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Media in the Politics of Water Development: The Case of Wazzani Spring, Lebanon

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The Hasbani River pump station was built by Lebanon in 2001-2 on their side of the border with Israel to furnish sixty villages with potable water. Despite its small scale, and that Israel uses most of the water from the Hasbani River after it passes through southern Lebanon, the Israel press reacted with systematic virulence to thwart the use of the pump station. This study documents the events surrounding this project as one case study of current conflict within the region over apportioning increasingly scarce water. A critical analysis is undertaken of how media coverage treated the events.

Introduction

In this paper I analyze a controversy between Lebanon and Israel over a project to supply villages from the Jordan River drainage system with drinking water and how the media represented the event. Lebanon initiated a water extraction project from the Wazzani spring, which meets the Hasbani River, as one of the tributaries of the transboundary Jordan River. The Wazzani pump was built in two phases in 2001 and 2002 a short distance before the Hasbani enters Israel. The project supplies drinking water to some 60 border villages which are being repopulated and rebuilt after having been militarily occupied by Israel for 22 years. The latter $3.5-million project entails pumping 10,000 cubic meters (cu.m.) of water per day from the spring and conveying it to a reservoir, 10 kilometers to the west of Wazzani. Despite its small scale, this project has triggered much fury

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in the media and in Israeli political circles. Hence this controversy drew much international media coverage. The war of words has become so inflammatory that the United Nations and the United States and France have attempted to mediate. Mediation was directed by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. This paper will outline the Wazzani project's historical and hydrological contexts, and will critically analyze how this controversy was politicized in the print media in both Lebanon and Israel.

Geographical Background

Lebanon is reasonably endowed with water resources, especially when compared with other countries in the Middle East. Precipitation levels, however, fluctuate widely by season and by geography (Table 1.0). Rainfall only falls in notable amounts during the winter.[1]

(Table 1.0): Geographic Pattern of Water distribution by Season

(In mcm/year)

	Wet Season	Dry season	Total
Western Slopes	1,958	515	2,473
Bekaa			
Assi Basin	54	43	97
Upper Litani Basin	488	153	641
Hasbani river, springs, and other waters	68	96	164
Total	2,557	818	3,375

Source: Mallat 1982

1. About 90 percent of all precipitation is received between November and April. January is the wettest month, and snow is frequently present is areas that are 1,500 meters or higher above sea level. The highlands receive an average of 1500 millimeter (mm) of precipitation per year, and the mountain peaks along the western ranges receive up to 2,000 mm. Precipitation along the coast is 830 mm/year in the north, 800mm around Beirut, and 700 mm near and south of the coastal city Sur. The northern Bekaa region near Hirmil receives an average of 250 mm/year while Ba'lbeck receives 550 mm. In southern towns of Karoun and Marjoun, precipitation is around 700mm. Hence the landscape of the South can be largely classified as semi-arid.

The riparians of the Jordan River are Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Palestine and Jordan. The Hasbani River is one of three tributaries of the upper Jordan River.[2]

Lebanon's water resources are increasingly vulnerable to industrial and agricultural pollution, competing (rural vs urban) demands, and are vulnerable to more frequent droughts in recent decades. Some regions of Lebanon are better endowed with resources than others, and the South has suffered from war-related destruction, and from many decades of neglect.[3]

In addition to human-induced pollution, natural droughts add to the water stress.[4] Drougts seem to be cyclical. Every seven to ten years, Lebanon experiences a drought which lasts for three or more years. Between 1988 and 1991, Lebanon's internally renewable water was reduced by 40 percent from drought. The resulting reduction in surface water flow elevates levels of water pollution. In turn, freshwater is rendered prohibitively expensive to bring back to a potable state, and/or

2. The river's largest tributary is the Dan River whose flow varies from 173 to 285 million cubic meters (mcm) per year, averaging 250 mcm. The Hasbani River's flow ranges between 52 and 236 mcm per year, averaging 150 mcm. The Banias River's flow ranges between 63 and 190 mcm, averaging 121 mcm. Currently, Israel is estimated to receive from the Hasbani anywhere between 138 mcm per year to 150 mcm.

3. The Litani River, which crosses part of the South, is Lebanon's largest river. The quality of potable (and sea) water is of growing concern to the government, citizens, popular organizations, and to the NGOs that operate in the country. One of the issues that has received much public attention is the pollution caused by the industrial zones in the Litani watershed area near the town of Zahle. The majority of industries (with 5 workers or more) located in the Litani watershed (except for cattle and poultry farms) are found in seven clusters most of which are in the vicinity of Zahle. This area, according to a 1996 survey of industries, showed the total number of industries to be 36, including 15 food and drink processing plants, and 6 non-metallic industries (eg., glass, ceramic etc). The Lebanese Ministry of the Environment is monitoring the industrial waste of 100 factories, is based on the size and type of activity that certain operations. Of these industries, four are located within the Litani River watershed producing food, paper, and non-metallic products. Finally, there are numerous towns and villages which empty untreated sewage into the Litani waterway.

4. Towards the end of the civil war, a "cocktail of toxics" contained in a total of 15,800 barrels and 20 containers were exported to Lebanon in 1987. Italy was the source of most of them. The toxics were from industrial processes, and waste from research laboratories and were made of heavy metals such as Ag, CN, CN2, Hg, CdCN2, dioxine and PCB. Although some of the barrels were eventually returned, over 10,000 barrels remain. Some of the barrels were emptied, and reused there after by people and restaurant owners to store food or water (*An-Nahar* 11 February, 1995). The contents of other barrels were emptied into the Mediterranean Sea and in the Kesrouan Mountains. The latter are the recharge areas of a coastal aquifer located northeast of Beirut (Hamdan 1995). Consequently, dumping endangers ground water and the ability of local farmers to irrigate the coastal plain.

has harmful effects on aquatic life. Lower surface water flow adversely, effects the life of farmers in the semi-arid but fertile plains and hills of South Lebanon.

The Council for Development and Reconstruction is studying the feasibility of supplying Beirut with water from the Litani River through the Jun tunnel (ie., from Karoun Reservoir) before the water is processed through the hydro-electric plant in Jun. The proposed water withdrawal will be about 250,000 cu.m. per day in the first stage, and 500,000 cu.m.per day in the final stage. The total annual volume will be 180,000 mcm.[5] However, this extraction contradicts the spirit of law number 14522 (16 May 1970) which allocates the water of the Liatni to the southern Bekaa (30 mcm) and to the South (160 mcm) for domestic use and irrigation.

Political Geography of Lebanon-Israel Conflict For Water

Starting in 1970s, South Lebanon became a staging area for Palestinian guerrilla operations against Israel. After numerous violent exchanges over the years, the Jewish state invaded South Lebanon in 1978 and created a "restricted" security zone. In 1982 Israel invaded and occupied all of Lebanon to Beirut. Israel eventually withdrew in 1985 but retained an expanded security zone. The consequence of these military incrusions and political management from Tel Aviv was neglect of economic development in that area, as well as endanging the physical security of its citizens.

The agricultural sector, the corner-stone of the economy in the security zone, was crippled. The area was isolated from the rest of Lebanon, which shut off the customary market north of the occupied belt for farm produce. However, Israel protected its own farmers by banning imports of South Lebanese produce. The net result was large-scale emigration from the occupied border zone. Those who remained throughout the turbulent years abandoned agriculture and sought employment in farming or factories in northern Israel. Israel and her allies, the South Lebanon Army,

5. Fadi Comair, *Sources and Uses of Water From the Litani Basin and Karoun Lake*, Paper presented at the Workshop on Pollution of Litani Basin and of Lake Karoun, and the Environmental Problems of the Western Bekaa and Rashaya (May 9-10, 1998).

"burned olive groves and other trees to deprive Hezbollah guerrillas of cover, diminishing another local resource."[6] The relative absence of the Lebanese government from the scene, especially after the civil war started in 1976, meant that the infrastructure for farming was neither maintained nor modernized. Efficient production in this semi-arid region dropped considerably.

After the civil war ended in 1990, the militias disbanded and turned in their weapons to governmental authorities; Yet Hezbollah was the exception. Hezbollah continued to focus on liberating South Lebanon from Israeli occupation. After countless attacks and counter attacks, and thousands of victims, Hezbollah forced the Israeli army to end its 22 year adventure in Lebanon, and to unconditionally withdraw in May 2000. The liberation of the South brought a general atmosphere of tranquility to this long troubled region. Once again, goods and people moved freely, which made it possible for the displaced residents to return to their homes and places of birth. The Wazzani pump makes the towns and villages of South Lebanon more inhabitable.

Why would former residents return to their wholly or partially destroyed villages which they were forced to flee? Some of the villages in question, especially those close to the Shebaa farms in southeast Lebanon, remain an active military front even after their liberation. Tuathail explains this strong attachment to the land as the idea of a multi-layered territory.[7] Thus we should speak not of territory but of "culturally contextual and technopolitically contingent territorialities." Territory, he adds, relates the "complex of state power, geography and identity. Put somewhat differently, territory is a regime of practices triangulated between institutionalizations of power, materializations of place and idealizations of 'the people'."[8] Over fifty years ago, Bowman wrote, some what poetically, that territory "evokes personal feelings and group

6. Howard Schneider, "Lebanese Are Left With a Wasteland," *Washington Post* (July 1, 2001), p. A14.

7. Gearoid O' Tuathail, "Borderless World? Problematising Discourses of Deterritorialisation" in Nurit Kliot and David Newman, eds., *Geopolitics at the End of the Twentieth Century: The Changing World Political Map* (London: Frank Press, 2000), p. 140.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-154.

sentiments."[9] Some people "endow the land itself with a mystical quality, hearing revered ancestors, the authors of past grandeurs and the doers of heroic deeds, speak from their graves in its soil."[10]

Those that were forced to leave South Lebanon had different attachments to their native lands than those who emigrated to Beirut or abroad. Some South Lebanese emigrated in the 1970s and 1980s to escape the devastation of the civil war, but eventually found themselves victims of Africa's civil wars in the late 1990s. Consequently, a large number of emigrants returned before the liberation of South Lebanon, many with newly amassed wealth and business contacts around the world. They built lavish villas with exotic gardens, sweeping staircases and Spanish-tile roofs in their home villages — in some cases, a few miles away from the front line of the security zone. Poorer residents, especially those who were explicitly or implicitly evicted from their home towns, usually relocated to Lebanese cities in the North. Yet, they retained a sense of "mission" to return, re-establish their dislocated identity, and to reclaim a perceived past "grandeur" — simple and symbolic as it may have been. The fact that the land of South Lebanon is widely believed to have been honorably liberated gives it a magnetic appeal to most people in the country. Furthermore, this land has been a theater of military operations by and against the Israeli army. The war dead are generally seen through a religious lens as "martyrs" who sacrificed their lives so that others may live with freedom and dignity. A large scale return of South Lebanese to their ancestral lands, however, required infrastructural prerequisites. Critical among these preconditions of repatriation was access to water at home and on the farm.

Liberating the Water and Rehydrating the Refugees' Return

After the liberation of the South, the Lebanese government started to take firm, albeit incremental, steps to rehabilitate the overall infrastructure necessary for civilian life. Early in 2001, and using American and UNIFIL

9. I. Bowman, "The Strategy of Territorial Decisions," *Foreign Affairs*, 24: 2 (1946), p. 177.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 177-194.

(United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon) intermediaries, Lebanon notified Israel about a plan to build a small pumping station along the banks of the Wazani Spring. The pump is located one kilometer north of the international border (now called the "blue line"), immediately north of the Alawite village of Ghajar (which was occupied by Israel in 1967). The pump was to supply a few impoverished villages in the border area with drinking water. One Israeli source said that his country "acknowledged the information (submitted by Lebanon) but without comment." While another spokesman for the UNIFIL, Goksel, but related that Israel's army and Ministry of Defense were "fully aware of what is going on" and had "agreed to the installation of the pump."[11] After receiving notification from the UN agency that it was now possible to begin, Lebanon commenced construction, on the 20th of February 2001, of the station and of paving a road so that trucks could transport electricity pylons for powering the pumps.

When the news of the water pumping station appeared on the front-pages of major Israeli newspapers, the Lebanese workers had been laying down pipes for three weeks.[12] Officials with the UNIFIL were bewildered by the strong reaction to the pump by Israel. Remember, the UN agency had mediated the work between Israel and the Lebanon--both countries were in agreement--and its peacekeeping troops had monitored its progress.

Not long after this controversy was contained, another erupted in August 2002. Lebanon decided to expand the Wazzani project and dispatched engineers to install a pump and 40cm (16in) pipe to draw some 10,000 cu.m. of water a day. The Lebanese completed the project. An atmosphere of national celebration dominated Lebanon's October 16th, 2002 successful 45-minute test of the pump, despite Israeli warnings that such a move could constitute "grounds for war." High-ranking Lebanese

11. Bar'el Bar'el, "Analysis: The Price of Withdrawal is Water," *Ha'aretz* (March 15, 2001). *http://www3.haaretz.co.il/eng/htmls/kat7_3.htm*; Arieh O'Sullivan and Herb Keinon, "Lebanon Warned Not to Divert River," *The Jerusalem Post* (March 15, 2001). *http://www.jpost.com/Editions/2001/03/15/News/News.22989.html*

12. The pumping station is built to supply 300 cu.m. of water annually using a four-inch (ten-centimeter) diameter pipe.

officials led by President Emile Lahoud, Speaker of the House Nabih Berri, Hezbollah's leader in South Lebanon, Sheikh Nabil Kaouk, Druse leader Walid Jumblatt, priests, Sunni and Shia Muslim imamas, and foreign diplomats — all joined an estimated 10,000 people to inaugurate the Wazzani pump.[13]

Lebanon used the ceremony to demonstrate a multi-dimensional front against a common threat, and to show support for development and prosperity of the South. Israel, on the other hand, promoted an atmosphere of intimidation. During the ceremony, a few hundred meters to the South, Israeli soldiers monitored the event through binoculars. Israeli helicopters circled the site a few times, and Israeli fighter jets broke the sound barrier over the southern port city of Tyre and Tripoli.[14] These tensions were prompted by the Wazzani Development Project and persisted a few months until international mediators interceded.

American Mediation

The United States has assisted the riparians of the Jordan River to arrive at various water allocation agreements for about fifty years. President Eisenhower sent his envoy Eric Johnston to mediate an Arab-Israeli conflict over the waters of the Jordan River. Johnston proposed a plan to allocate 52 per cent to Jordan, 30 per cent to Israel , 9 per cent to Syria and 3 per cent to Lebanon. While the plan was ratified by Israel, and not by the Council of the Arab League, it provided a lasting informal guideline.[15] The Plan is the closest Israel and Lebanon have come to agreeing on allocating the waters of the Hasbani River. Lebanon tried to use its share of the Hasbani, but was prevented by political instability in the area and by Israeli objections. In 1972, the Lebanese built a small

13. The Lebanese President did not speak at the ceremony. The leader of Amal, Hezbollah's rival, gave the main address. Whereas Hezbollah claimed the credit for liberating the land in May 2000, Amal took the lead to seek "complete" liberation of the South's water resources.

14. Perhaps related, an unmanned reconnaissance drone was observed over the Bekaa valley, and Israeli troops crossed the border a short distance into Lebanese territory.

15. This translates to Lebanon receiving 35mcm to irrigate 3,520 hectares of land around Hasbaya; H.A. Amery and A.T. Wolf, *Water in the Middle East: A Geography of Peace* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2000).

causeway on the Hasbani River (near al-Mari) to use during the dry summer, but the Israeli army destroyed it.[16] One should bear in mind that the present day Wazzani project will extract only one tenth of the allocation according to the Johnston formula. Washington was apparently reluctant to intervene during the March 2001 opening of the initial Wazzani pump, based on the Israeli reaction. When did get involved, it was low level mediation. However, in the subsequent 2002 Wazzani confrontation, America rapidly intervened, because violence between Lebanon and Israel apparently might sidetrack the campaign against Iraq. Hence in September, an official water expert based in the American Embassy in Jordan led a fact-finding team to the Wazzani project. The American mediators "convinced" Lebanon to use the Wazzani water for drinking only, but especially not for irrigation. From this, the Lebanese perceived that their project was secure from Israeli sabotage, and that the Israelis had agreed to the limit of the volume to be pumped. This allowed both Lebanon and Israel face-saving de-escalation.

Yet, in the wider political climate, Lebanon did not wish to negotiate with Israel because it had commited to coordinate foreign policy with Syria. Israel also continued to occupy the Shebaa farms. Lebanon's official position was that it would not accept American -led mediation, but would only resort to the United Nations. Although France, the USA, and the UN sent representatives to mediate the conflict, Lebanon considered these envoys as "technical" staff only, lacking sufficient diplomatic status to negotiate water rights and allocations. These issues, Lebanon insisted, ought to be overseen by U.N. diplomatic supervision.

Israel contended that American mediators warned Lebanon to halt work and not to pump water from the Wazzani. Lebanon's defiance was reported by a leading Israeli paper as another (global) example of the "limits of America's power as world policeman."[17] Perhaps from this provocative posturing, the American Embassy in Beirut was not

16. Ali Faour, *South Lebanon: People and Nature* (Beirut: Dar al-Bahith for Publishing, 1985), p. 185.

17. Aluf Benn, "Waiting Also Carries a Price," *Ha'aretz* (January 20, 2003). *http://www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=%20247618&contrassID=2&subContrassID=4&sbSubContrassID=0&listSrc=Y&itemNo=247618*

represented at the pump inauguration ceremony in the Fall of 2002. Some in Bush's administration felt that the Wazzani project deliberately attempted to create a new tension along the border, and thus to distract the U.S. from preparing for war against Iraq.[18] Yet, it should be borne in mind that the U.S. extracted a promise from Lebanon to restrict water use to drinking only, and succeeded in calming the antagonists on either side of the border.

Wazzani Water and the War of Words in the Media

Lebanon was not prepared for a media-based confrontation over the Wazzani pump, which could shape public opinion and force action in Washington and elsewhere. While Lebanon's public relations campaign yielded some success, it was no match for Israel in how its case was presented to the "court" of world opinion.

In contrast, the Israeli media crafted a certain public outrage. Scenarios of action, counter-action, and of war were being aired inside Israel. And Governmental officials issued threats of preemptive action. In this regard, the Minister of National Infrastructure, Avigdor Lieberman, stated that the Wazani project "cannot be allowed to pass without a reaction."[19] Similarly, spokesmen for other organizations including the Water Commissioner (Shimon Tal), Mekorot water company head (Uri Saguy), and the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, expounded, in an orchestrated front, on the negative consequences of the Lebanese action. Saguy stated: "There is no water in the Middle East. Therefore, understandings must be reached. If not, it can turn into a war or a forceful confrontation."[20] An influential member of the Knesset, Michael Kleiner, argued for the government to destroy the pump.[21] Hillel Plasman, head of

18. The US was also irritated with Lebanon because of the continued support of Hezbollah and its failure to deploy its armed forces along the Lebanon-Israel border.

19. Phil Reeves, "Fight Over Four-inch Water Pipe Reignites Tension on Lebanese Border," *The Independent* (UK, March 16, 2001). *http://globalarchive.ft.com/globalarchive/article.html?id=0103160 01345&query=Lebanon+and+water*

20. Arieh O'Sullivan and Herb Keinon, "Lebanon Warned Not to Divert River..."

21. *Ibid.*

the river impacts of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, stated that a reduction in the flow of the Wazani would "cause damage to the natural flora and fauna of the river."[22]

Some newspapers accused Lebanon of "opening a new front" which was no less dangerous than the threat posed by Hezbollah's Katyushas rockets. Others, however, described the episode as a "storm in a glass," in which the Israeli media and government officials exaggerated their "concern." The UNIFIL's spokesman countered that "You don't divert a river with a pipe so small."[23]

Some news stories invoked the incident of 1964, when a summit of Arab leaders decided to deliberately divert the water of the Hasbani to harm Israel's economy, and the Israelis answered with military force. The attempted diversion in the 1960s was seen by Israel as a *causus belli*. By merely invoking the 1964 episode to historically contextualize the political significance of the Wazani pump incident, the war option nudged forward.[24]

To stand back and analyze the confrontation, the Israeli media confused the small scale Wazani spring project with the much larger Hasbani River activities. Remember, that the Wazani and other tributaries feed the Hasbani River. Accordingly, "Israel sent a very sharp message to Syria and Lebanon through the United Nations, warning them that diverting the waters of the Hatsbani River would violate international conventions."[25] The media also postulated that any diversion on the Hasbani River could dry up one of Israel's prime water sources, and its principal freshwater reservoir, Lake Tiberias.[26] All this is to say that the nearly-dry and miniscule Wazzani Spring, was equated with the Hasbani River.

22. Arieh O'Sullivan and Herb Keinon, "Lebanon Warned Not to Divert River..."

23. Samer Wehbi, "Beirut Plans to Dismantle Israeli Pump on Hasbani," *Daily Star*, 26 (March 2001). *http://www.dailystar.com.lb/26_03_01/art7.htm*

24. The media did not acknowledge the fact that the context had changed considerably from events that took place four decades earlier within the context of the Cold War, and the different realities of the twenty first century.

25. Rinat Zafrir and Agencies, "Lebanon's Proposed Water Station Pumps Up the Tension," *Ha'aretz* (March 15, 2001). *http://www3.haaretz.co.il/eng/htmls/kat6_3.htm*

26. *Ibid.*

The Israeli media's coverage of the Wazzani project became more virulent and distorted during the course of 2001 to 2002. The coverage ranged from cynicism ("What does Lebanon want" from this project?) to intimidation and threats (Lebanon is "target(ing) Israel with water, rather than guns."[27] One newspaper editorial suggests that Lebanon would be increasing its water withdrawal from the Hasbani by 28 percent, and that the Hasbani is an "important part" of the "daily existence" of Israelis.[28] It should be borne in mind, however, that Lebanon withdraws from both the Hasbani and Wazani 5mcm to 7mcm per year, a fraction of what it would be entitled under international law, or under the Johnson plan.

To put the debate in comparative perspective, water is of greater importance to Lebanon than to Israel. The agricultural sector in Israel employs less than four percent of the labor force and contributes two percent to the gross domestic product (GDP). However, the agricultural sector employs ten percent of Lebanon's labor force, and contributes thirteen percent to the country's GDP. The economy of South Lebanon is even more dependent on farming. Further more, the recently-liberated security zone's economic infrastructure was severely battered by decades of war and protracted military occupation. Throughout the period of conflict spanning three decades, the zone suffered from the absence of the governmental authority, and was increasingly isolated from the rest of Lebanon. The cumulative effects were poverty, underdevelopment, and dispossession. This author visited the newly-liberated area in 2001 and observed neglect and the need for economic development. Developing the Wazani spring aided the needy. While the Lebanese officials could have emphasized this point to the media, they did not.

To this end, the Lebanese government convened a committee of technical experts and civil servants, chaired by Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. The resulting 100 page report was sent to the UN Secretary-General to assert Lebanon's right to develop the Wazzani. In

27. Editorial, "A Thirst For Escalation," *The Jerusalem Post* (September 17, 2002).

28. *Ibid.*

early 2003, the Prime Minister stated: "We asked the U.N., U.S., EU and Russia to help us define the quantity of water" that Lebanon can obtain from the Wazzani according to international law. Yet Hariri cautioned that "Maybe the political situation in the region does not allow peace, but it does not mean that the alternative is war."[29] Lebanon clearly sought a legal solution.

On the other hand, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stated that Israel will not "stand idly by," and that this "water theft" is a "cause for war." Israel considers itself as having "sacrificed" by allowing Lebanon to build the 2001 project, and is not willing to do the same for a larger pump in 2002. Such argument disregards international law. The Johnson plan is not cited, nor the fact that Israel has used the waters of the Hasbani for two decades.

On balance, Lebanon's print media offered some analyses showing the historical and the legal bases of context of the dispute. Lebanese water specialists were barely consulted by journalists for their own professional assessment of hydro-tensions. Generally, the Lebanese newspapers focused on reporting the news, though the Israeli experts' opinions were cited as they appeared in Reuters or Associated Presses, or in Israel's media. These experts supported Lebanon's right to utilize the Wazzani. One cannot fault the Lebanese journalists for balancing their news with the Israeli viewpoint. However, it should be borne in mind that the two states are officially in a state of war which explains some partisan reporting. Furthermore, many Israeli academics consult for the government of Israel.

A distinction needs to be made between statements made by politicians, and those made by experts. Statements by governmental officials are often seen as diplomatic gestures or responses to political signals. To illustrate, Prime Minister Rafik Hariri said: "We asked the U.N., U.S., EU and Russia to help us in defining the quantity of water" that Lebanon can obtain from the Wazzani according to international law.[30] He also stated his government's overall geopolitical position as one that

29. Combined Dispatches, "Israel-Lebanon Conflict Bubbles Below Surface," *Washington Times* (January 15, 2003). *Url: http://washingtontimes.com/world/20030115-28401859.htm*

30. *Ibid.*

rejects the much discussed idea of water war.[31] Furthermore, government and other public officials are well versed in the politics of an issue but may not have a sound grasp of its scientific and technical details. Trained experts need to explain the various aspects to both world and domestic public opinion. The omission of local experts by the Lebanese press resulted in an inadvertent reliance on Israeli perspective.

Western journalists may easily access Israeli academics who express their authoritative views without fear. Had the Lebanese identified some local experts, international reporters could have interviewed them. Most journalists work with very tight schedules and are often unversed about the local scene or even the issues at hand. Add to this the fact that most western journalists are usually uninformed about issues as specific as the Wazzani story. When a major international story breaks out, newspaper editors rapidly deploy one (or more) of their journalists to cover the event. Reports by journalists who cover a story without much background knowledge are commonly referred to as "parachute journalism."

One journalist's tour of duty covering the "War on Terrorism" in Pakistan for a prominent American daily newspaper was coming to an end when the Wazzani story broke out in August 2002. On his way back to the USA, his editor asked him to stop in Lebanon and write a story on the Wazzani tensions. This journalist's job was to snatch a story and run. For him it is just another assignment.

Furnishing journalists with the historical context of the Wazzani water project and the desperate need of the local inhabitants for water would balance the presentation of the events. Politically, diplomatically and militarily, Israel is stronger than Lebanon. Yet this situation of David-and-Goliath can generate some sympathy for Lebanon.

Irrigation and Development

Lebanon's ample arable land (Table 2) could, if irrigated, boost agricultural output and increase incomes. "The average yield for irrigated wheat and barely was estimated at 5 tons/ha, as against 2.2

31. Combined Dispatches, "Israel-Lebanon Conflict..."

tons/ha for rain fed wheat and barely."[32] There are, then, notable incentives to entice farmers to covert rain fed fields to irrigated farms. The National Authority for the Litani River (NALR established effective 14 August, 1954), set forth objectives to implement the massive Litani project, drain and irrigate lands, and to provide potable water and electricity within a comprehensive water planning strategy for Lebanon. In 1955, the government applied for and received a $24 million loan from the World Bank to initiate this project which included the construction of the Markaba and Awali hydroelectric power (HEP) plants, and Awali HEP plant, and to irrigate 15,000 ha.[33] This represents, an early governmental effort to develop rural South Lebanon.

According to a study by a hydrological engineer, Ibrahim Abd Elal, Lebanon planned in 1959 to supply 16 villages in the Marjoun district with water from springs Shebaa which remained occupied after Israel evacuated the security zone in 2000. When the dispute over the pump erupted in 2001, the Lebanese government was rebuilding the house for the 1970's pump on the Wazani.

The Shebaa farms served as smugglers' havens for decades. The abundance of freshwater springs in Shebaa and its environs is a function of its topography. It is at 1250 m above sea level on the western foothills of Mount Hermon. The springs of Al Jwaz (walnut) and al Maghara (Cave) rise from Shebaa and have a flow of 50,000 (cu.m.). The waters of Shebaa were officially slated to be siphoned for use in Marjoun, Hasbaya, and alKhiyam as far back as 1931 and the project was completed in 1932. This project was eventually expanded to provide water for 19 villages and towns totaling 4089 paid "subscribers" by 1967.[34] This figure does not include water supply to the army and police barracks. The farms, then, are of hydrostrategic and of economic significance to Lebanon.

32. FAO, *Irrigation in the Near East in Figures* (Rome: FAO, 1997).

33. Y.A. Sayigh, *The Economies of the Arab World* (London: Croom Helm, 1978); Jafar Sharaf ad-Din, "The Litani or a Broken River?" in *Water and Peace in the Middle East*, H. as-Sabi, *et al*, eds., 12 (Beirut: Ma'loumat (Arab Center for Information), August 1994).

34. Adbul Hadi Nour Eddin, "Acquired Water Rights in Shebaa" in *Water Facts in Lebanon (Waqi al-Miyah fi Lubnan)* First Study, Conference Proceedings (October 27-28, 1992), p. 326.

(Table 2.0): Water Use for Irrigation by Province, Lebanon

	Irrigated Area by		Total
	Surface water	Ground water	
Irrigated Area by Province (ha)			
North	12,200	2,800	15,000
Mount	7,300	500	7,800
South	9,700	6,200	15,900
Bekaa	18,300	1,0000	28,800
Total of permanently irrigated area	4,7500	20,000	67,500
Seasonally irrigated areas	13,000	7,000	20,000
Total area under irrigation	60,500	27,000	87,500 ha (1993 data)
% area irrigated from ground water		45.7% (1993 data)	
% area irrigated from surface water	54.3 (1993 data)		
Irrigation potential	177,500 ha (1992 data)		

Source: Amery 2000

The economic feasibility of "Irrigating the South" was completed in 1965. It was, however, delayed by the disagreement over where to irrigate, and later by the instability from Israeli occupation of South Lebanon. The country's drive towards larger and larger irrigation faced the "sectarian challenges" of where to irrigate, and at what elevations. An implicit question was being asked: should the politically and economically disadvantaged Shia receive irrigation coverage similar to that of the more advantaged Maronites and Sunnis? On the 29th August, 1973, the Council of Ministers agreed to implement the first phase of Jabal A'mil irrigation project by building the necessary infrastructure to provide water to areas located up to 800 meters above sea level. In 1974, the Parliament voted to allocate 191 million LL to implement the project.[35] The sectarian challenges and other factors such as difficulties in financing the projects, corruption, political instability — all greatly slowed the country's struggle to realize its national agricultural objectives.

Analyses and Conclusions

The scale and speed of development in rural South Lebanon are constrained by the degree of destruction, deterioration of the long-neglected arable lands, the abundance of land mines, the poor condition of the roads and limited water resources. These problems are compounded by being adjacent to an enemy nation. Over 130, 000 land mines were placed by Israel in the South, which impeded farming.

Ideally, Lebanon can export more of its agricultural produce, especially fruits and vegetables, into the lucrative markets of oil-rich but water-poor Arab states. Exporting "virtual water"(water embodied in agricultural produce) would revitalize Lebanon's rural areas.

South Lebanon remains impoverished and underdeveloped. Ameliorating this situation necessitates delivering fresh water to the villages, towns and farms. This is pivotal to the accelerated return of the area's residents. Yet, this could intensify local demands for domestic and irrigation water and hence amplify the hydrological tensions with Israel.

35. *Assafir, Water Issues in Perspective* (April 5, 1994), p. 5.

Alternatively, reviving the economy of South Lebanon would stabilize this area, since the residents will have a vested interest in maintaining and protecting their livelihood and well-being. The faster the economic foundations are (re) established, the faster civilians would re-settle the border villages, as a step towards peace and tranquility. Finally, a part of economic and political development would be to develop a proactive media. The Lebanese can and should "become the media." Neither the media nor the West are endemically hostile to Lebanon. This paper outlines some small steps that Lebanon can take to balance the media's coverage of political issues like water ■

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