



ROUNDTABLE ON NEW ARCHITECTURE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

Amman, Jordan
February 22 – 23, 2017

Co-hosted by

Strategic Foresight Group
El Majlis El Hassan

in cooperation with

Royal Scientific Society
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

A group of opinion makers from Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, along with international experts, met at the Royal Scientific Society in Amman on February 22-23, 2017 to identify elements of a new architecture for the Middle East and to define institutional structures underpinning it. The meeting was co-convened by the Strategic Foresight Group and El Majlis El Hassan in cooperation with Royal Scientific Society and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). It was organized under the patronage of HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan.



OPENING SESSION

The roundtable opened with a keynote address by HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal. He emphasized the need to focus on human dignity as the basis for a new architecture for the Middle East. He suggested that it is important to focus on Levant, as it is the region requiring new directions since some of the other parts of the Middle East have developed other models for their growth. In brief, the future of the region will depend on strengthening institutions that reinforce human dignity in the Levant region. To this end, he made the following suggestions:

- Overall effort should be made to shift from politics to policies.
- It is important to consider the carrying capacity of the Earth and any region while formulating policies. At the current rate of consumption, it is estimated that resources equivalent to three Earths would be required. It is important to conserve our resources and to lower pressure on them.



- The direction of the effort should be forward-looking as excessive obsession with the past cannot help the region find solutions to the problems of the present.
- It is necessary to focus on economic, social, and environmental resilience.
- An important aspect of social resilience is social equalities in the Middle East including gender equality. The life of a child in Yemen should be no different than the life of a child in Qatar.
- We must promote Sustainable Development Goal for Justice with an aim to empower citizens.
- Resilience requires good water governance and provision of sanitation, health care, and education to the entire population.

- It is necessary to go beyond a commercial and nationalist view of water to a cooperative and regional view of its management. With such a perspective, collaborative and sustainable management of water resources of the region becomes essential.
- Regional cooperation in water should be promoted in such a way that can also expand regional productive base and, therefore, create opportunities of employment and livelihood. Such a base cannot be solely dependent on small and medium enterprises.
- It is also necessary to develop a regional knowledge base, particularly about the environment and natural resources.
- It is necessary to take the message of collaborative and sustainable management of water resources to communities across the region and away from capitals. To this end, it is necessary to have interactions with communities at numerous locations and to engage with civil society and university students.
- All these efforts should culminate into the formation of a Regional Cooperation Council for the Sustainable Management of Water Resources.



Ambassador Safia al-Suhail of Iraq highlighted the importance of protecting water resources from terrorist actions. She said that water should not be allowed to be used as a weapon or target of war. She expressed hope in the Blue Peace process for promoting collaborative water management in the Middle East.

Ms Esse Nilsson of Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) explained Sweden's policies and rationale for supporting the Blue Peace process. She underlined the importance of stakeholder engagement and an inclusive approach to make space for voices that are normally not heard, but are significant in the development process. She also

emphasized the importance of creating a regional knowledge base and to underpin it with an appropriate regionally-owned and regionally-steered institutional apparatus.

EXPERIENCE EXCHANGE

The roundtable continued the tradition of exchanging experiences. Ambassador Tariq Karim, former Senior Envoy of Bangladesh, with a long experience in water diplomacy in South Asia, suggested that the following factors are helpful in promoting trans-boundary cooperation:

- In any region, there is always asymmetry between nations and this has to be accepted as a reality.
- Political will is a must and exists often. However, bureaucratic orthodoxy falls behind the will of political leadership.
- Political will is a must but not enough. There must be an intergovernmental institutional mechanism to monitor the progress reflecting the political will. The mechanism should have representation at a level representing the Heads of Government.
- Progress should be made in the first half of the electoral term when the democratically elected leaders are relatively free from political compulsion and, therefore, are willing to take greater risk.
- Restoring or creating connectivity through water is often helpful.
- Where there is a vast region, a beginning can be made with sub-regional cooperation involving three countries with contiguous borders and good relations.
- Cooperation in water can be made possible if security concerns of all the riparian countries are respected and, where necessary, a trade-off between water and security is accepted.

Ms Judith Enaw, Secretary General of CICOS and President of African Network of River Basin Organizations, suggested that the following factors are helpful in promoting trans-boundary cooperation:

- Water cooperation should be seen as a means for achieving economic growth and social wellbeing for the people.
- Countries should develop their national strategies bearing in mind implications for their neighbours and in some form of coordination with each other.
- Proper management can only be possible when there is deep notion and intention in sharing the resources.
- In order to translate good intentions into collaborative and sustainable management of water resources, it is important to outline priorities and begin with easier sectors and then build cooperation to include more challenging sectors. In the case of CICOS, they began with safe navigation in the Congo Basin and then added fisheries and other issues.
- Trans-boundary water cooperation does not always lead to win-win outcomes but the failure to have trans-boundary water cooperation can create lose-all outcomes.



ELEMENTS OF NEW ARCHITECTURE

Participants expressed concern about the volatile and uncertain nature of current politics in the Middle East and the difficulties in mapping future trajectories. Under the circumstances, they expressed the need for new ways and a new architecture, but also the need to proceed with caution. Some of the ideas that were discussed included:

- There should be a new humanitarian order in the Middle East underpinned by human dignity, social justice, inclusion, and respect for environment.
- While there are many issues which divide the region, it is necessary to focus on the issues that can potentially unite the region. In this context, water and its relevance to food, energy, and environment can be seen as a uniting factor.
- It is therefore necessary to explore the creation of a regional cooperation architecture centred on water and environment in the longer journey to find peace and stability in the Middle East, particularly the Levant.
- In the immediate future, the relationship between water, refugees, and the gender factor should be carefully addressed. There are about 40 million hydro-insecure people in the Levant, some of them turning into refugees due to water scarcity and drought, and all of them adding pressure for demand on water and sanitation in some of the urban centers. In this scenario, women are found to be both victims and solution providers at the grassroots level. Therefore, the dynamics between water, refugees, and the gender factor should be considered while designing a policy response.
- The process of trade integration should be renewed as it can lead to prosperity in the border regions.

- The four frontline states around Syria namely Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey should find ways to engage in practical cooperation on humanitarian issues including water, refugees, and social justice, and pave the way for a new humanitarian order in the Middle East. This will hopefully also absorb Syria in the future, once the country has a stable polity.
- Any new architecture for the Middle East should be supported by financial resources from within the region and not be entirely dependent on external financing.

WAY FORWARD

There was unanimity among participants to have a long term goal of establishing a regional cooperation council for water management officially created by governments of the region as an inter-governmental agency with appropriate political mandate. There was also realisation that this would have to wait until there is a functional state in Syria and the ISIS is weakened enough to make it possible for all states to operate in a rational way. In the meanwhile, there could be bilateral or sub-regional committees to explore specific cooperation, such as the one between Iraq and Turkey which is already operational and one between Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon which can be explored.

There was also support for the promotion of technical cooperation through data exchange, harmonization of standards, training and capacity building.

There was a strong sentiment among the participants about the need to have a regionally-driven and regionally-owned institutional inclusive mechanism for policy dialogue. Such a mechanism can be in the form of a center or an institute which facilitates policy discussion between different stakeholders. It should create space for vulnerable and marginalized communities, women, and youth to voice their concerns and ideas for solutions. It should also be instrumental in creating a regional knowledge base by reaching out to the universities across the Middle East.

Such an institutional mechanism could be created in Jordan considering the relatively neutral place of Jordan in the current politics of the Middle East, its institutional experience and capacity, and its ability to reach the entire MENA region.



List of Participants

PATRON

- HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan

JORDAN

- Mr Khaled Shraydeh, former Minister of Energy
- Dr Ahmad Mango, Senior advisor to HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal
- Prof Elias Salameh, Professor of hydrogeology and hydrochemistry at the University of Jordan
- Dr Duried Mahasneh, former Secretary General of Jordan Valley Authority
- Dr Maysoon Zoubi, Secretary General, Population Council
- Mr Samir Barhoum, Chief Editor, The Jordan Times
- Ms Hana Namrouqa, Senior Columnist, The Jordan Times
- Ms Reem Sharaf, Senior Columnist, Al Rai Newspaper
- Ms Iman Alfares, Senior Journalist, Alghad Newspaper

IRAQ

- Dr Bakhtiar Amin, former Minister of Human Rights
- Ms Safia al-Suhail, Iraqi Ambassador to Jordan and the Palestine
- Dr Shirouk Abayachi, Co-chair of Parliament Committee on Water and Agriculture
- Ms Bohar Isa, Member of Parliament
- Mr Hajim Alhassani, former Speaker of Iraqi Parliament and former Minister
- Dr Diary Ali, Head of Geology Department, University of Sulaimani
- Dr Yadgar K Ahmmad, Researcher and Lecturer in Public International Law and Human Rights Law

LEBANON

- Dr Basem Shabb, Member of Parliament, Lebanon
- Eng Zeina Majdalani, Economic Expert, Office of the Prime Minister, Lebanon
- Dr Selim Catafago, President of Board of Directors, Litani River Authority, Lebanon
- Ms Roula Majdalani, Director of the Sustainable Development Policies Division, UN-ESCWA, Lebanon
- Mr Issa Goraieb, Chief Columnist, L'Orient-Le Jour
- Ms Mey Sayegh, International News Editor, Al-Joumhouria
- Ms Sara Matar, Reporter & Editor, Future Newspaper

TURKEY

- Mr Reha Denemeç, Senior Advisor to the President of Turkey
- Mr Saban Disli, Member of Parliament, Deputy Chairman of AK Party
- Mr Mehmet Celik, Political News Editor, Daily Sabah
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INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS AND INVITEES

- Ambassador Mojtaba Ferdosipour, Iranian Ambassador to Jordan
- Dr Tariq Karim, Advisor to the World Bank for Regional Integration, South Asian Region and former Ambassador of Bangladesh
- Ms Judith Enaw, Secretary General of the International Commission for the Congo-Oubangui-Sangha Basin (CICOS)
- Ms Chloe de Preneuf, Middle East expert
- Dr Maisa El Gamal, Attorney at Law, Cairo, Egypt
- Ms Tessa Terpstra, Counsellor at Embassy of the Netherlands in Jordan

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

- Ms Esse Nilsson, Senior Programme Manager, MENA Unit, Stockholm
- Ms Yosra Albakkar, Embassy of Sweden in Jordan

MAJLIS EL HASSAN

- Dr Hakam Al Alami
- Ms Antonia Dimou
- Mr Maximilian Shadbolt

WANA INSTITUTE

- Mr Barik Mhadeen
- Ms Juliet Dryden

ROYAL SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY

- Eng Rafat Atieh Faiyad Assi
- Dr Othman Ahmad Salman Almashaqbeh
- Ms Suha Mohammad Khalil Shouqar

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT GROUP

- Dr Sundeep Waslekar, President
- Ms Ilmas Futehally, Executive Director
- Ms Parita Kotak, Research Analyst

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