

# BLUE PEACE

## IN THE MIDDLE EAST

### LESSONS LEARNT





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*Strategic Oversight Group*

**With support from**  
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It is always helpful to pause from time to time on any path and decipher the lessons learnt. Such an exercise can help the journey in the future. It can also help other travellers on the same path. We feel that this is a moment when we should pause to review the progress of the Blue Peace initiative and draw lessons learnt thus far.

The Blue Peace concept was conceived by Strategic Foresight Group in a project supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Political Directorate of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and presented in the form of a report published in February 2011.

The SDC and FDFA extended financial, diplomatic and intellectual cooperation to begin implementation of the Blue Peace recommendations made in the same report. In particular, they supported exploring the implementation of the first recommendation to establish the Cooperation Council for the Sustainable Management of Water Resources in the Middle East and to strengthen and expand the Blue Peace Community as an interim strategy until political conditions were conducive for the establishment of the Cooperation Council. Their support included active participation of FDFA officials and Swiss diplomats in meetings and consultations. The Government of Switzerland also offered neutral venues as a meeting place for parties involved in a difficult relationship. The cooperation provided by the Government of Switzerland and its agencies and departments has been comprehensive.

In particular, State Secretary of the FDFA, Director General of SDC, Deputy Director General of SDC and Members of Parliament of Switzerland have empowered the Blue Peace process with their personal commitment and strategic input.

Sida has provided very valuable cooperation to create decision making tools and introduce innovation into the Blue Peace process. Sida has supported SFG to begin an exchange of experience between the policy makers and media leaders in the Middle East and representatives of successful cooperation institutions in Africa, Asia and Europe. This exercise provides vital knowledge and inspiration to generate political will in favour of cooperation.

While the Governments of Switzerland and Sweden have provided practical, diplomatic and intellectual support to the Blue Peace process, the House of Lords of the British Parliament has extended political support. With leadership provided by The Rt. Hon. Lord Alderdice, former convenor of the Liberal Democratic Parliamentary Party in the House of Lords, the House has been a neutral venue for several meetings of stakeholders from the Middle East. The House of Lords hosted a dedicated floor debate on the Blue Peace. Ministers dealing with foreign affairs and development issues have participated in these debates, meetings and bilateral consultations with SFG. Similarly, the Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflicts at the Harris Manchester College, Oxford University, led by Lord Alderdice, has been most helpful in providing venue and facilitation.

The European Parliament has also hosted discussion on the Blue Peace process. The discussions in the British and European Parliaments have contributed significantly to building international support for the Blue Peace process.

While international support has been critical, the Blue Peace process is essentially a result of the initiative and commitment shown by several institutions and eminent individuals in the Middle East.

HRH Prince Hassan of Jordan leads the Blue Peace process. He is the Chairman of the High Level Forum and was for some time Chair of the UN Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation. He has led the process from the front from its initial phase providing vision, strategic and intellectual direction, moral leadership and a strong personal commitment. His emphasis on long term sustainability overriding short term expediency and his ability to blend idealism with pragmatism have been crucial for Blue Peace.

HRH Princess Sumaya, President of Royal Scientific Society of Jordan, must be also acknowledged for her personal commitment, dynamic and inspiring leadership and her enthusiastic support in innumerable ways.

HRH Prince Hassan has been supported by eminent leaders with experience of serving respective national governments in the endeavour of advancing the Blue Peace framework. These include late Dr Mohamed Chatah, former Finance Minister of Lebanon; Dr Yasar Yakis, former Foreign Minister of Turkey; Dr Bakhtiar Amin, former Human Rights Minister of Iraq; Mr Abdulsattar Majid, Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources, Kurdistan Regional Government. Several Members of Parliament, particularly Mr Saban Disli of Turkey, Dr Bassem Shabb and Dr Mohammad Kabbani of Lebanon, Ms Safia Al Suhail of Iraq and Mr Selim Batayneh of Jordan, have been at the core of the Blue Peace.

The participation of representatives of Governments, particularly ministries and authorities dealing with foreign affairs, national security, water and environment, have been most critical to make the Blue Peace framework relevant.

Important scientific institutions including the Royal Scientific Society of Jordan, Okan and MEF Universities in Istanbul, Litani Water Authority of Lebanon, and other academic institutions have provided intellectual underpinning of the process. The Blue Peace Media Network is an important part of the Blue Peace process.

In the ultimate analysis, Blue Peace is a process of over 200 champions of the cause whose courage, commitment and catalytic capacity gives millions of people in the Middle East the means to transform the present context of despair into a reality of hope.

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**PART 1**

**LESSONS LEARNT**



# Peace is Possible

History has shown that peace is possible in the Middle East. As recently as 2010, Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon established the “Close Neighbors Economic and Trade Association Council” (CNETAC) to create a free-trade and visa free area. The Council was based on the already existing bilateral agreements on free trade and visa exemption. The existence of such bilateral arrangements and practices provided a firm foundation to launch enhanced forms of cooperation on issues that were of interest to the parties. While the Council functioned only till 2011, there is much to learn from this impressive feat accomplished by the countries in the region to form a mechanism which attempted an integration arrangement similar to the EU. Most importantly, during this period, the countries were able to set aside their apprehensions regarding sensitive issues

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such as state security and were able to cooperate. Visa exemption, normally considered as a highly sensitive matter by most nations was not only included in the 2010 agreement, but was implemented through bilateral arrangements even earlier.

The Council agreed to have ministers in charge of issues such as energy, agriculture, health, internal affairs, water and environment, participate in the Council when required. Anticipating that cooperation would evolve to other areas of mutual interest, the countries also agreed to provide for a change in composition of the Council. This shows that apart from economic integration, the countries were looking at integration and co-operation in a holistic manner, which extended beyond the confines of trade and commerce and also beyond the perceptions that restricted co-operation on sensitive matters.

As the process of economic cooperation gathered momentum in the second half of 2010, many politicians and scholars from the Middle East said that it was necessary to deepen the process. They thought that interaction in trade and industry could be turned on and off in response to political environment of the day. However, cooperation in core sectors can withstand political pressures. Just as coal and steel were the core sectors of Europe in the 1950s, water and environment are core sectors in the Middle East in the 21st Century. Therefore, many opinion makers suggested that the process of peace and cooperation should be expanded with the inclusion of Iraq as one more country and water as one more sector.

In this context, they thought that revisiting the formation of the EU would be helpful. The EU as it exists today is the result of the efforts of six governments in 1952 to establish a body that would help to achieve stability in the region. The initial product was the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) launched as a free trade and visa-free plan for charter members. The ECSC operated above and beyond the control of its national governments. In other words countries were able to relinquish certain amount of control and cooperate for the greater good. Similarly, the 2010 agreement in the Middle East and the formation of the Council were the first and major steps in this direction; without a doubt it was the ECSC of the Middle East. Hence it was suggested that it would not be very difficult for the countries to initiate a similar process for water as well. In fact, many leaders in the Middle East publically began to talk about the Middle East Union.

Across the world there are examples that peace can be brought about through cooperation over trans-boundary rivers. In the early 1960s, Senegal and Guinea had serious differences regarding the legacy of colonialism, approach towards African Union, and other matters. However in 1963, President Senghor of Senegal went to Conakry in Guinea to present the idea of the joint development of the Senegal River by Guinea, Mali, Mauretania and Senegal. It took political courage by one leader to push the agenda of trans-boundary water cooperation that was taking into consideration the interest of all the riparian countries. Similarly today, if one head of state from the Middle East makes a bold visit to neighbouring countries specifically to promote joint management of water resources; it should be possible to initiate a process of cooperation. Despite all the highs and lows experienced by the Middle East since 2010, with some vision and courage, actions of a statesman can prove that peace is possible even amidst the chaos that is currently dominating the region.

If any leader decides to take the first bold step, he will find that there is a community supporting regional water cooperation ready to welcome him across the region. Since 2012, a community supporting regional water cooperation has come into existence and is growing at a fast pace. The Blue Peace Community, as it is known, comprises of a few hundred policy makers and opinion makers from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Israel and Palestine including ministers, government officials, legislators and media leaders. The Community has been interacting through meetings, conferences, media programmes and other channels, and proposing various ideas for fostering regional water cooperation. Many of the people who form the Blue Peace Community are not water experts. In fact they had nothing to do with water issues before they became engaged in the process. The Community has now created a soft infrastructure of dialogue which will be extremely useful for any political leader who decides to take a lead in fostering cooperation, especially on water. The existence of such a vibrant community supporting water cooperation in an environment of violent strife is by itself evidence of the fact that peace is possible.



# Involve Me and I Learn

“Tell me and I forget, teach me  
and I may remember, involve me  
and I learn.”

**Benjamin Franklin**

A key learning from Strategic Foresight Group (SFG) experiences, working in the Middle East region, has been the tremendous response we have received through direct stakeholder involvement. Our programmes have gained immensely from the first-hand experience and knowledge of the various stakeholders in the region.

Strategic Foresight Group does not tell catalysts in the region what to do to promote cooperation and peace. It does not even intend to teach them. It only creates an enabling environment for engagement of the relevant stakeholders so that they can draw their own lessons and learn on their own. The role of Strategic Foresight Group is that of a facilitator of the Blue Peace initiative. The ownership, commitment and initiative are with the key opinion makers in the region.

Since the introduction of the Blue Peace framework through the SFG report “The Blue Peace: Rethinking Middle East Water” in 2011, key regional players have been involved, through several engines for cooperation including mainstream political engagement, bilateral meetings, learning missions and the formation of a Blue Peace Media network. In particular, the High Level Forum, which has expanded from the High Level Group, is an example of involvement of opinion makers in the Middle East.

SFG’s work on Blue Peace has initiated a process to increase the political capital invested in the water issue and bring water to the forefront of the global peace and security agenda. Conventionally, water experts and water ministry officials have addressed the water issue. The Blue Peace process has succeeded in engaging high level political leaders including ministers, legislators and heads of mainstream media organisations.

Visionary leaders of the Middle East have taken gradual, but carefully structured steps to create Cooperation Community for the sustainable management of water resource, popularly known as ‘the Blue Peace community’. The first step was the establishment of a High Level Group during a meeting in Amman in April 2012. Chaired by HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal, with Mr. Yasar Yakis, former Foreign Minister of Turkey, and the late Dr. Mohammad Chatah, former Finance Minister of Lebanon, the mission of the group was to explore and harness political will at the highest levels to transform water into an

instrument of cooperation between Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey. The High Level Group led several meetings of politicians, government officials, diplomats, media leaders and experts.

The High Level Group led to the establishment of the High Level Forum. The popularity of the High Level Forum meetings and actions between formal meetings has demonstrated that the Blue Peace Community of Practise is growing in the Middle East. Beginning with a handful of experts committed to the issue in 2010, the Blue Peace Community has now expanded to include more than 200 policy makers, serving and former cabinet ministers, senior government officials, Members of Parliament, media leaders, scientists and experts. The sheer presence of decision makers and opinion makers in the High Level Forum meetings, including most noticeably one in Geneva in October 2015, in an increasing number is a testament to the growing commitment of mainstream policy practitioners and catalysts to the Blue Peace principles.

In a short span of time, the High Level Forum has succeeded in building the tempo required to instigate action, such as reaching consensus on the “Principles of Cooperation”. At the High Level Forum in Istanbul in 2014, policy makers, Members of Parliament, serving and former Ministers, media leaders, academics and water experts from across the Middle East, discussed and agreed upon seven Principles of Cooperation that are to support the work of the Blue Peace Community and processes to establish a Cooperation Council.

## Seven Principles of Cooperation

1. Water resources should be accepted as a common and shared responsibility.
2. Confidence Building Measures such as data and technology exchange and the development of common methodology should be supported.
3. Benefit sharing approach should be promoted through cooperation to achieve water, food and energy security.
4. Riparian countries and communities should cooperate to manage climate risk.
5. Each country should manage water resources efficiently.
6. Water should not be used as an instrument of war and water resources should be protected from terrorist activities and violent actions.
7. Sustainable water management should particularly address the situation of vulnerable communities.

# Time and Tide Wait for None

While the Blue Peace community has expanded, it is important to bear in mind that slow response to specific policy ideas has led to several missed opportunities. This is true of initiatives of the Blue Peace community. It is equally true of major policy initiatives by governments in the Middle East. It is therefore imperative to emphasize the importance of time.

The prospects for solutions to water problems get weaker every year due to rapidly dwindling water resources. These resources are extremely susceptible to demand increases that come naturally with a rapidly increasing population, damage from over-pumping, pollution and the effects of climate change. Every year we lose precious resources and golden opportunities, and with a diminishing availability of freshwater and growing conflicting interests, water cooperation is up against a battle with time. Ever since the 1980s, when the Turkish President introduced the concept of a peace pipeline until recently when Iraq and Turkey agreed to the Blue Peace community proposal for calibration of data, time and tide have bypassed valuable opportunities.



## Turgut Ozal's Original Peace Plan and Manavgat River Supply Project

A golden opportunity was missed 20 years ago, when a plan proposed by the late Turkish President Turgut Ozal offering Turkish national water to the rest of the region was rejected. In the late 1980s, a surplus of 16 BCM was available in the Turkish Seyhan-Ceyhan basin; today that same amount is no longer available. The water in this region has dwindled as Turkey has several development projects and national concerns which have arisen over the years and it is currently being wooed by requests for freshwater from other Mediterranean and North African countries. This aborted plan stands out among the example of missed opportunities.

In the more recent years, a proposal to export water from Manavgat River to Israel has been discussed. The Manavgat River, located in southern Turkey originates in the Western Taurus Mountains and empties into the Gulf of Antalya. The river has a mean annual discharge of 4.7 BCM, of which 1.8 BCM are judged to be available for export. The existing plants are equipped to deal with only about 180 MCM of this water. The river is one of several situated in the southern province of Antalya and it has been estimated that even if the entire amount of 1.8 BCM were exported, it would not drastically affect the supply to the population in the future.

The Manavgat River Water Supply Project began in 1992 and was completed in 1997 with a total cost of \$150 million. The project is equipped to provide up to 250,000 cubic metres of purified water and another 250,000 cubic metres of un-purified water daily. Separate pipelines and receiving stations have also been built from the river to the coast, where the water can then be loaded onto tankers, ready for export. Export of the Manavgat water to Northern Cyprus began in 1999, and in 2000 talks were held with Jordan, as well as Israel for the water. In January 2004, an agreement, in principle, was signed after more than two years of negotiations for Israel to purchase 50 MCM of water annually for 20 years from the Manavgat River. Special tankers were commissioned to be built to transport the drinking water from Manavgat to Ashkelon on Israel's coast, a distance of 325 nautical miles, and from the port the water would be carried to the existing National Water Carrier. In March 2004, further steps were taken to implement the agreement and Ankara spent several millions for water treatment facilities, and more storage along the Manavgat. But in all the meetings, the cost of

water and cost of transportation were never finalized and proved to be one of the key impediments to the project.

An alternative option to the tankers could also be to build an underwater pipeline across the Mediterranean Sea to Israel. With an average depth of 1500 metres, a low lying pipeline could be constructed near the sea bed. This has been done before in the Black Sea, where the current pipe carrying oil was laid at a depth of 2100 metres. Experts vary in their estimates of the cost of water from Turkey, which ranges from \$0.80 - \$1 per cubic metre, which is more expensive than the water from desalination (approximately \$0.50 - \$0.55 per cubic metre, which could reduce further due to recent gas discoveries in the Mediterranean Sea, off the coast of Israel). It is important to note here that this will be the cost to Israel, and not to the consumer, which could be more depending on a number of factors. It has also been argued, mainly by Israeli proponents of the desalination option, that the 50 MCM will only serve 3 per cent of Israel's water consumption. But a March 2010 Knesset Special Committee Report stated that the environmental damages of purchasing Turkish water would be less than the environmental damages involved with sea water desalination.

The export capacity of the Manavgat facility is only 180 MCM annually, of which some water is already being sent to Northern Cyprus. Other countries such as Libya, Malta and Greek Cyprus have also expressed an interest in purchasing this water for a sustained period of time. The possibility that an agreement between Turkey and another interested party will be reached in the near future should not be discounted. Such an agreement would effectively mean that in the future if Israel or Jordan needs the water, it could no longer be available.

Meanwhile, a number of events beginning with Israel's invasion of Gaza in the winter of 2008, have caused deterioration of bilateral relations between Israel and Turkey. Since 2012, Turkey's foreign policy has changed substantially in which good relations with Israel do not have much space. Currently, Turkey does not even have an ambassador in Israel and there are no signs of communication or cooperation between the two countries. Similarly, Israeli elite no longer trust Turkey as a friend. The opportunity of exporting water of Manavgat seems to have been lost in the tide of events.

## Lake Kinneret (Tiberias)

Syria lost control of the Golan Heights to Israel during the 1967 war. As a result Israel gained control of the Banias River and consequently secured control of 50 per cent of the Jordan River's upstream flow. Before this, the Dan River was the only source of the River Jordan that was located wholly within Israeli territory. In a 1999-2000 peace deal, brokered by the US and held in West Virginia-USA, Syria agreed to normalize relations with Israel and recognize its statehood in return for an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. While Syria insisted on the 1967 pre-war borders, Israel insisted on the 1948 borders. The main issue of contention was access to Lake Kinneret (Tiberias). In May 2008, Israel and Syria announced that they were conducting indirect talks or 'proximity talks' with Turkey as mediator and this included potential options over the Golan Heights. But talks broke down after the Gaza War broke out in 2008-2009 and have not been able to resume since. In December 2009 the Syrian Foreign Minister indicated interest in reviving the talks but the souring of relations between Israel and Turkey in the following month foreclosed the option of Turkey facilitating an agreement on Tiberias (Kinneret) lake between Israel and Syria.

In any case, the resumption of talks between Syria and Israel on water cooperation to include declaration of Lake Kinneret (Tiberias) seem next to impossible now because of the collapse of state in Syria. In July 2014, the government of Syria had estimated that 35% of all water treatment plants in the country had been damaged due to war. In Deir ez Zor, large parts of which are currently under the siege of ISIS, water pumping dropped by 90% due to war and resultant serious damage to water pumps. Both rebels as well as government forces are responsible for the destruction of water infrastructure during the Syrian civil war.

In August 2014, when government forces conducted air strikes on ISIS positions in the eastern Syrian city of Rakka, one of the air strikes ended up hitting the city water plant and cut off water supplies to the locals. Whether the government forces intended to hit the water plant is not clear, but the damage was done. At the same time in western Syria, water treatment plants on the Orontes River were attacked and damaged by unknown forces. Water pipelines from Orontes to Hama and Homs, which are largely regime-controlled, were damaged severely, forcing both cities to go without water for weeks.

Militant groups in Syria have not spared even the water supplies reserved for refugees and IDPs. In September 2014, after a drought and a typhoid outbreak in the summer, conflict between government forces and militant groups destroyed the pipelines supplying water to Yarmouk refugee camp in south-western Syria. Since then, the 18,000 residents have been forced to deal with additional health and sanitation challenges.

In August 2015, four rockets struck Israeli controlled Golan heights which resulted in Israeli retaliation on Syria. Perhaps if Israel and Syria would have co-operated in time on Lake Kinneret, parties involved would have been more circumspect about launching air strikes on an area of co-operation.

## Friendship Dam

Another dramatic case of a “too good but too late” initiative was the announcement by Syria and Turkey to build the Friendship Dam on the Orontes (Asi) River in Hatay province. Since the 1940s Syria has claimed title to the area which is under Turkish domination. Due to the political dispute, cooperation over Orontes Rivers which flows in the province was not possible. Finally, in February 2011, Heads of Government of Syria and Turkey agreed to build the Friendship Dam on the Orontes River in Hatay province with a 50-50 cost and benefit sharing ratio. The project was inaugurated amidst much fanfare. However, within a month, the Syrian uprising took place, with various terrorist groups taking over parts of the Orontes River basin. With the growing strength of non-state actors in Syria, the government in Damascus was no longer in a position to take the project ahead. Moreover, Turkey decided to oppose the regime expecting it to fall, though it continues to survive as of 2015.

Had the Friendship Dam been launched 3-4 years earlier, much of what followed would have been averted. In the absence of strong state to state cooperation between Syria and Turkey, which the Friendship Dam could have commenced, anti-state violent groups were able to establish themselves, unleashing a reign of violence and terror. In each case where the states initiated water cooperation after prolonged mutual suspicion, the act of cooperating came too late. In each case, the winners were violent non-state actors. The failure to act urgently has led to the loss of official state authority,

security of people, and development opportunities for the benefit of forces of violence, destruction, chaos and despair.

Failure to act urgently on water cooperation has little to do with water cooperation. It has more to do with the existence of states and peace and prosperity of people. If such opportunities arise in future, there is no option but to act promptly - as if there were no time to wait until tomorrow. The choice before the states of the Middle East is between the urgency of water cooperation and the risk of their own disintegration.

# Media Matters

Over the last many decades, media has emerged as a de facto fourth pillar of democracy; the other three being judiciary, legislature and the executive. The Blue Peace Media Network is an informal community of media leaders and journalists from the Middle East who have been exploring ways to mainstream water issues and linkages between water and peace. They also help bridge the gap between policy makers and civil society.

For effectively regional co-operation, especially in regions such as the Middle East where there is a break-down of communication between governments, the media can play a pivotal role in informing the public about various peace initiatives, as well as bringing the public opinion to the attention of the decision makers. A central element towards this objective has been building the capacity of the media persons in the Middle East to increase their awareness and understanding on the subject of water security.

At the Blue Peace Media conference in Istanbul in March 2013, media leaders discussed the Blue Peace initiative and the challenges and opportunities presented in turning the knowledge of the Blue Peace process into actions that could benefit the Middle East. They discussed the role of media in informing the public about the looming water crisis especially in the upstream countries and sensitizing them about the sustainable use of water for a better future. Participants also acknowledged the fact that not only politicians but also the citizens need to take an active part in water conservation.

In November 2013, a joint Op-Ed article co-authored by HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal and Dr Sundeep Waslekar, President of SFG was simultaneously published in more than 25 leading newspapers across the Middle East including Jordan Times (Jordan), The Daily Star (Lebanon), The Yemen Times (Yemen), Gulf News (UAE), Zaman (Turkey), Al Mada (Iraq), Al Iqtisad (Syria), Al Arab (pan Arab), Al Monitor (pan Middle East) and many others. Besides, several newspapers from outside the region, including the Atlantic Post (USA) and Dhaka Tribune (Bangladesh) carried the same Op-Ed. Two episodes of El Etejah television channel in Lebanon almost completely focussed on water conservation, demand management and good governance with an emphasis on the Blue Peace initiatives in the region. They were broadcast at the prime time and viewed by several million people.

At the High Level Forum on Blue Peace in the Middle East in Istanbul in September 2014, the media participated in large numbers. With the increasing role of social media, mainstreaming of online portals as major news disseminators, the Blue Peace media discussed the need of creating demand for collaborative and sustainable management of water resources. They particularly discussed the following ideas:

- ≡ Code of Conduct by the media in its coverage of water and the relationship of water with peace and development.
- ≡ A watchdog role with active participation in building awareness about qualitative as well as quantitative aspects of water management in the domestic context and in the regional environment.
- ≡ Joint articles by experts and media persons.
- ≡ Expansion of media space given to water cooperation issues.
- ≡ Documentaries and television programmes, possibly including a documentary on the Tigris River.
- ≡ Local and regional networks of like-minded media persons.

A capacity-building media workshop was held at the Second High Level Forum in Geneva in October 2015 to strengthen the involvement of media in spreading awareness and creating demand for the sustainable management of water resources in the Middle East. Participants brainstormed about the issue of trans-boundary water management and how this must be brought closer to basic needs of the common person in the Middle East.

The primary outcomes of the Blue Peace media network addressing the key issue of governance in water sector are in the form of media products, such as television broadcasts, newspaper articles and internet publications. It is estimated that these would have reached several million people by now. It is obviously difficult to analyse how many of the recipients of such knowledge and information would actually change their attitudes. Since 2011, Blue Peace related issues have been highlighted in 300-400 articles across the region in English, Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish, German, Italian, Persian and Hebrew in newspapers, magazines, television programmes, online news portals, blogs in more than 20 countries. The cumulative readership and viewership of these agencies is roughly 30 million.



# The Point is to Understand

“Any fool can know.  
The point is to understand.”

Albert Einstein



The Blue Peace initiative since its beginning has undoubtedly built awareness of issues in the Middle East. As the circle of people thinking about water cooperation has expanded, the knowledge about the depletion of water resources has spread widely among opinion makers and decision makers. The stakeholders in the Middle East know how severe the crisis is. They know that all the main rivers and lakes are shrinking at a fast pace. And that the flow of Jordan River, as measured at the Dead Sea, has reduced from 1300 MCM per year in the 1960s to 100-200 MCM presently. In the lean period which lasts almost half the year, the river flow is barely 10-20 MCM. They also know that the Yarmouk River has experienced reduction in the water flow from over 500-600 MCM a few decades ago to 50-60 MCM presently.

The decision makers in the Middle East are acutely aware that the surface area of the Dead Sea has shrunk from 950 square km in the 1960s to about 637 square km at present. During the same period, the Dead Sea water level has dropped from 390 metres below sea level to 420 metres below sea level. It is likely to drop further to 450 meters below sea level by 2050.

And that some of the major rivers in Turkey, including Tigris, Ceyhan and Seyhan are expected to see a 50 per cent reduction in their annual average flow by 2050. In Syria, Barada River which feeds the capital city of Damascus has already turned into a stream. In addition to reduction in the quantities of water flow, there is also decline in the availability of fresh water due to pollution and contamination.

However, it is not enough for opinion makers merely to know these facts. It is essential for them to understand the gravity of the present trends and act promptly to contain them. If the state and the civil society fail to understand the necessity of engaging in water cooperation on an emergency basis, extremist violent organizations and terrorist groups will take control of the situation.

ISIS, a terrorist organization, has already taken control of significant parts of the Tigris and Euphrates basin. The ISIS has also demonstrated its capability and willingness to use water as an instrument, as well as a target of violence. Some of the violent groups in Turkey have taken control of the area near Ilisu dam in the Tigris basin.

Thus, the problems of quantitative depletion, pollution, contamination and terrorist control of critical water resources have together combined to create a significant crisis in the Middle East. Under the circumstances, it is necessary to move beyond

mere awareness and knowledge of the issues. It is necessary to understand and act immediately. Otherwise, the state structures and civil society will face severe crisis across the region.

The vicious cycle connecting drought, extremism, gender and water produces the phenomena of internal and trans-boundary displacement. In the second half of 2015, more than 15 million people, accounting for over a tenth of the population of the region, were estimated to be displaced. While on one hand the drought and water shortage has caused some portion of the displacement phenomena, on the other hand, refugees fleeing from both natural and man-made disasters have increased the pressure on water resources in some areas.

Large scale displacement, loss of livelihood, and loss of self-esteem leads to instability, war and political turmoil. Therefore, water security is at the very core of human security and state security in the Middle East. Indeed, water security has emerged as an existential issue on its own, as well as in its close linkage with violence, displacement and instability. The Middle East urgently needs to address the question of water security because it is an extremely critical factor in determining the very existence of states and societies in the region.

The decision makers in the Middle East can learn from other parts of the world. However, they must adapt and modify the experiences of others to the realities in their region.

In the Middle East, it is necessary to shift the mind-set from obsession with potential losses to the consideration of potential benefits. The discourse in the Middle East is excessively concerned with national interest and national security. Water is considered to be a sensitive issue. The discourse is primarily governed by the question of adequacy of supply for each country from its national perspective. It is concerned about potential losses of trans-boundary exchanges and agreements. Since any agreement is about give and take, the elite in the Middle East tend to worry about what they have to give and what they should take from a narrow national perspective. There is a need to shift the mind-set from a focus on losses to a focus on benefits.

In the Middle East, data is seen as a strategic asset, which is compromised if shared. It is primarily a question of political approach. In other parts of the world, data is sometimes seen as a scientific asset and is used positively for the benefits of all states.

In the absence of political impetus, cooperation does not progress. If the Middle East wants to convert water into an instrument of cooperation, it is imperative for Heads of States and Government to take the initiative, not as an ad hoc effort, but a political exercise supported by healthy and robust institutional structures.

The sensitisation about water issues through over 300 articles demonstrates that the opinion makers and common citizens of the Middle East know the challenge facing them. However, it is not enough to know. The point is to understand and act, and act with urgency as if there were no tomorrow.

# From Little Acorns

Mighty oaks from little acorns grow.

While grand and bold steps are required to achieve a major breakthrough in the region, it is not necessary to wait for them. At a time dominated by conflict and violence, it is important to find small windows of opportunity. Sometime small beginnings can lead to larger processes, just as mighty oaks grow from little acorns.

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## Monitoring Stations between Iraq and Turkey

The Iraq-Turkey bilateral track was launched in 2013, to explore confidence building measures on the Tigris River basin initially by scientific experts in the two countries, later on evolving to involve senior decision makers. It was a considered decision of the experts to concentrate on the Tigris River Basin as it could be addressed at the bilateral level and not to focus on the Euphrates River. In a series of meetings of experts in the initial stage and of experts and policy makers in the later stages, hydrology of the Tigris River Basin was discussed and it was proposed to encourage the water authorities of the two countries to institute small but specific confidence building measures.

Such a forward movement was made possible because of improving political will in the two countries. It was best reflected in the Minutes of the Meeting of government officials from Iraq and Turkey held in May 2014 proposing cooperation in data exchange and other aspects of water management. It was in the spirit of cooperation promoted by both the governments that senior policy makers from Iraq and Turkey met in Geneva in June 2014 under the Blue Peace umbrella. They achieved a major breakthrough in developing consensus on pragmatic ways to achieve harmonisation of quantitative and qualitative data and standards of the flow of the Tigris River. At the Geneva meeting a Plan of Action for promoting exchange and calibration of data and standards pertaining to Tigris river flows was agreed on. This consensus has been referred to as the “Geneva Consensus on the Tigris River”.

At the Blue Peace High Level Forum, held a few months later, further ideas were proposed to move from the statement to substantive action. Such as, for the two governments to commence the process of cooperation in exchange and calibration of data by taking immediate steps to identify one stream gauging station on each side; and to slowly expand cooperation to other areas of mutual interest and concern. However, within a month, ISIS took over many strategic parts of the Tigris basin including Mosul city. The terrorist group held control over the Mosul dam for some time. Eventually, Mosul dam was freed by the Kurdistan Regional Government forces. However, Mosul city, continued to be under occupation of the terrorist group. As a result, using Mosul facilities for exchange of data with Turkey became impossible, even though the Iraq government was now agreeable. The ISIS also continued to hold its sway over other dams in the Tigris basin.

In the meanwhile, Turkey went ahead and identified Cizre Monitoring station for the purpose of exchange and calibration of data. They urged Iraq to identify a monitoring station which was not under the control of ISIS and hence in a position to be used for data exchange. Iraq took almost a year to identify Faysh Khabour on the border as the station free of terrorist control which could be used for exchange and calibration of data.

After Iraq identified this station in June 2015, it was soon found that it was not at the same level as the Turkish station at Cizre. International assistance was required to upgrade the station or a new station needed to be installed. Iraq was ready for installing a new station by August 2015. However, in July-August 2015, militant groups took control of Cizre town and the area near Ilisu dam in Turkey. As a result, it became impossible for Turkish officials and engineers to visit the area and the monitoring stations located within it.

For years, Iraq and Turkey were suspicious of each other and neglected opportunities for cooperation. When they were finally ready, they had lost control over strategic geographies and water installations, to violent non-state actors on their respective sides. Had there been strong cooperation between the two states, they would have consolidated the state control on the area and it would have been impossible for the non-state entities to attack. It was much easier for PKK and ISIS to gain and consolidate their positions since they found two states unwilling or lethargic for mutual cooperation. The mutual suspicion between the states on the ground of national security cost them their lands as well as their security.

As the Iraqi and Turkish officials realise the dangers of delay, indications are that they will be prompt in responding to the next window of opportunity. At the Second High Level Forum held in Geneva in October 2015, both sides were ready to move ahead, only waiting for the border areas to be free from extremist violence.

## Israel-Palestine bilateral talks

Soon after fragile calm returned to Gaza in the autumn of 2014 and despite official restrictions on interaction, when other communication channels had broken down, several distinguished policy makers, including former Cabinet Ministers from Israel,

Palestine and Jordan met at Oxford to discuss possible ways forward in improving water relations between the three countries. The roundtable took a pragmatic approach and discussed few, specific, and modest objectives for cooperation in the water sector, which would be helpful in the improvement of overall relations. Recommendations included the reconstruction of water infrastructure in Gaza, stronger engagement with civil society and revisiting the currently paralysed Joint Water Commission (JWC).

A group of Israeli and Palestinian experts met in Mumbai in June 2015 to take the Oxford discussions forward and to discuss the functioning of the Joint Water Committee (JWC). As the JWC is a critical mechanism for facilitating water co-operation between the two parties and since it is currently not functioning in an optimum way, experts from the region believed that it would be a very worthwhile step ahead to examine the issue in a constructive manner.

Israeli and Palestinian experts met in Stockholm in August 2015 as a follow-up to the meeting in Mumbai to discuss the functioning of the JWC. The group recognised that getting additional water for Palestinian areas was the most critical issue. It was also agreed that along with reviving the JWC, new mechanisms, alongside conventional sources, to increase water supply into Palestinian areas are required.

One of the key outcomes of both meetings was that the group recognised the immediate need for water supply in the Palestinian areas. To achieve this optimally, the Palestinian experts provided a list of 'fast-track' projects which are concrete projects for immediate implementation by the JWC. These projects are strategic projects based on urgent need in terms of the amount of water the projects will generate, the areas they will reach out to and the number of people they will benefit. The Israeli experts are in the process of providing a feedback on the list of projects and whether they can be approved at the political level.

## The Best Case Scenario

Despite the initial difficulties, when the two initiatives move ahead, they have potential to have a multiplier impact. Once exchange and calibration of data between one set of stations begins to deliver results, the process can be expanded to cover three sets



of stations. This will require joint capacity development since the development of expertise for the purpose of improving the performance and knowledge of the relevant staff is essential. On-site training programmes can be started in both countries. Capacity building programmes will also help to build relationships between people working along the river in both countries and develop trust. Relevant organizations in each country can pick the sites for training, as well as the experts and engineers to be trained.

This could lead to co-operation on the Ilisu Dam drawing from the example of the Grand Renaissance Dam in the Nile Basin. While Turkey insists that the construction of the dam will be beneficial to all parties and may even alleviate problems of flood, downstream Iraq complains about the quantity and quality of water flow. The tripartite structural co-operation that has been witnessed in the case of the Grand Renaissance Dam can be replicated in the case of the Ilisu dam, should smaller confidence building measures between Turkey, Syria and Iraq work.

The next step would be integrated water resource management (IWRM) in the Tigris Basin. Once there is a reasonable amount of trust between Turkey and Iraq beginning with an agreement on standardised measurements, laws and goals, the two countries may decide to upgrade cooperation at the basin level. Such an initiative could come through a joint ministerial statement of the riparian governments. The parties may decide to approach international organisations and donors for technical and financial input. However, such an initiative has no potential to sustain itself if it is primarily driven by external institutions.

The inception stage (2-3 years) of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) of the Tigris basin can create integrated data management systems for the basin, from all the countries involved (primarily Iraq and Turkey). This could include a comprehensive and coordinated database considering all socio-economic aspects of water use. Mathematical modelling could be used to evaluate the surface and groundwater resources. An assessment of the situation prevailing in the basin from all sides regarding water use, water quality, and water legislation could be carried out.

The development phase (3-5 years) would involve projects on the ground such as introduction of modern irrigation practices and efficient management of water flows and quality. The institutional phase (beyond 5 years) would involve establishing a joint river basin commission, with representatives of governments and local authorities

creating an institutional architecture in the form of an umbrella organisation supported by various joint technical committees for the participating countries to manage the basin jointly leading to efficient and meaningful co-operation between Turkey and Iraq. Eventually, when the situation in Syria improves and there a stable state structure, Syria can be involved in the arrangement not only for Tigris but also for Euphrates.

In the post-conflict scenario, once Iraq, Syria and Turkey begin to manage the Euphrates-Tigris basin in an integrated way, they can examine the possibilities of major trade-offs. They can plan agriculture for the entire basin, along with free trade between the countries. This will enable the most optimum utilization of land and water resources. They can also consider trade-offs between water and other public goods. This will lead to water and environment forming the basis of an economic community in the Middle East, which Iraq, Syria and Turkey can also extend to Jordan and Lebanon.

As water and environment are core sectors in the twenty first century, integrated development of these sectors will be essential as the corner stone of economic community. The foundation created in the core sector can be strengthened by a free trade area for trade, transit, industry and energy.

At the beginning of this report, we noted that the countries in the Middle East made a visionary effort for creating the Middle East Union with a free trade area in 2010. This effort failed because it ignored the core sectors of water and environment. In other words, it was a highly needed initiative but it began at the right end. The tragedy that followed is known.

If the leaders and people of the Middle East draw lessons from the trauma they have faced in the last four years and a small glimmer of hope that the Blue Peace approach has shown, they can begin with small steps that can lead to a big change. In the long run, they will find that five years is not an impossible period to surmount. It is unfortunate for a nation or a region to receive a setback but is wise to learn lessons from such a tragedy and to march ahead. If the leaders can demonstrate the courage to take big steps to make a new beginning, it would be ideal. If not, at least small steps can be taken in a way they can eventually lead to a big change. After all, as a proverb says, mighty oaks grow from little acorns.

**PART 2**  
**SUPPORTING**  
**THE LEARNING**

# HIGH LEVEL FORUM REPORT

October 8-9, 2015  
Geneva, Switzerland



The High-Level Forum on Blue Peace in the Middle-East was co-hosted by the Strategic Foresight Group and the University of Geneva in cooperation with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Human Security Division of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs on the 8th and 9th of October 2015. About 70 policy makers, Members of Parliament, serving and former Ministers, media leaders, academics and water experts from across the Middle East came together for the forum which was held in Geneva, Switzerland.

The High Level Forum marked the continuity of the Blue Peace community which has emerged as the soft infrastructure for dialogue and a rare channel of communication between countries affected by internal and inter-state violence. It endorsed specific confidence building measures at the bilateral and sub-regional level. It included a capacity building workshop for the media in the Middle East. It concluded with the proposition of new directions for its work. While in the long run, the Blue Peace community in the Middle East will work towards the achievement of water as a sustainable development goal, in the short run, it will foster efforts to protect water as a strategic and humanitarian asset. On behalf of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Ambassador Thomas Greminger delivered the Opening Address and Mr Dominique Favre made the valedictory remarks at the High Level Forum.

## OPENING SESSION

The session kicked off with a message from HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, delivered by Dr Hakam Al-Alami. HRH Prince Hassan expressed concern over the fact that despite efforts by the international and regional water community, water is still being used as a tool of war. He also highlighted the relationship between water and refugees, the nexus between water, food and energy and the impacts of the lack of a regional framework on the overall economic growth of the region. He said that regional stabilisation, innovative practices, strategic partnerships and human security were necessary in solving the water crisis and called for the prioritisation of water and sanitation needs in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals.



Ambassador Thomas Greminger, in his opening address, observed:

- ≡ On 25 September all 193 UN-members formally adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including a global goal on Water. The new 2030 Agenda makes it clear that we all have a shared responsibility to address this global risk by ensuring available and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- ≡ The global water crisis is not just a threat but a threat multiplier, with implications for food and energy security as well as for political and social stability. This is illustrated by increased competition between water uses, growing debates around large dams and tensions over land and water at local and international levels.
- ≡ The Blue Peace community is a soft infrastructure for dialogue that is operational, even when political realities do not allow for more formal track one processes for dialogue and cooperation between nations. It is the only platform that is currently engaging multiple stakeholders from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey and to a limited extent even Syria not just on water but on any issue at all.
- ≡ When we started work on Blue Peace in the Middle East, after the launch of the report in 2011, water was seen widely as an item on the development agenda. Today, water is perceived as a strategic and humanitarian good. Its supply and demand is closely linked to refugees, displacement, gender situation, terrorism and



drought. Therefore, in the short run we need to create mechanisms that address these linkages between water and other humanitarian and strategic issues, and in the long run, we have to ensure the sustainability of water supply and good governance in the sector for the sake of development.

Mr. Abdul-Sattar Majid Qadir, Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources, Kurdistan Regional Government, Iraq delivered the keynote address. He stressed that the collective management of water resources is extremely necessary in light of the fact that the Middle East is experiencing a high incidence of water conflicts. This could be achieved through cooperation, sustainable use of existing resources and also by supplementing resources with other means such as rain water, spring water and use of new and advanced technology. He spoke about the need to activate Dukan and Darbandikhan dams for providing water to the surrounding areas, the need to stop wasting water and recognised the threat of global warming for depleting water resources in the region.

He urged that water should not be used as a pressure point in relations between countries, but should rather be seen as an instrument of developing dialogue and peace. The Minister declared support for the Blue Peace process and called for senior



policy makers in all countries to be further involved in the process.

Ambassador Majid Hassan of Iraq conveyed the support of the Government of Iraq to the Blue Peace process and particularly to the bilateral confidence building measures between Turkey and Iraq.

## REGIONAL APPROACHES

A panel comprising of senior policy makers and parliamentarians from Turkey, Jordan and Iraq chaired by the Rt. Hon. Lord John Alderdice discussed regional water cooperation mechanisms beyond 2015 in light of the transformation of the region from an era of cooperation in 2010 to an era of conflict and crisis in 2015.

- ≡ The panel recognised the enormity of humanitarian crisis in the Middle East at present due to displacement, violence and extremism, all of which create a sense of loss of dignity and justice among common people.
- ≡ In the short run, we need to address immediate problems arising out of breakdown



of trust and growing humanitarian crisis. All efforts should be made to declare water off limits for war. Organisations such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent should be approached to address the problem. It is also necessary for the Blue Peace network to continue to function to fill some of the void created by the absence of official regional cooperation institutions.

- ≡ In the long run, it is necessary to have concrete institutional framework for cooperation. It is necessary for us to begin thinking about “the day after”.
- ≡ There is a sharp decline in the per capita availability of water in parts of the region, both due to depletion of water resources and pressure on demand placed by influx of refugees.
- ≡ Some of the speakers rued the losses created by lack of cooperation in the last 25 years. There is a need to assess the cost of inaction.
- ≡ Water has to be seen in its multi-dimensional perspective. On the one hand, it is a security issue - used by non-state organisations like ISIS (Daesh) as a target and weapon of war - and on the other hand it is a development issue closely linked to agriculture and energy.
- ≡ It is absolutely necessary to have a futuristic approach for a sound regional organisation with a mandate to solve the water problem in a collaborative manner. It is about time that a pre-emptive approach replaces the prevailing reactionary mindset. It is important to introduce basin-centric approach in planning and to explore trade-offs between water and other related sectors. In order to do this, it is necessary to have an intergovernmental organisation at the regional level in the Middle East.

It must be noted that while a large number of participants supported the establishment of a permanent interstate regional organisation for the management of water resources, some participants expressed preference for a gradual approach based on specific technical measures and practical projects for exchange and harmonisation of data.

## BILATERAL APPROACHES

The following bilateral approaches for joint water management in the region were discussed by the experts.



### **1. The Iraq - Turkey Track**

Dr Ahmet Saatci of Turkey and Mr Forat Al Timimi of Iraq led the discussion, which included the review of bilateral agreements, treaties and efforts at the track one and track two levels in the past. There is a concrete progress on the Tigris Consensus initiative between the two countries, under the auspices of the Blue Peace process, for exchange, harmonisation and calibration of data on the Tigris River, using output from designated monitoring stations in the border areas - one each in Iraq and Turkey. In the case of Turkey, a high quality monitoring station capable of performing such tasks is already in operation. In case of Iraq, a monitoring station near the border will need to be built, for which Iraq can expect technical input from Turkey and technical and financial support from Switzerland. At present, the border areas in both countries are under the domination of violent non-state actors. However, considering the willingness of the two countries, it can be expected that such a measure will be implemented as soon as there is a political space and reduction in violence.

### **2. The Israel- Palestine Track**

Mr Mario Carera introduced the Israel-Palestine initiative on water to the group. Water experts from Israel and Palestine met in June and August 2015 in Mumbai and

Stockholm respectively to understand ways to revitalise the Joint Water Committee. As the JWC is a critical mechanism for facilitating water co-operation between the two parties and since it is currently not functioning in an optimum way, the two meetings examined the issue in a constructive manner.

The participants in the two meetings recognised that getting additional water for Palestinian areas was the most critical issue. It was also agreed that along with reviving the JWC, new mechanisms to increase water supply into Palestinian areas are required. Such mechanisms are not alternatives to the conventional sources. Thus, conventional and new sources of water are both required.

Palestinian water experts have submitted a list of water development projects as “fast-track” projects for immediate approval. The Israeli experts will review them to explore if the implementation of such projects could be facilitated to build confidence between the two sides.

### 3. The Lebanon – Syria Track (The Orontes River Basin)

Prof Ronald Jaubert introduced atlas of the Orontes River Basin in the context of trans-boundary water issues between Lebanon and Syria and the role of water in the Syrian conflict.

## MEDIA WORKSHOP

To strengthen the involvement of media in spreading awareness and creating demand for the sustainable management of water resources in the Middle East, a capacity-building workshop for media experts from the region was organised on the 8th of October, 2015.

The workshop has presentations from:-

- ≡ Prof Martin Beniston from the University of Geneva who spoke about the impacts of climate change on available water resources, upstream and downstream links and changing hydrology in the Alps.
- ≡ Dr Christian Brethaut made a presentation on the instruments of cooperation used for transboundary river management. River management is governed by different organisational frameworks, legal regimes and the ‘context’ of water.



- ≡ Dr Francesca de Chatel spoke about the challenges in mainstreaming water stories in the media and its role in shaping perceptions about water. She also drew attention to the problem of reporting unchecked and inaccurate data.
- ≡ Mr Stuart Reigeluth presented the case study of Revolve magazine and its work in publishing on water.

A panel of media leaders from Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq discussed how to mainstream water issues in regional and national media. Some of the observations were:

- ≡ The issue of transboundary water management must be brought closer to basic needs of the common person in the Middle East.
- ≡ It is important to underline the urgency of water issue - this is about crisis on our doorsteps and not about a future risk.
- ≡ There is a need to simplify data so that media can effectively communicate with the public.
- ≡ It is important to have dialogue between media persons on the one hand and policy makers and scientists on the other so that the media would get credible information and the policy making and scientific community would be able to transmit its key messages to public.
- ≡ Social media can be harnessed in sensitising people to water issues.
- ≡ Images, info-graphics, historical photographs help people better understand data surrounding water depletion and scarcity.

- ≡ Women have a close relationship with water and therefore links between women, water and peace should be highlighted.
- ≡ It is necessary to undertake coordinated and shared efforts by media leaders from different countries in the Middle East for greater impact of the collective approach than what can be achieved through individual approaches.
- ≡ There has to be continuous commitment and engagement of water journalists to periodically research and publish about water.
- ≡ The media leaders can also use their access to political leaders to convey messages informally.

## CONCLUSION: KEY MESSAGES

1. The Blue Peace Community in the Middle East is a soft infrastructure for dialogue. It will be in a position to contribute to positive change as soon as the political space opens up. It should be nurtured, diversified and strengthened.
2. The long term objective for enabling water cooperation in the Middle East is to create an institutional mechanism such as a Cooperation Council for the





sustainable management of water resources. In the Middle East, Heads of States and civil society organisations have fostered regional cooperation in different spheres of economic life. However, it has floundered in the absence of interstate, effective institutionalisation of cooperation. The experience of river basins around the world shows the importance of such institutionalisation. In the Middle East, some countries support institutionalisation of cooperation, whereas some have reservations. It is important to note that there is no single and ideal model of institutional cooperation. The countries in the Middle East can construct a model which is appropriate for their environment drawing from best practices from around the world.

3. The states and civil society should not allow non-state violent actors to target water infrastructure in the course of conflicts, or to use water assets as an instrument of violence. Any attack on water assets or their use as a tool in warfare or terrorism should be treated as a threat to humanity. This is a relatively new phenomenon in the Middle East due to the rise of Daesh or ISIS. It is necessary to use our intellectual capital to decide how to respond to these phenomena. In particular, the role of organisations such as International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), should be explored.
4. It will be useful to engage Iran in the Blue Peace Process, as the tributaries of some of the rivers flowing into Iraq originate from Iran, that country is very much part

of the Middle Eastern hydro-political region. In the past it was not possible to engage with Iran due to geo-political and practical constraints. With the growing improvement of relationship between Iran and the international community, a future engagement should be possible.

5. Specific bilateral confidence building measures should be promoted. In this respect, the progress made by Iraq and Turkey to exchange, harmonise and calibrate data about the flow of the Tigris River is welcome. It has been agreed to use one hydro-metrological station each from Iraq and Turkey in the border area for this purpose. In the case of Turkey, such a station already exists. In the case of Iraq, it would be necessary to establish such as a station with technical cooperation from Turkey and financial support from Switzerland. In both cases, the border areas of two countries are currently experiencing extremist violence, which makes it difficult to use the stations in an optimum way. Therefore, the understanding that has been reached can be translated into action, as soon as the political situation allows. This initiative will help translate the agreements reached in bilateral intergovernmental meetings between Iraq and Turkey in mid-2014 and December 2014 into a reality. Similarly, a discussion on bilateral confidence building measures between Israel and Palestine are in progress. More such specific bilateral or sub-regional confidence building measures should be encouraged.
6. Besides the quantitative aspects of trans-boundary water management, it is important to focus on governance, demand, and quality of water courses. The countries in the Middle East can organise expert sessions for exchange of experiences in governance and quality related issues. Such sessions can be useful in exchanging best practices from one another. It would also be useful to explore the role of various catalysts in the society to educate public opinion.
7. The role of media is immensely important. The sharing of knowledge and experiences between the countries within the region as well as River Basin Organisations outside the region is highly important. The participation of media leaders in the Blue Peace community should be enhanced.
8. The process of Blue Peace should be shaped simultaneously bearing in mind short term as well as long term objectives. In the short term, immediate issues need to be addressed, including specific confidence building measures, expansion of knowledge sharing initiatives, condemnation of the use of water as a weapon or target of violence, promotion of institutional mechanisms and engagement with decision makers, as outlined above. In the long run, water as a sustainable



development goal has to be promoted. While in the immediate future in the Middle East, water may appear to be about strategic and humanitarian crisis, it is important to remember that in the long run, water is indeed about sustainability and development.

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This report is a reflection of Strategic Foresight Group on the proceedings of the High Level Forum held in Geneva on 8-9th of October 2015. It does not represent views of any of the above mentioned organizations, nor does it indicate consensus of the participants.



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# SFG WATER DIPLOMACY PUBLICATIONS

- ≡ Women, Water and Peace: Crisis of Survival in the Middle East, 2015
- ≡ Why? A Case for Cooperation in the Middle East, 2015
- ≡ Water Cooperation Quotient, 2015
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## CONFERENCE REPORTS AND LINKS

- **Blue Peace in the Middle East High Level Forum, October 2015**  
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- **Mekong Learning Journey, November 2014**  
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## About Strategic Foresight Group

Strategic Foresight Group (SFG) is a think - tank engaged in crafting new policy concepts that enable decision makers to prepare for a future in uncertain times. Founded in 2002 to create new forms of intellectual capital, our body of work today encompasses over 50 countries, across four continents. SFG has published over 30 in-depth research reports in English with some translations in Arabic and Spanish. We currently work within three areas of focus: 1. Water Diplomacy 2. Peace, Conflict and Terrorism 3.Global Foresight.

SFG analysis and recommendations have been discussed in the United Nations, UK House of Lords, House of Commons, Indian Parliament, European Parliament, Alliance of Civilization, World Bank, World Economic Forum (Davos), and quoted in over 2000 newspapers and media sources. Several Heads of Government, Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament have participated in SFG activities.

SFG is known for pioneering the concept of Blue Peace to transform water from a source of crisis to an instrument of peace and cooperation. It has worked in the Middle East, Africa, Eastern and Western Himalayan rivers basins in Asia to craft the Blue Peace approach. These efforts have involved the participation of Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament, heads of water authorities and experts from the three continents and defined sustainable and collaborative solutions to the trans-boundary water issues. In its 2015 report, Water Cooperation Quotient, Strategic Foresight Group has proposed a unique formula to predict the probability of war on the basis of water and peace equation.

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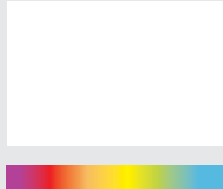
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