However, the relative success of the Med Plan suggested fertile ground for such cooperation in substantive terms if political obstacles could be overcome.

Summary

This chapter's survey of pre-Madrid efforts to establish Arab-Israeli regional cooperation in the arms control, economic, water, and environmental issue areas underscores the difficulty of such efforts in the absence of political accommodation. The conflictual Arab-Israeli environment impeded the progress of many regional cooperation schemes, limiting both the nature (e.g., little if any direct Arab-Israeli contact) and scope (e.g., largely bilateral or U.S.-sponsored trilateral agreements) of such endeavors. Thus, the establishment of the Madrid multilateral working groups marked a serious and unprecedented departure from all previous regional cooperation efforts. Still, these pre-Madrid examples also laid the groundwork and proposed many of the ideas that would later emerge in the multilaterals, from security CBMs to desalination plants to regional oil spill centers. Unlike earlier efforts, however, the multilaterals would establish a process by which Arabs and Israelis would discuss and even implement these ideas in a large regional setting, albeit always in the context of a tense political environment that would continue to pose obstacles for the resolution of these "technical" problems. But with the Madrid conference changing the overall nature of Arab-Israeli relations because of the willingness of Arab parties to recognize Israel as a state and a legitimate regional player, the ability of these adversaries to overcome or at least manage political divisions allowed these issue areas to be considered technical—with varying degrees of success—for the first time in the history of the conflict.