The securitization of the Disi Aquifer: a silent conflict between Jordan and Saudi Arabia
Disi is

- A shared groundwater basin
- A non-renewable aquifer
- A project with a heavy environmental impact
- Far from Amman and consequently costly
Our theoretical tools

- The securitization continuum
  - Non-politicised
  - Politicised
  - Securitized
  - Violised

- The Sanctioned discourse
- The hydraulic mission concept
- The concept of “non violent conflict”
- Silence as a method of control & power
- Prior use concept
Why Disi?

- Jordan is one of the countries located within Israel’s hegemonic area.
- As a consequence of this, Jordan chose the option to embark on a conflict with Saudi Arabia than opening a new bargaining process with Israel.
- Disi is therefore an effect of dominance depending on the Israeli “hydro-Hegemon status”.

The politicization phase

- Disi was discovered in 1984 and until the 1990s geological and hydro-chemical surveys were the only studies available on the subject.
- During the 1990s the Disi aquifer was targeted as a short-term solution by Jordan, due to the political unfeasibility of bigger projects at a regional level (Unity Dam, Red-Dead Canal).
- Disi starts to be considered as an international political issue. A “groundwater conflict” and a “pumping race” with Saudi Arabia is feared (Shapland 1997).
The securitization phase

“An issue may be securitised by the performance of the speech act of inscribing that issue with meaning as part of the security politics” Neumann 1998

- Jordan accuses Saudi Arabia of over-exploitation in 1992 and 1999, with no official reply from the Saudi Government
- In 2002 the Minister of Water and Irrigation declared that Disi was part of the National Security Issue. As such, the project was set by the Ministry of Water as a first priority for 2002
- Between 2002 and 2004 the accessibility to the environmental feasibility studies has been blocked
- The data regarding the renewability of the aquifer, its capacity and the proposed pumping rate have been secreted.
The narrative and the securitisation continuum of Disi project

Jordan accuses Saudi Arabia of over-exploitation (1992 and 1999)

Disi is declared a national security issue and, therefore, it is silenced

Politisation 1990's

Securitisation 2002-2004

Non-politicised

Politised

Securitised & silenced

Demand

: Phases / : Processes / : Events
Why a silenced securitization?

- A silenced securitization is useful in the case you prepare yourself to exploit the principle of “prior use”.
- This principle states that, in the case of a water agreement, a state shall be entitled to the same amount of water usually exploited in the past.
- A state tries to pump more water than usual in order to claim a major quantity of the resource, in case it will face a bargaining process that will lead to an agreement with a co-riparian state.
Conclusions

- Disi can be put in the list of non-violent conflicts running over shared waters
- Disi project is currently being securitized by the Jordanian Government
- The conflict is being silenced by both Jordan and Saudi Arabia
- A silence as a method of control and power is here suggested as a tool for future analysis in the field of water conflicts
THE FUTURE
Whishing well: waiting for desecuritisation?

“Desecuritisation of water resource management is a healthy manifestation, because it opens up the discourse and allows a wider range of roleplayers to become involved in the resolution of the core problem. This tends to foster institutional development and manifest as a win-win outcome, which is inherently more conducive to economic growth and hence positive peace”. (Turton 2003).
Thank you!

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