

OTHER NATIONS

Mideast Water

"The War Over Water" by John K. Cooley, in *Foreign Policy* (Spring 1984), P.O. Box 984, Farmingdale, N.Y. 11737.

Oil may be the natural resource that comes most quickly to mind when the Middle East is mentioned, but another liquid is at least as important. "Long after oil runs out," writes Cooley, an ABC News correspondent, "water is likely to cause [Mideast] wars, cement peace, and make and break empires . . . as it has for thousands of years."

Israel has far more industry and irrigated farmland (about 500,000 acres) than its Arab neighbors and thus consumes five times as much water per capita as they do.

Cooley says that the Arabs fear—not without some cause—that Israel seeks to control more of the region's scarce water supplies. He argues that Israel's decision to occupy the West Bank during the Six-Day War of 1967 can be traced, in part, to Israeli concern over two underground aquifers that originate there and supply much of the water for northern and central Israel, including the cities of Tel Aviv and Haifa.

The second major Israeli source of fresh water, filling about 25 percent of the nation's needs, is the Jordan River (tapped by the Israeli National Water Carrier pipeline). The Arabs have constantly tried to reduce the Jordan's flow. Indeed, Cooley believes Arab efforts to divert the Bāniyās River, which rises from Syria's Golan Heights and feeds the Jordan, was one motive behind the Israelis' occupation of the Heights in 1967 and de facto annexation of the area in 1981.

Water is also an important behind-the-scenes factor in Lebanon. One of Syria's preconditions for withdrawing its forces from Lebanon's Bekaa Valley is a guarantee that nobody will tap the Orontes River that flows into Syria. The Israelis seem to have designs on southern Lebanon's Litānī River, Cooley speculates. Another notable Middle East waterwork is Israel's proposed canal from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea, which would serve chiefly as a source of hydroelectric power. But the project would also raise the level of the Dead Sea, disrupting Jordan's existing seaside industries and its plans to reclaim some coastal land for agriculture.

During the early 1950s, the United States tried and failed to get the Middle Eastern nations to agree on a plan to share scarce water. Cooley suggests that Washington make a fresh attempt before today's every-man-for-himself attitude leads to a new war in the Middle East.

