6 Water and Environmental Cooperation

Project-oriented and intended to demonstrate positive, concrete returns on peacemaking efforts, the Water and Environment working groups, of all the multilateral working groups, held out the highest expectations for tangible progress. Water and environmental cooperation focused on projects that could potentially improve the living conditions of millions of people—sewage treatment plants, desalination to increase regional water supplies, oil spill centers to prevent and respond to crises affecting common waters, and a wide variety of regional infrastructure projects. Moreover, both topics—but particularly the problem of water scarcity—posed readily understood threats to Arabs and Israelis and thus provided fertile ground for the parties to address long-term regional challenges.[1] Given the "technical" nature of these issue areas, we would expect such types of functional cooperation to stand the best chance of success even according to outcome rather than process criteria.

However, while both working groups made considerable accomplishments, including influencing sections of the Israel-Jordan peace treaty and the Israeli-Palestinian peace agreements, their development does not drastically depart from the patterns that emerged in REDWG and even ACRS. An analysis of the basis of the groups' relative success underscores the exaggerated distinction between technical versus political issues. The parties' willingness to cooperate in these issue areas cannot be assumed based on their desire to make cooperation cheaper and easier by joining a multilateral forum to address these "consensual" technical topics. Rather, a consensus

had to be developed among the regional parties that such types of regional cooperation served their broader interests and political goals. In other words, a political decision had to be made to treat these issues as technical problems.

While consensual knowledge about how to address these regional problems led the parties to support multilateral cooperation—even during difficult periods on the bilateral front—this was not the unproblematic result of a Middle East epistemic community[2] of scientists and experts who illustrated indisputable facts about the water crisis and environmental degradation in the region. Instead, the consensual knowledge developed among the *political* elite, who allowed the experts to enter the process once they were agreed that regional cooperation could be defined in ways that served or at least did not undermine perceived national goals. Specifically, political elites increasingly perceived both the water and the environment issue areas as regional problems that required multilateral cooperation but that could also advance political objectives. They also recognized that these solutions did not have to come at the expense of bilateral solutions that were more politically sensitive, such as the question of water-sharing in the Jordan River basin. Once these common understandings developed at the political level, the technical aspects of the problems could be addressed, and progress could be made on specific projects in a variety of sectors.

Yet regional support for cooperation does not fully explain why particular regional parties were eager to see such cooperation continue even under extremely adverse peace process conditions. Again, the political basis for cooperation predominated, with many of the regional parties viewing such cooperation not only as a way to address water and environment issues, but also as a means to exert political influence vis-à-vis other regional players and gain a place at the regional table. This political value, particularly apparent among the smaller Arab states, became a potential impediment to working group progress given the challenge it posed to the larger regional players. In short, even in the issue areas where regional support for cooperation should be unproblematic, we find that the source of commitment to the process is not self-evident and its politically constructed nature can lead to outcomes we would not fully expect from a functional analysis.

While the Water and Environment working groups developed separate trajectories after the 1992 Moscow organizational session and were chaired by different gavelholders (the U.S. chaired the Water group; Japan, the En-

vironment), this chapter treats the groups together because of their commonalities within the multilateral framework and the overlapping nature of these issue areas in practical terms. Indeed, many of the individuals representing regional parties served in both working groups; at the June 1995 plenary in Amman, for example, the working groups held parallel plenaries in recognition of the close connection between the two. The overall purpose of this chapter is to examine the broader trends of these issue areas in promoting Arab-Israeli multilateral cooperation and the forces driving this process forward and, at times, backward. This chapter, like the earlier ones, does not treat in great detail the substantive problems (water scarcity and environmental degradation) that the groups address. Indeed, the problem of water scarcity in the Middle East has already spawned a considerable literature.[3] Rather, this chapter discusses why and how Arabs and Israelis sat down in a multilateral forum to cooperate on these issues; it is a story of process, not outcomes.

The chapter demonstrates that to understand the development of these working groups, we must examine how regional players themselves viewed the process rather than looking to explanations centered on external actors or the constraints of domestic politics. Indeed, external actors would not have been sufficient to sustain the process—particularly during difficult periods in Israeli-Palestinian bilateral relations—if regional parties viewed cooperation negatively. And even after Oslo, the domestic environments did not alter radically in terms of a greater demand for broader regional cooperation, especially amid diminishing expectations about the ability of these working groups to produce tangible projects that could benefit the public. Rather, the objectives of regional participants drove this process forward, but, as discussed above, these objectives were not as self-evident as we would expect from the nature of these issue areas, which, at least in the case of the environment but even in the case of water after Oslo, should have been obvious candidates for mutual gain.[4] As in the case of security and economic cooperation, the process had to depoliticize these issues in order for the working groups to progress successfully.

The first section reviews the empirical record according to the working groups' pre- and post-Oslo stages in order to document the changing nature of the groups' activities and interaction within the process. The second section proceeds to analyze these developments by considering both the facilitators and the impediments to Arab-Israeli cooperation in these issue areas. This analysis demonstrates the value of examining the process of cooperation

to understand the development of these groups, as compared to alternative explanations for multilateral cooperation.

The Development of the Water and Environment Working Groups

The Pre-Oslo Record

Before Oslo, the gaps between the Water and Environment working groups were pronounced. The Water group was burdened with the contentious issue of water rights, with its territorial implications for the Israeli-Palestinian track, while the Environment group was propelled by a relatively consensual agenda. Moreover, the absence of the Syrians and Lebanese from the multilaterals adversely affected the prospects for regional cooperation among the riparian states of the Jordan River basin more than was the case with environmental cooperation. Still, despite these differences, the basis for the establishment of both groups was similar, as were the attempts to define a working agenda that satisfied a wide array of regional interests. This overview of the empirical record of both groups before Oslo illustrates the role played by the United States and other extraregional parties, particularly Japan in the Environment case, in shaping the agenda and goals of the working groups in the face of regional indifference and even resistance, underscoring that success in these areas was not a foregone conclusion.

Water

As was typical of all the multilateral working groups, the early plenary sessions in the Water group were tense and polarized, with little regional interaction and mostly extraregional presentations and seminars about the nature and potential solutions that could form a working agenda. Moreover, as in the case of ACRS, an initial division emerged among Israel and the Arab parties about the sequence of the group's work, with the Arab parties (particularly the Palestinians and Jordanians) interested in dealing with issues of water rights and sharing, while the Israelis preferred addressing technical projects that would improve and increase existing water supplies and promote broad regional cooperation that would enhance progress on the bilateral tracks. Thus, the mutual-sum nature of this issue area was not evi-

dent to the parties at the outset, and the leadership of the United States proved critical in shaping a working agenda that did not initially match the expectations of many Arab parties, particularly the Palestinians.

Essentially, while in the first several rounds the Palestinians were pushing the water rights issue, the United States backed Israel's preference for addressing the technical aspects of the water problem and facilitating regional cooperation even before bilateral progress. As gavelholder of the working group, the United States carried great influence with all regional parties, many of whom were more interested in currying favor with the gavelholder than in defending the Palestinian position. Thus, the working agenda that emerged from the first meetings focused on four main areas that largely matched the American desire to facilitate regional cooperation by focusing on sectors that avoided issues of territory and sovereignty.[5]

Four central areas for cooperation emerged early on, and defined all future work for the Water group:

1) Enhancing water data availability;
2) Water management and conservation;
3) Enhancing water supplies; and
4) Concepts of regional cooperation and management on water.

However, while several regional parties expressed an interest in moving ahead with regional projects even before Oslo, it was not until after the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles (DoP) in September 1993 that most of the projects under the four sectors were developed and, in some cases, implemented. Indeed, unlike the case with the Environment group, the Water group did not conduct any extensive intersessional activities (or more technically oriented workshops consisting primarily of regional experts rather than political representatives) before the Israeli-Palestinian DoP, particularly because the water rights issue proved too divisive before the parties agreed to deal with this issue bilaterally shortly before the Oslo signing.[6]

Still, signs that some Arab parties were prepared—with U.S. backing—to engage in cooperation with Israel began to emerge before Oslo. While the Gulf states were not initially active in the multilateral sessions, Oman emerged as the first Gulf state to speak in the Water forum and to propose a regional project (at their own initiative) when they gave a presentation on desalination to the full working group at their April 1993 plenary session in

Geneva.[7] This presentation provided the basis for one of the major projects of the working group—a desalination center in Muscat—that developed after Oslo and was ultimately established. Jordan also proposed a number of projects in a position paper as early as the first plenary meeting in Vienna in May 1992, including a regional water charter (that eventually evolved into a Declaration of Water Principles), and other areas that matched the Israeli preference, such as increasing and improving water supplies and the efficiency of existing water resources.

But generally, while some Arab parties (particularly those interested in acquiring a more pronounced regional role in this new multilateral context and gaining the favor and financial support of its American sponsor) were prepared to begin defining and negotiating a common work agenda even before Oslo, little progress was possible as long as the water rights issue clouded the negotiations. Consequently, the primary purpose and character of these early sessions was a limited familiarization exercise, where workshops and seminars were promoted by the Americans in order to "get people together for its own sake" rather than to tackle the substantive items emerging on the agenda.[8] The process remained highly centralized (with large plenary sessions serving as the group's focus rather than project-focused intersessionals) with the United States serving as the intermediary for regional interaction.

The Environment

Unlike the early sessions of the Water group, politically divisive issues did not burden the Environment talks. To the contrary, most of the regional participants were like-minded environmentalists with common understandings of international and regional environmental threats. As the Jordanian position paper for the May 1992 Tokyo plenary observed, "This meeting comes coincidentally only a couple weeks before the greatest environmental conference that man has known [the Rio Summit in Brazil]. But the fact that both these discussions are concerned with the environment is no coincidence. There is a growing realization by all of us who share this planet that we must work hard, and work together, at reversing systemic damage that we have been doing to our environment."[9] The Palestinian participants also found the talks constructive, despite continued concern that the multilateral groups not outpace the bilateral negotiations with the Israelis.[10] Still, the Palestinians were pushing—even in this issue area—for discussion of

more politically charged issues, such as Israeli tree cutting, water allocation, and Palestinian control over natural resources in the West Bank and Gaza.[11]

Left to their own devices, it is questionable how far regional parties would have moved without extraregional guidance and direction, in this case from Japan (with American support).[12] Moreover, given that environmental threats did not suddenly emerge with the creation of this working group, we must also ask why such a forum did not appear earlier in the Arab-Israeli context, even on a tacit level as occurred with water cooperation. The Japanese sponsors were particularly eager to avoid contentious issues that would slow or even disrupt the working group's progress—and their only opportunity to assume a leadership role in the American-dominated peace process—and hence supported the Israeli position to leave political issues aside in favor of less controversial environmental projects.

Topics that emerged early in the group's agenda included:

1) Environmental management and education (to raise environmental consciousness in the region);
2) Maritime pollution in the Gulf of Eilat/Aqaba and the Mediterranean Sea;
3) Oil spill emergency planning;
4) Waste management;
5) The re-use of treated water; and
6) Protection of wildlife.

Moreover, in contrast to all other working groups at that time, the Environment group—at the initiative of the Japanese chair and in coordination with the United States—moved to a smaller, technical workshop format by its second plenary meeting in The Hague in October 1992, allowing for direct Arab-Israeli contact much earlier than any other working group.[13] At The Hague, the Israeli delegation proposed a project to combat desertification—which received support from the World Bank representative, who offered to find financing for the project—and was endorsed by a majority of participating states, remaining a central project of the working group in its future meetings.[14] The Japanese delegation proposed a regional environmental code at the May 1993 plenary in Tokyo, which later became the Bahrain Environmental Code of Conduct that was approved unanimously by the full working group in October 1994.[15] Also at the 1993 Tokyo plenary Canada proposed to dispatch a mission to review environmental impact assessment

(EIA) needs in Jordan, Israel, Egypt, and the West Bank and Gaza, a mission which they conducted after the plenary and which produced a report with recommendations for the regional parties.[16] And several intersessional activities, including a U.S. sponsored workshop on hazardous material accidents in February 1993 and a Japanese-led seminar on maritime emergency preparedness in June 1993, illustrated the quick pace of this group and its willingness to proceed with practical projects. This trend only accelerated with the Oslo signing [see table 6.1], when many of the group's projects began to move toward the implementation stage, although international funding and political rivalries posed increasing obstacles to moving these projects from concepts to reality.

Developments After Oslo

Once the Water and Environment groups were established and had initiated working agendas, and particularly after the Oslo signing accelerated the pace of activity for all the multilateral talks, regional participants increasingly shaped the direction and substance of the process. Regional parties increasingly perceived multilateral cooperation in these issue areas as serving national interests, but these interests had less to do with the substance of the issue than with political interests in enhancing one's regional role and status and gaining external support (both political and financial), particularly from the United States. In this sense, the development of these working groups is not remarkably distinct from that of the other multilateral working groups. If cooperation were based solely on interests in solving the substantive problems under discussion, then regional parties would have been much quicker to halt the process when bilateral negotiations stumbled, given the secondary importance of these issues relative to the core peace process issues of territory and sovereignty.

Instead, regional parties looked for excuses to sustain multilateral cooperation because it served interests distinct from peace process objectives and the substantive issues on the agenda. Thus, only extreme periods of deterioration in Israeli-Palestinian relations slowed the pace of cooperative efforts. The development of these working groups raises questions about the value of making sharp distinctions between the prospects for cooperation across different issue areas.

TABLE 6.1 Water and Environment Working Groups Calendar of Plenary Meetings and Sample Intersessionals, 1992–1996

Meeting	Date, Place [where available]
First Water Plenary	May 1992, Vienna
First Environment Plenary	May 1992, Tokyo
Second Water Plenary	September 1992, Washington, D.C.
Second Environment Plenary	September 1992, The Hague
Third Water Plenary	April 1993, Geneva
Third Environment Plenary	May 1993, Tokyo
Fourth Water Plenary	October 1993, Beijing
Fourth Environment Plenary	November 1993, Cairo
Fifth Water Plenary	April 1994, Muscat, Oman
Fifth Environment Plenary	April 1994, The Hague
Sixth Water Plenary	November 1994, Athens
Sixth Environment Plenary	October 1994, Manama, Bahrain
Seventh Plenary (Joint Water and Environment Session)	June 1995, Amman
Eighth Water Plenary	May 1996, Hammamet, Tunisia
Intersessional Meetings/Workshops	
Maritime emergency preparedness seminar	June 1993, Japan
Hazardous material accidents workshop	February 1993
Several Water Seminars (including weather forecasting, data base standardization, and study tour of river basins)	October 1993–April 1994
Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Workshop	June 1994, Canada
EIA Training Course	November 1994, Cairo
Pesticide Management Workshop	December 1994, Cairo
Water Meeting with U.S. Gavelholder	March 1995
Water Meeting	March 1995, Oslo
Oil Spill Project Intersessional	March 1995, Eilat

TABLE 6.1 (*continued*)

Meeting	Date, Place
Sanitation Workshop	March 1995, Washington, D.C.
Rain Enhancement Workshop	April 1995, Australia
Oil Spill and Environmental Center Meeting	April 1995, Bahrain
Gulf of Aqaba Environmental Projects Intersessional	April 1995, Amman
Radioactive Waste Workshop	May 1995, Washington, D.C.
Water Working Visit to Gaza and Israel	May 1995 (sponsored by Luxembourg)
Water Courses	May 1995, Oman and Denmark
Water Courses	June 1995, Sweden
Water Steering Committee	July 1995, Germany
Dutch Aquifer Workshop	August 1995, The Netherlands
Coast Cleaning Workshop	September 1995, Eilat
Environmental Waste Meeting	September 1995, Amman
Water Courses	November 1995, Canada and the U.S.
German Study Meeting	November 1995, Tel Aviv
Water Data Meeting	November 1995, Aqaba
Environment Meeting	November 1995, Beit Shean Valley
Environment Workshop	November 1995, Cairo
Desalination Center Meeting	December 1995, Washington, D.C.
Norwegian Water Meeting	December 1995, Oslo
German Water Meeting	December 1995
Water Course	December 1995, England
German Water Meeting	January 1996
Water Meeting (agriculture)	February 1996, Luxembourg
Israeli Water Course	February 1996
German Water Meeting	February 1996
Water Steering Meeting	February–March 1996, Germany
Chemical and Toxic Waste Workshop	March 1996, Switzerland
Rehabilitation of Municipal Water Systems	March 1996, Israel

TABLE 6.1 (*continued*)

Meeting	Date, Place
Desalination Center Training Session	March 1996, Tokyo
Desalination Center Training Session	April 1996, Oman
Water Data Bank Meeting	May 1996
Environment Steering Meeting	June 1996, Oman
Regional Environmental Centers Intersessional	December 1996, Amman

Source: Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, *Middle East Peace Process: Meetings Following the Madrid Conference* (Washington, D.C., November 8, 1996); Background paper prepared by the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Jerusalem (no date), in Hebrew. Again, because dozens of technical workshops convene with no record, this list represents only a sampling of intersessional-type activities.

Water

At the first multilateral Water group meeting in the wake of Oslo, in October 1993 in Beijing, one of the key American officials involved in the talks observed a "dramatically different attitude" among regional participants, particularly the Palestinians.[17] Because the water rights issue was subsumed by the bilateral negotiations, and Palestinian control over water resources was addressed in the DoP itself with the creation of a Palestinian Water Authority, the multilateral agenda was able to move ahead on specific regional projects. The working group's efforts also received a boost by convening its next plenary session in Muscat, Oman, in April 1994; the holding of the session in a Gulf capital was a first in the history of Arab-Israeli peacemaking. For a Gulf state with whom Israel had no diplomatic relations to receive an official Israeli delegation—headed by senior officials including Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin—was a historical and psychological breakthrough for the Israelis, and was viewed favorably back home.[18] Much was made of the working group's acceptance of an Israeli project proposal to prevent water leakage in small communities, the first Israeli proposal to gain acceptance in any of the multilateral talks.

Indeed, while substantive progress was made on the working group's central projects, which were now inching toward implementation stages, the

Oman plenary[19] represented the fundamental purpose and nature of these talks: political acceptance of Israel, accompanied by political maneuvering by the small Arab states for greater international attention and financial support. While the following overview of the four central areas for regional cooperation reveals significant promise and incentives for Arab-Israeli cooperation on technical aspects of water supply and use that could produce mutual-sum results, it is unlikely this type of cooperation could endure if it was not supported by political interests, particularly as the bilateral peace process deteriorated after the election of Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel in May 1996.

Before assessing the motivations for regional actors to engage in multilateral water cooperation as the working group evolved away from an extraregional focus toward greater regional initiative, this section reviews the main areas of its working agenda and the flagship projects of the talks that dominated all working group sessions—both plenaries and intersessionals—after Oslo. The review demonstrates that while the working group's activity slowed considerably in the aftermath of the 1996 Israeli elections, it did not come to a halt, with a variety of smaller-scale meetings taking place and several projects moving ahead as had been planned before the elections. The absence of a full working group plenary is not evidence of the collapse of multilateral water cooperation, especially because such sessions were increasingly viewed as less critical in fostering regional cooperation than smaller forums focused on particular projects.[20] Because of funding limitations, most of these projects were small (in the $2–15 million range),[21] leaving the larger regional infrastructure proposals, such as the much publicized Red-Dead and Med-Dead canal projects,[22] for the MENA summits where they could potentially attract the private sector investment. After Oslo, projects developed around the four main areas presented early in the talks: 1) the enhancement of water data availability; 2) water management practices and conservation; 3) enhancing water supplies; and 4) concepts of regional cooperation and management.[23]

The enhancement of water data availability

Water planning and management requires a reliable source of common data available to all regional parties so that a consensus can emerge about the water needs of the region when formulating potential solutions. To this end, the U.S. and EU initiated a data banks project, with its first stage focusing on establishing a Palestinian data bank (largely financed by the Nor-

wegian government) and the second phase linking this data bank to Israel and Jordan to create a common data bank for the subregion. While some of the data consisted simply of identifying the experts and papers specializing in water resource management, much of the data was of a highly technical nature designed for specialists who would be implementing projects on the ground. Because of Egypt's ongoing concern about protecting its water rights in the Nile Valley, Egypt declined to join this project and most of the other working group proposals. But the other core parties in the peace process demonstrated increasing interest and activism, and in the water data sphere established an executive action team (EXACT) at the November 1994 plenary in Athens to implement the data banks project. By the summer of 1996, the project was in the implementation stage, acting on several of the ninety recommendations suggested by the EXACT in a "Terms of Reference" document.

Water management and conservation

Several projects emerged in the water management and conservation area, which formed the focus for dozens of intersessional activities from 1993 to 1996. The Norwegians conducted a study on comparative water laws and institutions among the regional parties. The Israelis pursued their project on the rehabilitation of municipal water systems, with experts meeting at intersessional workshops (including in Israel in March 1996) to implement the project by focusing on specific sites for rehabilitation. Work on wastewater treatment also progressed as the group focused on establishing a demonstration facility in the West Bank village of Taffouh. Other projects focused on water usage for agriculture purposes (where much of the region's water supply is depleted) and domestic water consumption in the region. At the May 1996 plenary in Tunis, the United States proposed an initiative to increase public awareness on water and promote water conservation through public outreach activities, a proposal which the working group endorsed. This initiative—the Public Awareness and Water Conservation Project—led to the production of a video shown at youth-oriented events to underscore the regional importance of water.

Enhancing water supplies

Two major projects emerged that focused on enhancing regional water supplies. The first was a German study on regional water supply and demand,[24] which produced a book that accumulated reports from the three

central regional participants (Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority) in an effort to arrive at a figure that accurately reflected the water gap in usage between regional parties (an extremely sensitive issue for the Israelis)[25] and the amount of water the region needs in the coming decades to meet regional demand. The German supply and demand study represented the first phase of the project, with the group moving on to its second phase, which was the consideration of alternative means to increase the regional water supply. Four main methods were topics for various regional parties to study and present to the full working group: desalination; importing water by sea; importing water by land (water pipelines); and water management and saving (to reduce water loss from existing pipelines). The final phase of the project was the implementation of the working group's recommendations, which had in some cases begun by the summer of 1996.

The second major project in the water supply sphere, the Middle East Desalination Research Center, was established even in the wake of the 1996 Israeli election and in the aftermath of the September 1996 armed violence between the Israelis and Palestinians. The Omanis officially presented the proposal in the April 1994 plenary in Muscat, training sessions took place in Tokyo and Oman (March and April 1996 respectively), and a director was appointed to the Center in May 1996.[26] An agreement to establish the Center was signed on December 22, 1996, in Muscat by its founding members: Oman, Israel, the U.S., Japan, and Korea. The U.S., Japan, Oman, and Israel committed $3 million to the Center's operations, while the EU committed $3.5 million, providing the Center with a total of $15.5 million in pledged financial contributions, with $7 million available for its first year of operations.[27] The Omanis and other Gulf states were particularly interested in the development of cheaper desalination methods given that their subregion produces approximately half of the world's desalinated water (amounting to millions of cubic meters a year). While some Gulf states, particularly the Saudis, were made wary by their concern that the Center would compete with existing desalination plants in the Gulf (and their ongoing political concern that multilateral projects with Israel await bilateral progress), the Center was created as planned, with the expectation that other regional parties would view it more favorably in the future. Still, despite the clear functional utility of cooperation in this area, the political intentions of this project were apparent. In his statement at the signing of the establishment agreement for the Center in Muscat, the American Ambassador present explained, "It [the Center] is not designed for the benefit of any single

state or group within the Middle East region. . . . It is for the benefit for all who are committed to the cause of peace and progress in the entire region. . . . We must recommit ourselves to areas of common ground—such as the Center being established today—and build upon them for the larger goal of a region, at last, living in peace."[28]

Concepts of regional cooperation and management

While training programs guided by the European Union were conducted in the context of promoting regional cooperation and management (with 275 regional experts having participated in twelve training courses that had been completed by the May 1996 plenary in Tunisia), the central project emerging in this area was what evolved into a Declaration of Principles for Cooperation on Water-Related Matters and New and Additional Water Resources [see appendix H]. The Declaration—initialed by representatives of Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority (PA) on February 13, 1996, in Oslo—represented the first regional multilateral agreement on water-related issues.[29] Following the mandate of the Water working group, the agreement did not address water distribution or sharing issues, but rather focused on the development of new water resources. Building on work from other sectors of the Water group, the Declaration included sections related to coordination among water institutions and national legislation pertaining to water, as well as proposed areas for water cooperation discussed previously in numerous plenary and intersessional workshops. Given the importance of Syria and Lebanon for progress in such coordination, the regional parties called on these states to join the Declaration. Again Egypt, concerned that such a document would set a precedent for water sharing in the Nile, declined to join. Parts of the Declaration were implemented with the Waternet Project, intended to develop a common electronic water information system and a research center for regional cooperation on water-related matters (scheduled to begin operations in Amman, Jordan, in 2000).

Environment

Despite its relatively active agenda before the Oslo Accord, the Environment group was not immune to political sensitivities and obstacles to moving working group projects forward toward implementation. While the parties agreed at its first meeting after Oslo in Cairo (November 1993) to focus on implementing the variety of projects emerging on its agenda, a dispute led

by Egypt arose concerning Israeli nuclear waste. Unlike in the ACRS case, this dispute was ultimately resolved a year later when nuclear waste was dropped from the agenda in favor of a compromise between the Egyptians and Israelis to discuss the issue within the context of a broader subgroup focused on hazardous materials, including chemical and toxic waste.[30] But the dispute revealed that even in "easy" issue areas like the environment, political concerns can both facilitate and impede cooperative processes.

The most visible development of the working group was the plenary session in Manama, Bahrain, in late October 1994.[31] While other multilateral working groups had already met in the Gulf region (Water met in Oman and ACRS met in Qatar the previous spring), this session facilitated the Environment group's momentum in moving its projects from their conceptual to implementation stages. The high-level Israeli representation (including the attendance of Israeli Environment Minister Yossi Sarid)[32] revealed political motivations in capitalizing on the conference to further political ties and normalization between Israel and the Gulf states. The smaller Gulf states also held a political interest in participating in these talks—and even in hosting working group sessions in their capitals—because of the leverage it gave them vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia and the international attention such forums promised.

While the bilateral negotiations always influenced the pace and atmosphere of the Environment group, regional commitment to seeing this process go forward stemmed from forces unrelated to the bilateral peace process. Prime Minister Netanyahu's election in Israel negatively impacted all multilateral working groups, but technical sessions continued even after the Israeli election despite the failure of the working group to meet in a full plenary session originally scheduled for Valencia, Spain, in October and then December 1996.[33] Shortly after the Israeli elections an intersessional meeting took place in Muscat on June 26–27, 1996, primarily to discuss implementation of the Bahrain Environmental Code of Conduct, including the creation of a regional environmental center, which the parties agreed would be established in Amman, Jordan.[34] The intersessional also considered an Egyptian proposal to establish a Coordinating Regional Center for Oil Spill Combating as part of the group's larger oil spill contingency planning project.[35] And despite Egyptian concern about convening a technical intersessional meeting in December 1996 because of slow movement on the Israeli-Palestinian track (the agreement for Israeli redeployment in Hebron had not yet been signed), the Jordanians went forward with the

meeting as planned, which not surprisingly took place in Amman and was considering the proposal for the regional environmental center which was expected to be established in Jordan. But increasingly, the deterioration of the Israeli-Palestinian track slowed the working group's activities, as did the lack of sufficient funding, which pushed many of the larger regional schemes into the agenda of the MENA economic summits which sought private rather than public sector funds (see chapter 5 for more details on the MENA summits).

But again, the problems emerging in the working group were not unlike those that emerged in the other multilateral talks in that they had less to do with substantive difference in the technicalities of the issue area (which were few in the Environment case) than with political competition among the Arab parties and ongoing concerns among larger Arab parties (particularly Egypt) about Israel's role in an evolving region. Before expanding on the forces facilitating and impeding cooperation in this issue area, this section will conclude with a brief review of the central projects that emerged from the working group and their development after Oslo.

Environmental cooperation in the Gulf of Aqaba/Eilat

The Gulf of Aqaba was targeted as a fruitful area for environmental cooperation because the subregion includes key peace process parties (Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia) who all share a stake in promoting the area for tourism and shipping while maintaining its renowned coral reefs and marine ecology.[36] Given the high volume of industrial activity in the Aqaba/Eilat region (Aqaba is Jordan's only sea outlet) and the nature of the materials handled in the area (gasoline, phosphates, and other chemicals), the risk of an environmental catastrophe that would damage both the marine ecology and the tourism industry is significant.[37]

At the November 1993 plenary in Cairo, the working group supported a proposal for marine disaster and emergency preparedness and agreed to establish joint Israeli-Jordanian-Egyptian[38] emergency response facilities in the northern half of the Gulf of Aqaba to address common threats like oil spills.[39] The European Union offered funding for the project[40] and was later joined by the Japanese government in financing the facilities.[41] According to a State Department official involved in the working group, the total budget for the oil spill centers was approximately $8–9 million.[42] In March 1995, Israel hosted an intersessional meeting in Eilat focused on the technical aspects of the oil spill contingency project, including discussions of the type of

equipment required and personnel training.[43] Another intersessional focusing on other environmental projects and economic development in the Aqaba Gulf convened in Amman in April 1995.[44] The oil spill project led to the creation by the June 1995 plenary in Amman of regional centers equipped to combat oil spills of up to 200 tons and coordinate responses for accidents where oil spreads across national borders. The parties agreed after the plenary to send joint teams from Israel, Egypt, and Jordan to Norway for intensive training as part of the implementation of the project.[45] By the summer of 1996, the centers were operational, and had already been put to the test with an actual oil spill in the Aqaba region in September 1995 which generated a coordinated regional response based on the working group's plans.[46] A similar cooperative project among Israel, Egypt, and Cyprus was established under the umbrella of the Mediterranean Action Plan (Med Plan) in June 1995 to combat pollution and oil spills in the eastern Mediterranean, termed the Agreement on the Subregional Contingency Plan for Preparedness and Responses to Major Marine Pollution Incidents in the Mediterranean.[47]

Desertification

In the November 1993 plenary, the World Bank proposed a project to control natural resource degradation in arid and semiarid areas of the Middle East, and Japan announced that it would contribute $530,000 to the proposal.[48] At the April 1994 working group meeting in The Hague, an operational program for the project was adopted with the participation of the Israelis, Egyptians, Tunisians, Palestinians, and Jordanians. The project included the establishment of grazing lands, wildlife, forestation and orchards planting, vegetation for arid regions, and the purification of brackish water. The implementation of the plan would take place through five regional centers which would each address a different aspect of the desertification program: Egypt (vegetation development for desert conditions); Tunisia (the use of brackish and waste water for irrigation); Jordan (livestock and grazing); Israel (forestation and exploitation of runoff water sources); and the Palestinians (professional training for all the above mentioned areas). According to an Israeli participant in the working group, the purpose of the regional centers was to "strive to create a network for the exchange of information, the transfer of technology, and the establishment of pioneer projects by any of the parties."[49] The total budget for the centers was estimated at $12 million.[50]

The Bahrain Environmental Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct project was distinct from other working group proposals focused on specific, concrete projects that could be implemented quickly on the ground, and in this sense resembled the Declaration of Water Principles in the Water working group. Both of these documents attempted to define general principles to govern regional cooperation, and called for the establishment of regional institutions to promote cooperative Arab-Israeli relations and forums for long-term development of the region. Because the Code of Conduct was not a project-oriented proposal, it did not require immediate funding from international donors to materialize, and thus became an increasingly important focus for the working group as it became clear that public sector funding would not be readily available for many of the projects originally envisioned. Creating institutions is a cheap way to facilitate cooperation and an easy way to satisfy political interests of various participants who would receive prestige and potential international investment by hosting the institution. After Oslo, all the multilateral working groups increasingly turned toward an institution-building focus, and the so-called project-oriented groups like Water and the Environment were no exception.

The idea for an environmental code of conduct emerged well before Oslo, with the Japanese gavelholder presenting the project at the first working group meeting in Tokyo in 1992. A group of "wise men" (or regional environmentalists from the major participants), also known as the Cairo Consultative Group, was established to negotiate and draft the code. The group met twice and prepared a document for the larger working group, although Japanese officials prepared the first draft based on comments from regional parties at the first meeting.[51] The most active participants were the Egyptians, Israelis, Palestinians, Jordanians, Bahrainis, and Americans.[52] Because the parties agreed the code would be morally rather than legally binding, the group was more easily able to achieve a consensus in favor of the document. The final code [see appendix I] was agreed to at the October plenary in Bahrain (hence its name, which was very important to the Bahrainis who were eager that the code be agreed to at this particular meeting) with forty-one delegations in attendance.[53] The code calls for cooperation in two main areas: joint action in five specific areas of environmental concern (water, marine and coastal environment, air, waste management, and desertification) and a regional framework for environmental cooperation. While the initial purpose of the document was simply to demonstrate that

regional parties could agree on principles related to issues of common concern, the participants were less clear on how to move the code from abstract language into specific projects that could be implemented on the ground in practical ways.

Explaining the Record: The Construction of Technical Cooperation

What drove Arab-Israeli multilateral cooperation on the water and environment issue areas after Oslo, even in the wake of bilateral crises in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations? While extraregional power via leadership was essential for establishing such cooperation, regional support for the processes largely explains why such cooperation continued and evolved the way it did. Although it is tempting to assume this support on the basis of contractual approaches to cooperation, we must search for the source of regional support for cooperation based on political and ideational forces, which can only be understood upon examination of the process of interaction which occurred in these working groups. The groups achieved relative success in reaching common understandings because the regional parties saw the value of multilateral cooperation both for solving substantive regional problems and for serving broader political interests. Despite a number of impediments, including several outlined in chapter 1, a number of mechanisms facilitated progress in these groups. Most significant among these mechanisms were the increased interactions among regional participants—including the participation of technical experts—which fostered common understandings about the nature of these regional problems and the value of multilateral cooperation in these issue areas for furthering other regional objectives, such as the enhancement of regional status.

Growing Support for "Technical" Cooperation

The demand to solve functional problems of common concern like water scarcity and environmental degradation does not necessarily lead to unproblematic positions among regional parties to engage in cooperative forums—particularly an unprecedented and ambiguous multilateral process—that address these issues in efficient ways. Nor do epistemic communities of re-

gional scientific experts simply "reveal" the parties' need for regional cooperation based on consensual knowledge about effective methods to solve these problems, a consensus that in any case would be questioned even among a self-selected scientific community.[54] Rather, political elites make decisions about whether to engage in functional cooperation and the political value of such cooperation.

Indeed, both working groups faced impediments to successful cooperation despite their more "technical" nature. Early politicization of the issues, influenced by the bilateral peace process, often slowed these groups' ability to identify the problems to be addressed and hindered them from reaching common understandings about the nature and utility of cooperating in these areas. For example, the issue of water rights complicated the early sessions of the Water group, since regional parties still defined the issue in distributive rather than integrative terms. Moreover, minimal regional interaction occurred in both groups as extraregional actors dominated the early seminar-style meetings. Other high profile and politically charged issues, like Israeli nuclear waste, also presented some obstacles in the Environment group despite the relatively positive-sum nature of this issue area. Moreover, the Water group was never able to redefine the water problem in ways that did not threaten Egypt's concern over its control of the Nile River, leading Egypt to refrain from some major working group projects. Progress in both groups was also sensitive to negative domestic publicity in the Arab world because of concerns that normalization await resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Still, despite these impediments, both working groups made considerable progress because regional parties developed support for the process.

Some of this support had very little, if anything, to do with the technical knowledge of the working groups or the substantive problems on their agenda. The nature of regional support for the process at times arose from political and ideational concerns about a nation's role in an evolving regional environment and maximizing one's status and prestige vis-à-vis other regional parties. Oman and Bahrain, for example, have substantive reasons to engage in technical cooperation with Israel in areas where Israeli expertise and Western financial assistance can solve problems like desalination and desertification. But these functional interests in cooperation cannot sufficiently explain these small states' persistent support for multilateral cooperation (even in the face of serious political crises) when they have other alternatives for dealing with these functional problems (e.g., through existing forums that do not include Israel, such as national desalination centers or

cooperation with the European Union) that would not pose the same political risks as cooperating with Israel before the Israeli-Palestinian dispute has been resolved. These small states were favorable toward such functional cooperation because it also served political interests by giving them more leverage and attention relative to Saudi Arabia, its larger Gulf neighbor and the dominant force within the GCC. Hosting plenary sessions and regional centers also provided legitimacy and could attract funding from international donors. Jordan held similar political interests vis-à-vis Egypt, as demonstrated by the various who-will-host-what debates across all multilateral working groups.

Several officials involved in both the Water and Environment working groups have observed that while cooperation within these project-oriented groups may appear easier from the outside, the types of impediments that emerge in bringing projects from conceptual to operational stages (i.e., to actually solving the problems the groups were in theory supposed to address) were not significantly different from those faced by other working groups.[55] Indeed, the common complaint that both of these project-oriented groups moved away from a project mandate toward more abstract institution-building is revealing, and not just the result of the fact that funding was wanting across the board. Just as in the case of the other working groups, new regional institutions served political interests distinct from the substantive issues on the working agenda. All working groups addressed similar questions, which cut across the uniqueness of the issue area: Where is this new institution going to be? Who is going to run it? What is the mandate and whom does it benefit? These types of questions are difficult problems but they are not Arab-Israeli problems. They are not issues of recognition and existence, which the initial creation of the working groups was intended to address based on American conceptualizations about normalizing Israel into the region.

These problems are related to issues of prestige and influence in a region no longer defined by U.S.-Soviet rivalry where legitimacy derived in great measure from the outside patron. Common understandings about the value of these working groups was based in part on a growing comprehension of the role such a multilateral process could play at the political level. Regional parties developed support for the *process* of multilateral cooperation as much as, if not more than, a desire to solve the substansive problems on the agenda.

That said, increased interactions among regional participants and the proliferation of intersessional activities involving technical experts (approx-

imately 400 water professionals have participated in multilateral activities) fostered common understandings about the nature of these regional problems and their potential solutions. Interactions within the multilateral process allowed regional participants to redefine these issue areas as mutual-sum rather than zero-sum problems. For example, the question of how to divide water resources became a bilateral problem as regional participants began to focus on how to improve the overall supply of water to the region. Moreover, projects like the Declaration of Principles in the Water group and the Bahrain Environmental Code of Conduct in the Environment group reflected the growing consensus among Arabs and Israelis about the nature of these problems and allowed the parties to tackle them, using a technical vernacular, outside the politically charged context of the bilateral track. Projects like the regional water supply and demand study also sought to develop consensual understandings among regional participants about the nature and scope of the water problem in a depoliticized manner. The multilateral process allowed Israel to become a partner in addressing these common problems and produced new policy options—such as Arab-Israeli institutions—that would have been unthinkable before Madrid. It seems clear that deduced assumptions about self-interest among unitary actors acting in a politically neutral environment could not lead us to understand the basis for regional support for pursuing such cooperation without examining the process of multilateral cooperation.

Alternative Explanations

The value of a process framework, centered on how regional parties viewed these two working groups, is underscored by the weaknesses of alternative explanations which focus on external actors or domestic politics. For example, once both groups had been established and had defined working agendas, extraregional leadership and involvement in the process, once a critical component, became secondary. Increasingly, the role of the extraregional parties was that of a facilitator and financial donor for operational projects. Regional parties participated more actively in the process after Oslo, and even sponsored plenary sessions and supported new regional initiatives, as illustrated by the more visible role of Oman and Bahrain in the Water and Environment groups respectively. The core peace process parties (Israel, Jordan, Egypt, and the PA) often initiated and promoted many of the

working groups' activities, with the notable exception of Egypt's absence from several water projects because of ongoing sensitivity over their water rights to the Nile.

Given that the central extraregional's (the U.S.) political objectives had been met with the establishment of these groups and their positive influence on the bilateral peace treaties and agreements between Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians, the external parties could have been content with allowing bilateral and trilateral arrangements to subsume the multilateral's agenda. Moreover, none of the extraregional participants, including the United States, could have forced the regional parties to continue multilateral cooperation in the face of bilateral crises because, as the working groups moved toward the implementation of practical projects, voluntary regional participation in the projects was essential. Moreover, just as in the case of the other multilateral groups, none of the issues under discussion was of such fundamental importance that the regional parties could not have afforded to forego such cooperation if the risk in engaging in such cooperation became politically unacceptable.

Likewise, domestic forces in the region do not appear to have been a critical factor in shaping the development of multilateral cooperation, and again, over time they should have worked against such cooperation as the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations faced major crises beginning with the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995. True, as working group sessions moved to the region, particularly to the Gulf, the Israeli public positively responded to this recognition of Israel by the larger Arab world. But the public was far more interested in concrete commitments, through either bilateral peace treaties or normalization at the bilateral level (with individual Gulf states), than with regional processes about which they knew little. And once widespread terrorism began in the aftermath of the Rabin assassination, the public again focused on the fate of the bilateral tracks, with normalization moving onto the back burner.

As for the Arab public, these working groups were not producing major dividends that the average citizen could see on the ground (after all, most of the projects were highly technical, involved small levels of funding, and were slow to move toward implementation). And when the political environment deteriorated after the 1996 Israeli elections, Arab political elites were not inclined to promote normalization with Israel, and the Palestinians in particular were pressing for boycotts of the multilateral working groups until the political climate improved.[56] In sum, domestic forces were at best

neutral, and at worst hindrances (but not barriers) to proceeding with Arab-Israeli multilateral cooperation in both issue areas.

Summary

Because the Water and Environment issue areas involve substantive interdependencies between Arabs and Israelis and are often considered the least contentious along the continuum of cooperation case studies, these groups should present the "easy" cases for multilateral cooperation. If Arab-Israeli multilateral cooperation were to result in successful outcomes at all, it should be in these areas. After all, regional interests in avoiding common environmental disasters and in increasing a much-needed scarce resource were more apparent than was the case with either ACRS or REDWG, where extra-regional actors consciously promoted the notion that regional cooperation in these issues was in every player's self-interest. And yet, while both the Water and Environment working groups made considerable progress and were able, as in the REDWG case, to sustain cooperation during periods of significant setbacks in the Palestinian track, these groups also faced problems that often slowed and limited the progress that could be made. While technical experts played a critical role in both groups and increasingly dominated the workshops and intersessional activities after Oslo (and in some cases even before), the political decision-makers shaped and constrained the groups' development, not the reverse.

Consequently, to explain the development of both these working groups, an understanding of regional views of the process is critical. However, these views cannot be assumed based on the functional need of the parties to cooperate on these technical issues to most efficiently solve common problems. Rather, regional commitment to technical cooperation had to be *developed*. The source of this commitment to cooperation was often political, and was based on shared beliefs about the value of the multilateral process in enhancing various players' role in the evolving regional system, and the extent to which they perceived multilateral cooperation (with Israel included) as a legitimate and beneficial enterprise from this perspective.

Thus, these cases not only raise questions about the so-called technical-political distinction, but they also suggest that distinctions among issue areas may be overplayed because the prospects for cooperation are often unrelated to the substantive issues under discussion. That said, the projects that

emerged under the working agendas of both groups—some of which even reached implementation stages—were increasingly viewed as beneficial to all players in the region, allowing regional parties to view cooperation as a mutual-sum exercise rather than a source for political division. But we should also recognize the reality of cooperation even in the "easy" areas. Technical cooperation can be as political as any other type of cooperation. These working groups had to make similar efforts to define political problems as technical ones, and were able to do so because they ultimately perceived these cooperative processes as substantively and politically useful.