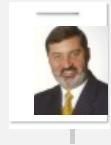


Middle East: Water — Question for Short Debate

4:34 pm

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Lord Alderdice (Liberal Democrat)

To ask [Her Majesty's Government](#) what assessment they have made of the [Strategic Foresight Group's](#) report *The Blue Peace on transforming water from a source of conflict into a basis for co-operation in the Middle East*.

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Lord Alderdice (Liberal Democrat)

My Lords, first, I declare my interests as in the *Register of Lords' Interests*. I am president of ARTIS (Europe) Ltd, which is a research and risk analysis company that takes some interest in the affairs of the Middle East and further afield. I have a number of non-remunerative interests in the Gulf policy forum, International Dialogue Initiative, [World Federation of Scientists](#), Conflicts Forum, and [Oxford Research Group](#). Of course, as I think noble Lords are aware, my real interests in this issue, this area and this subject go back a good deal further than any of my involvements in the organisations that I have mentioned and come from my experience in my part of the world, where I became aware that groups of people can be set against each other not because anybody wants conflict or its terrible results, but because they find themselves trapped in it.

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I am particularly honoured not only that a number of noble Lords who share those interests are participating in this debate but, in particular, that the noble Lord, Lord Williams of Baglan, has chosen this debate for his [maiden speech](#). He is an extremely distinguished diplomat, but I was privileged to come to know him through his involvement as UN special representative and then UK special representative in the Middle East. In conversations with him, I have found him thoughtful, enlightening, instructive, supportive and encouraging. It is a great delight to me to see him on the red Benches of your Lordships' House because I have no doubt that he will bring a very distinctive style and an extraordinary and distinguished experience to the corpus of knowledge and understanding in your Lordships' House.

Even before meeting the noble Lord, Lord Williams, I found myself very much involved in trying to find ways in which it was possible to encourage or facilitate people in the Middle East, not just in Israel and Palestine, although that is an important part of the area, but in other places, to see if any of the experiences that we had in the United Kingdom and more broadly might be helpful to them in finding a way out of the problem. Initially, I found myself doing what I had found extremely difficult to do at home, which was to engage with people who I not only disagreed with deeply but who were prepared to use or to threaten to use violence. I found that although it was possible for me to do that, many others simply found it beyond what was possible for them to consider, at least at that juncture, although my experience is that eventually it is necessary in most cases, but not all, to engage with those who cause the violence if you want to bring the violence to an end.

I then began to look at what had been necessary to create the context where we could address the issues between the British and Irish Governments and within the Province of [Northern Ireland](#). The truth was that we probably would never have been able to do it if there had not been a wider framework in which that was possible: in particular, the European Union, and the good relations of both our countries with the United States. Some noble Lords will remember that some years ago I introduced a debate in your Lordships' House on the development of an inclusive, semi-permanent conference on the

Middle East, the creation of a table where people from different countries with very different prospects could meet and engage with each other, as we have done in the European Union. Despite all the current financial and economic difficulties, we must not forget that we have now had two and more generations of peace in western Europe. I sometimes think we forget about that when we get so involved in the economic questions. Fundamentally, the European Union is an instrument of peace and conflict resolution much more than it is a matter of economics, which is the instrument, not the purpose.

I found that even as we tried to press this question there seemed to be a lack of urgency, so I went back to my colleagues in the [Strategic Foresight Group](#), which is based in Mumbai, who had helped to put together that report on the inclusive semi-permanent conference for the Middle East and encouraged them, along with some other friends from the Middle East and the United States, to produce a report on the cost of the conflict, which is many trillions of dollars over a number of years. I rather hoped that when people saw the enormous cost, not just to people in the region, but to all of us, perhaps it might encourage them to address these questions. But while we think that economics are the dominant factor, I am afraid that the truth is that there are some things that are even more important for us as human beings, and we sometimes engage in activities that are to our massive economic detriment because there are other values that drive us.

I went back to my colleagues in the Strategic Foresight Group to think about whether there were things that we were missing or that we did not understand and were necessary. As we looked back at the European Union, whose development has been of such importance, as I have said, we were struck by the way in which, after the [Second World War](#), the matters chosen for co-operation-coal and steel-were the very materials used to create the weapons of war and were based in the very areas that had been matters of dispute. We began to ask whether there are similar commodities in that region that could be or could become the cause of conflict, but which, if handled in a different way, could become the mechanism for co-operation, because they are shared requirements and shared needs. In the Middle East, the issues are not coal and steel, but water, energy and the environment. These things transcend borders in any case, but in a region like the Middle East many borders were simply straight lines drawn on a map with little cognisance given to social questions of tribe or community, to geographical and economic geographical questions, or to rivers and mountains and other kinds of naturally bounded communities. Things like water, energy and the environment transcend all our borders, especially in the Middle East.

Through colleagues in the World Federation of Scientists and a number of other such specialist groups, we began to look at water in particular. We thought that, if it is possible for people to understand that we need to engage with these issues as human communities and that we can learn a great deal from each other, perhaps with that engagement on human, social, economic and scientific projects, separate from the apparently almost insoluble political questions, we can build relationships between the countries that will enable us to address these other questions, as has been the case in our own part of Europe.

Our friends in the Strategic Foresight Group put together a report, which some noble Lords will have read while others will have read a précis of it. But noble Lords will clearly see that a thorough, thoughtful and deep piece of work has been done on many of the technical and scientific questions that must be addressed. But that, in a way, is simply to show that these are serious issues which need exploration. In practice, when we have gone to these countries and Governments, and have been able to bring many of them together in conferences in Turkey, Switzerland and elsewhere, it has been clear that there are opportunities to co-operate.

Noble Lords will not be surprised to know that we very quickly ran into the problem that most countries in the region simply would not sit down with the [Israeli Government](#). We tried various ways to facilitate that but we came to the conclusion that for the present that is not possible, which is a dreadful pity. The Israeli Government and the Israeli scientific community have been remarkable in the developments of technology that they have been able to make in their region. Their capacity for recycling water, for example, and for using it is way ahead of any other country in the world. There are so many things that they could give-and in terms of the availability of water, a country like Turkey has so much to give. But it simply proved to be impossible to get them together at this stage.

Therefore, we tried to bring together those countries in the north-Turkey, Syria,

Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan-and to bring Israelis together with Palestinians as well, indeed, with Jordanians. There has been some progress and there is an interest in moving forward on these issues. Of course, it is true that with the advent of the Arab spring, profound uncertainty has been thrown over all of this. In particular, it is impossible to do any work with Syria and the Syrian Government at the moment. One might well say, "Surely, that just throws the whole thing to the side". I do not believe that for two reasons. First, the proposition that we tried to create institutions that enabled governments to co-operate on issues like water is not something for this week, next month or even the next year or two. We did not develop the European Union over a year or two but over many decades. This approach requires decades of overcoming hurdles and working together. The second thing is that if we do not have positive outcomes and directions for the Arab spring, then what may have started as an exciting prospect for the region could turn out to be much more disappointing and difficult.

I am grateful to the House for the opportunity to raise this question and I hope that the [Minister](#) may at least be able to indicate [Her Majesty's Government's](#) preparedness to address this issue. We are not looking for money from the [Department for International Development](#) but for diplomatic encouragement through the [Foreign Office](#) to our diplomats in the region.

4:45 pm



Lord Palmer of Childs Hill (Liberal Democrat)

My Lords, I thank my noble friend [Lord Alderdice](#) for putting down this subject for debate in your Lordships' House. I also thank him for inviting me to a seminar earlier this year where I heard detailed speeches about the report to which he refers. It made me thirst to find out more about water. We must remember, as he has said, that there are other examples such as the [European Coal and Steel Community](#), which was a six-nation international organisation. That brought people together in what were difficult times. Whatever one's views on the European Union-this week there have been a lot of views on the European Union-it must be said that linking economies together has resulted in western European peace for over 60 years.

So can the same be achieved by a regional sharing of water? I believe it can. The problem is that there is not enough natural water to go round. Water or lack of it could be tomorrow's conflict in many arid regions-Turkey/Syria, Turkey/Iran and Egypt/Sudan to name several. The region described as the "southern circle" in the tome to which my noble friend Lord Alderdice refers shows how co-operation in this field can be made even without formal peace and has been shown for decades between Israel and Jordan. I take a certain amount of pessimism from his comment about people not being able to sit down, but Israel and Jordan have been sitting down quietly on this issue. I believe the way forward is shown by water technology in Israel, as he referred to. Israel is a leading producer of alternative, marginal water-essentially, desalination and waste-water treatment. This will in the next 10 years make up 50 per cent of Israel's total water supply. Ninety-two per cent of Israel's waste water was treated and about 75 per cent of that is used in agriculture. Other technologies include three large desalination plants. Within 10 years 23 per cent of potable water in Israel will be from desalination. Of course, the water of choice is freshwater and recharge from rainfall.

In the Palestinian territories in the [West Bank](#), waste-water treatment is sadly poor and there is no production of desalinated water. They have obviously had other problems which have been given priority. There are some desalination plants in Gaza but there is a great need for more. With Gaza's geographical position on the coast, there is a huge potential for more desalination. As the Arab spring, referred to by my noble friend Lord Alderdice, moves into the autumn, it is bound to struggle. When economies suffer terribly and agriculture is sadly devastated because of water shortage and desertification, co-operation needs to be built as soon as possible. Know-how on water treatment, sophisticated desert agriculture and the fight against desertification exists in the region in centres of excellence. I hope the EU, including the UK, will push forward with cross-border co-operation in these areas without waiting for slow political processes or listening to extremists in any country who flourish when conditions deteriorate. Co-operation in these areas is vital and might create better grounds and confidence that will accelerate political solutions.

I welcome *The Blue Peace* report on which this debate is based. There is, however, a view in the region that existing co-operation on water resources in what is called the southern circle in the book-that is, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian territories-is already more advanced than the proposals in the report. Things move fairly quickly but there is always

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room for improvement. As an example of this, an expert on regional water co-operation at the [Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) was this week in Oman at the biannual meeting of the organisation for regional co-operation in water, the Middle East Desalination Research Center. The organisation is located in Muscat in Oman, and its members are, amazingly, Oman, Qatar, [USA](#), the Netherlands, Japan, South Korea, Spain, Israel, Jordan and the [Palestinian Authority](#).

Next week, Israel is planning to hold a course on desalination in Israel for Palestinians and Jordanians. Next week, too, the biannual meeting of another regional organisation for co-operation on water, EXACT, will take place in Jerusalem. At the same time, a new trilateral project between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians, managed and sponsored by the USA and Norway, will be launched to deal with monitoring polluted ground water.

There is already impressive dialogue and co-operation on water issues between Israel and its neighbours in the region. This far exceeds regional co-operation in other areas and, amazingly, has managed to survive the problems that have beset the peace process.

Regional co-operation and dialogue on water issues began as long ago as 1992 as one of the five working groups established at the Madrid summit in 1991. The five areas covered were, as your Lordships will remember, water, environment, refugees, regional economic development and security. Water is the only main activity that has survived from the five groups and it remains active. Matters have moved on from the position in the *Blue Peace* paper.

The idea proposed in the *Blue Peace* paper to import water from Turkey is currently off the table for Israel as well for the Palestinian Authority, first of all for economic reasons. Even if Israel were to change its mind, it would need the water only for the next two years before it completed its national desalination project in 2013-14. The Palestinians do not have the facilities to absorb and distribute this water, even if Turkey were to provide it for free, although that may be a pessimistic viewpoint.

The paper suggests that the [RSDSC](#)-the Red Sea-Dead Sea Canal-is a long-term project, but the feasibility study is, I am pleased to say, in its final stage. By way of a subproject of the Red Sea-Dead Sea Canal, the general intention of the three beneficiaries, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians, is to build a desalination plant in Aqaba to create additional water for all three parties in the short term.

Co-operation on water between Israel and Jordan has improved in the past two years. During that period, because of the drought in the region and common work on the feasibility study for the Red Sea-Dead Sea Canal, new ideas were exchanged and things have moved forward, and there is an element of optimism. With the Palestinians, relations are more complex-perhaps I should not go into them in detail.

Israel implements its commitments on water provision. However, it is true that not everything goes smoothly and none of the Governments in the area is perfect. But generally, if one takes into account the multilateral regional co-operation, it can be said that the water situation is in some ways the opposite of the political situation in the region.

Water co-operation can help to build confidence between rival parties. No doubt this can be a good model for other areas of co-operation, but it cannot be a substitute for other tracks of the peace process.

We have a conundrum: can water bring peace, or does peace bring water? I am not sure, but what I am sure of is that I compliment my noble friend Lord Alderdice on bringing this debate to the House, on the expert way in which he has presented the paper, and on the background briefing that he has given to people such as me to make us more enthusiastic about water as a means to peace.

4:54 pm



Lord Williams of Baglan (Labour)

My Lords, I begin by thanking your Lordships for the warm welcome that I have received from all sides of this House. Noble Lords may recall that I was introduced on 18 October last year, but took a leave of absence from the House to continue my assignment as UN under-secretary- general for the Middle East for 12 months. I take this opportunity, therefore, to apologise to your Lordships for the delay in my [maiden speech](#).

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There are many Welsh men and women in this House, and two bear the name of the town in which I was brought up—Aberavon, or **Port Talbot**, in English. Indeed, as a child, I remember my noble and learned friend **Lord Morris** and the noble and learned Lord, Lord Howe, fighting the [general election](#) of 1959 for a seat in the [other place](#).

I have spent nearly my whole career in international affairs. It has often taken me overseas for extended periods, to Indonesia, Bosnia, Cambodia and Lebanon. I have worked as an academic, as well as for **Amnesty International**, the **BBC World Service**, the Foreign and **Commonwealth Office** and the **United Nations**.

In my UN career I had the privilege—not always a pleasure—of addressing the Security Council on several occasions, usually on the Middle East. I find it somewhat daunting now to address your Lordships' House in this important debate initiated by the noble Lord, **Lord Alderdice**. He has shown a strong interest in the Middle East over many years, and I commend his attention to an area that remains critical to world peace. I also thank him for his very kind remarks about our previous meetings and my experience in the region.

I have spent the last six years working almost exclusively on the Middle East, the past three based in the region. In particular, I was entrusted by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and then by his successor, **Ban Ki-Moon**, to secure the cessation of hostilities established by **Security Council Resolution** 1701 following the 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon. That resolution has worked remarkably well in securing stability, and there have been no major incidents between the two countries over the past five years. The people of Lebanon have been spared the many Israeli incursions that marked the quarter of a century between 1982 and 2006. For their part, the people of Israel, as former **Prime Minister Ehud Olmert** remarked to me, have been spared the many Hezbollah rocket attacks and raids that marked the years before 2006.

However, it has not been possible to move forward to a formal ceasefire, let alone a peace treaty. To some extent, the intransigence of both parties is at fault. In particular, there are Israel's daily violations of Lebanese airspace and continued occupation of a Lebanese village. On the Lebanese side, there is the presence of perhaps the world's most strongly armed non-state actor, Hezbollah, an organisation with a formidable [constituency](#) among Lebanon's Shia community. On the one hand, Hezbollah presents itself as a party that contests Lebanon's democratic elections and, on the other, it maintains a powerful militia outside the authority of the Lebanese state.

The failure to secure a Lebanese-Israeli peace, despite the fact that the two countries were until recently the only democracies in the Middle East, has been maintained by other factors. One has been the role of **President Assad's** Syria casting its dark [shadow](#) over Lebanon and facilitating Hezbollah's rearmament by an Iranian leadership that denies the very right of Israel to exist. Finally, the absence of progress in the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians inevitably freezes the prospects of peace between Lebanon and Israel and between Israel and Syria.

The immediate prospects for peace appear bleak. Frustration among the Palestinian leaders has led to their bid for statehood at the UN. That frustration has been intensified by the Palestinian sense that the efforts of President Mahmoud Abbas and **Prime Minister Salam Fayyad** to ensure security in the **West Bank** have not been met by an adequate response from the **Israeli Government**. In recent years, I have seldom met an Israeli general or security chief who has not attested to the genuine endeavours of the Palestinian leadership in this regard. Israel has offered talks, but with the continuation of extensive settlement activity in the West Bank and east Jerusalem and with far-reaching security demands regarding the **Jordan Valley**.

It is striking and ironic that the impasse over the Middle East peace process, the most serious since the Oslo agreements of 1993, has coincided with the unprecedented wave of political revival in the Arab world epitomised in the last week alone by the elections in Tunisia on Sunday and the demise of **Muammar Gaddafi**. Israel has not been alone in failing to comprehend the strategic significance of the Arab spring. The era of one-man rule and of authoritarianism is drawing to a close in the Arab world as it did earlier in eastern Europe and other regions of the world. We must brace ourselves for further political tumult in the region, some of which may not be to our liking.

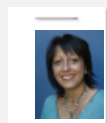
In the Middle East, differences between states are too often seen through the prism of the **Arab-Israeli** conflict. The issue of water raised by the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, is one such. Palestinians believe strongly and with some justification that their water resources have been taken advantage of by settlers in the West Bank. One often hears

that argument, with less justification, in Lebanon and other Arab countries. It often fails to recognise the fact that while Israel goes to great lengths to preserve its water supplies, Lebanon's infrastructure, for example, is woefully inadequate in this regard.

In recent years, new sources of tension have arisen, aside from the issue of water that the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, has drawn to our attention. I think particularly of the development of maritime resources and, above all, gas. Israel is well advanced now in the exploitation of natural gas in the offshore blocks that abut its coast. Cyprus and Lebanon are taking the necessary steps in this regard and Turkey has recently signalled its intent to embark on exploitation of maritime resources in the eastern Mediterranean. I hope that these resources can be seen as a source of opportunity and work for all the countries and peoples of the region but, in a region where maritime borders and boundaries are barely defined, I am concerned about the potential that exists now for further sources of conflict between its countries.

In closing, I wish to record my indebtedness to my sponsors, my noble friend [Lord Dubs](#), and my former UN colleague and noble friend [Lord Malloch-Brown](#). I also register my gratitude to the staff of this House, without whose advice a new Member would not find his way around.

5:03 pm



Baroness Falkner of Margravine (Liberal Democrat)

My Lords, it is a particular pleasure to follow the speech of the noble Lord, Lord Williams of Baglan. **He and I** share many similar interests. He read international relations a few years before I did, but he put it to far better use through a long and distinguished career in academia, the Foreign and **Commonwealth Office**, the **United Nations** and think tanks. Looking at his background, I was struck that our House, too, is becoming a refuge for that elite band of political fixers, the special advisers. The noble Lord was a special adviser to the late **Robin Cook** and to Jack Straw, Foreign Secretaries who in their time were certainly in the hot seat.

The noble Lord also brings a wealth of knowledge on the Middle East, as we just witnessed in his **maiden speech**. He will be pleased to know that a singular feature of this House is its expertise and strength in numbers of Peers who speak on foreign affairs. No matter how esoteric a subject, he will always find friends here to share his concerns and we look forward to his active participation in this House.

I turn now to the substantive debate, for which I am very grateful to my noble friend **Lord Alderdice** for initiating. It is seldom that one sees an initiative on peace in the Middle East without the presence of my noble friend somewhere in the frame.

Water was always a source of conflict, but what has changed in recent years is that it is being seen much more clearly in that light. It is therefore appropriate that the **Strategic Foresight Group** has gone to the heart of the region which is most conflict prone—the Middle East—to look at this aspect of what constitutes an impediment to peace and prosperity.

Prosperity in the region, and the role of water in providing for this, is the key to future development for the millions who live there. The pressures of demography, the requirements of agriculture and food security, jobs and livelihoods, sanitation and health and the natural environment are all dependent on adequate supplies of usable water. The politics of water is therefore closely linked to the politics of sovereign statehood. It is seen as an essential element of territorial integrity, but one which is increasingly beyond the control of a single state, if it ever was.

One factor that is gaining recognition in the debates over water security is the advent of climate change. As is now widely recognised, continuing climate change will exacerbate the water crisis in arid regions of the Middle East. Given that average global temperatures are likely to rise by 2 degrees Celsius during the 21st century, **Middle Eastern** countries are inevitably faced with a worsening water crisis.

This report builds on a successful record of transboundary water co-operation, which can be drawn on as models to go forward. In 1963 the European countries along the Rhine river signed up to the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine against Pollution. This helped to institutionalise co-operation between Germany, Switzerland, France and the Netherlands, and led to a dramatic decline in pollution. In 1972, the **United States and Canada** signed the **Great Lakes** agreement to protect the Great

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Lakes from pollution. This, too, significantly improved water quality in a heavily industrialised area.

The single distinguishing factor in those successful examples was that those countries already had good relations between each other. There was little fear of conflict and all had an economic interest in improving quality rather than disputing quantity. The main problem with water in the Middle East is scarcity. The competition for scarce water promotes a zero-sum mentality and can lead to greater tension.

Pollution issues, by contrast, are more amenable for resolution in a co-operative manner, as they can give rise to positive-sum co-operation. In the case of the Middle East, as we know, history has a long tail. The legacy of Ottoman rule still affects relations between Syria and Turkey. The more recent tensions in the Lebanese-Syrian relationship are being further aggravated by current events in Syria, and the [Israel-Palestine](#) dispute is one which has been already mentioned. The deteriorating relationship between Turkey and Israel also makes political co-operation in the region more challenging, as does Iraq's relationship with Turkey.

Let me turn to the most significant proposal in the report-that of taking a coalition of the willing, to establish mutually agreed circles of co-operation. A body comprising a political mechanism to define and take forward a common vision, to identify priorities, and to arrive at and implement decisions, would represent a major step forward. I like, too, the idea that the co-operation council would create protocols, devise guidelines and promote practical measures for joint projects. In reading the report I was struck by the singular lack of scientific consensus on how much water, and of what quality, was available as the sources flowed downstream. The lack of agreed data sets is bound to lead to conflicting versions of reality. This is further compounded by seasonal variations in rainfall and water surges across the region, which makes it impossible for one country to be able to realistically measure what has happened in another country without any co-operation on the ground.

It is also right that the envisaged activities of the council focus on issues that are less politicised and require relatively low levels of international co-operation. Developing common principles, promoting research, setting up early warning systems and developing methodologies for water management are all sensible steps and can be achieved below the level of high politics. Streamlining the legal architecture within countries is far more doable than trying to get countries to sign up to fresh treaties from the outset.

The proposals are ambitious-rightly so, in my view-in calling for engagement at the level of heads of government and/or high representatives. Unless the political will is there to support and deliver the objectives of the co-operation council, there will be little advance in policy co-ordination.

What was nevertheless confusing in the proposals was the rejection of the council as a negotiating platform. It seems to me that it is sort of self-contradictory to define a body as being run by Governments to reach political decisions yet to deny that negotiations between the parties will take place, particularly where concessions are sought in the face of a perceived national interest.

However, I also take encouragement from the examples of co-operation in the report, using water as an instrument for peace. The 1993 formation of the executive action committee including Israel, Palestine and Jordan, to share information and keep a dialogue open regarding their shared water resources, points the way. The setting up of joint measurement stations on the [Tigris and Euphrates](#) rivers also moves us forward. The initiatives between Syria and Turkey in 2009 and 2010 also show promise by focusing on areas where agreement is within reach, rather than being bound down by the evident disagreement that already exists. However, with the political situation in Syria, as with all other politics I suspect that there is now little progress in building on those measures.

Turning to that other long-term conflict-that between Israel and Palestine-I welcome the proposals for confidence-building measures between Israel and the [Palestinian Authority](#). What is urgently needed, however, are moves towards reconciliation between the Authority and Hamas to allow for the Palestinian people to be represented by a single Government. I was in Gaza in July and saw for myself the effects of water scarcity there which are so graphically described in this report. In fact, at the main water management station which we visited, the maps defining usable aquifers painted an even starker picture than that presented in the report.

Overall, the report gave us a wealth of ideas for managing the problem of water. Seeing how pressing the problems are, I was disappointed in its lack of development on the theme of demand management. We know that poor infrastructure, inadequate use of waste water, leaking pipes, agricultural misuse and household demand are all significant contributors to water waste. Lebanon, which is described as being in the middle of the spectrum of water scarcity, loses over 40 percent of its available water to leakage and poor transportation networks. We have the example of Jordan, which loses 35 per cent of its water to bad systems and old pipes, while in some parts Syria loses 60 per cent.

Many of the solutions to managing water can be found in domestic politics and can thus be adopted without waiting for international solutions. Developing a comprehensive water law, investing in drought and flood management and improving water use efficiency by households and businesses are all measures that can be undertaken here and now. I note that the report details Israeli expertise in this area and points to successful pilots in reusing waste water in the [West Bank](#) territories. I also know that the UK has expertise in all these areas. Can my noble friend the [Minister](#) tell us today whether the [Department for International Development](#) has resources that can provide assistance in this regard?

To conclude, the work of the Strategic Foresight Group has provided an excellent platform for anticipating a potential problem, looking at it comprehensively and arriving at pragmatic solutions which can be implemented in the short, medium and long terms. All that remains is to find the political will to implement it. The changes in the Arab world in the past year have provided both opportunities and threats. It is for the countries involved to see that doing nothing is no longer an option. If they are to safeguard the interests of all the people who live in the region, *The Blue Peace's* idea is one to build upon.

5:14 pm



Baroness Deech (Crossbencher)

Like others of your Lordships, I welcome and feel privileged to have been here for the [maiden speech](#) of the noble Lord, Lord Williams of Baglan. We can readily see that the House will benefit from his wide experience and I wish him a long and happy career here. I also congratulate the noble Lord, [Lord Alderdice](#), and agree with all the encouraging words and actions that he has described, stemming from his own experience. I express an interest as a trustee of the [Jewish National Fund](#), which invests inter alia in environmental projects in Israel.

I welcome the fact that the international community is addressing in a constructive way, in the excellent report *The Blue Peace*, the issue of transforming water supply into a trigger for collaboration and peace in the Middle East. As I will show, there are some grounds for hope. Already, as a result of the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan in 1994, Israel provides Jordan with a significant contribution to Amman's water supply, plus a storage capacity, and in return Israel is allowed to pump groundwater from the Arava basin from wells in Jordan. Israel and Palestine have an active joint water committee that meets regularly and Israel supplies water to Gaza, although maintenance is another issue.

The entire region is beset by common problems; a growing population, a diminishing supply of water and elevated expectations coming with higher living standards. Syria is drought-hit, through climate change, manmade desertification and lack of irrigation. One has to think long-term, for the alliances and enmities in the Middle East may change. Alongside the massacres inflicted by Syria's Government on their own people, their mismanagement of agriculture and irrigation add to their woes. Israel can hardly be expected to reach a deal with Syria over [Lake Kinneret](#) while that country is in a state of uprising. Iraq accuses Syria, Iran and Turkey of practices that reduce the flow of water to the [Tigris and Euphrates](#). The political instability of these countries exacerbates the environmental concerns. Turkey is unlikely to be a reliable partner in relation to the export of Turkish water to the [Jordan Valley](#), a project which has been considered, because of Turkey's changing needs.

However, there is good news too. At [Ben Gurion University](#) in the Negev there is funded a joint project between Israelis and Palestinians to address clean water issues in the [West Bank](#) area of Nablus; the team includes one person from Ben Gurion University, a professor from the Biodiversity and Environmental Research Centre in Nablus and an American. They are working on purifying secondary waste water, an immediate resource for irrigation. Also at Ben Gurion University, researchers have an

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award from the [NATO Science for Peace](#) programme to work on desalination in Jordan and in Israel; they work in collaboration with colleagues from the [Hashemite University](#) of Jordan and from the US. Ben Gurion University has its first Jordanian PhD student. Having completed his first degree in Jordan, he went on to earn his masters degree at the Zuckerberg Institute for [Water Research](#) and then on to the PhD program there in the Negev and it has resulted in published research by Palestinian, Israeli and Jordanian authors together. Israeli technology is being introduced into Jordan.

There is a project known as the Red Sea-Dead Sea Canal project, already mentioned this afternoon-sometimes called the peace conduit-which, if it comes to fruition, will be a joint [Israel-Palestine](#)-Jordan undertaking. It envisages a pipeline from one sea to the other that would carry up to 2 billion cubic metres of seawater per annum to the Dead Sea, of which half could be desalinated and the rest would replenish the Dead Sea. The water level there has dropped in 50 years by almost 30 metres and the surface area has shrunk by a third in a century. There are environmental concerns with the project, which the [World Bank](#) is considering at the moment, but if it worked it would be a splendid demonstration of regional co-operation. The potential donors to this are Italy, France, Greece, Korea, Japan, Holland, Sweden and the [USA](#). One can but hope that the current euro financial crisis does not weaken this venture, one I hope that the [UK Government](#) will encourage. Its success would arrest the deterioration of the Dead Sea environment and provide drinking water to the Middle East.

Israel, Jordan and Syria have all diverted water from the upper Jordan Valley and deprived the Dead Sea of the input of water. But the situation is not necessarily a manmade problem. Research has estimated that today's low level of the Dead Sea was also the case in about 800 [AD](#). The temperature in the Middle East over the centuries has oscillated between calamity and abundance, the researchers say. We should not always blame human activity, for over time climate change has affected human behaviour in migration and agriculture as much as the other way round. Nevertheless, at this time drought is increasing in the Middle East.

It does not help the situation for accusations to be flung by one country at another. They are all in it together. [Amnesty International](#) rather predictably whipped up what has been called hydro-hysteria in its report *Thirsting for Justice* in 2009, which took a one-sided approach to the evidence on water resources between Israel and Palestine.

The Palestine Water Authority has had much responsibility for water delivery since the mid-1990s and is beset by accusations of mismanagement, although it is in receipt of grants from the World Bank and others. Before 1967, only 20 per cent of the [Occupied Territories](#) was connected to a water network; now 90 per cent has running water. Israel has stuck to its commitment under the Oslo peace accord and has even increased the committed allocation, with the result that the water supply for Palestinians is better than that provided in Jordan and Syria. However, 30 per cent is lost through leaks in the West Bank.

What are the solutions? First, the UK Government should urge the World Bank to progress the Red Sea-Dead Sea project and join in themselves, if they can. They should encourage the joint [Palestinian-Israeli](#) meetings taking place through the joint water committee. They should publicise and, if possible, assist in grants to the outstanding initiatives of the Ben Gurion University, with especial emphasis on desalination and joint working; there is already one scholarship for a Ben Gurion University student to Oxford and a project to create another at [Oxford Brookes](#). They should note that the [Palestinian National Authority](#) is the world's largest per-capita recipient of international development assistance, and try to ensure that some of that largesse is devoted to water management and improved water delivery.

The thinking behind the *Blue Peace* report and all the many studies of the water issue rests on an assumption that people want to live in peace and use water as a natural way of sustaining life. If martyrdom is preferred, then all assumptions collapse. There is an old fable about a scorpion asking a frog to carry him across a river. The frog is afraid of being stung during the trip but the scorpion argues that if it stung the frog, the frog would sink and the scorpion would drown. The frog agrees and begins carrying the scorpion, but mid-way across the river the scorpion does indeed sting the frog, dooming them both. When asked why, the scorpion points out that this is its nature. There is a variation on the ending in which the scorpion says, "It is better that we should both perish than that my enemy should live". This is what I feared might apply to water in the Middle East, but I am cheered and wish to end with the words of the Jordanian PhD student at Ben Gurion University, who maintains that water is a great conduit for peace in the region. He says:

"The problem in what's happening right now in the region is that there's no trust at all between our leaders-but between our scientists there is trust".

5:23 pm



Lord Triesman (Labour)

My Lords, it is very useful to have this debate at this time. I congratulate the noble Lord, [Lord Alderdice](#), and all noble Lords who have taken part. I especially congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Williams of Baglan, on an outstanding [maiden speech](#). He is a great friend, a great diplomat and a great addition to your Lordships' House.

At present, little is happening to inspire confidence in the Middle East peace process, much as we would all wish it. This fact alone should encourage us to seize the moment to engage in genuine strategic thinking about what is happening, what could make the problems of the region more acute and what might be done to mitigate them. To be candid, I fear that today's debate will identify a problem that has been explored before. However, what we have is an opportunity to review past efforts to consider water insecurity and to evaluate whether any new proposals can take us forward appreciably. It is in this light that I welcome a debate on the work of the [Strategic Foresight Group](#) and the publication of *The Blue Peace*. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, for making sure that I had a full copy of it; I appreciate that greatly.

In particular, I welcome the fact that the report starts with hard data. No solutions, other than those that take a hard look at hard data, have any prospect of success. Some of the data are telling. The region is home to 6.3 per cent of the world's population but contains just 1.4 per cent of the world's renewable fresh water. Climate change will make that worse. This is a region greatly challenged by developing efficient, collaborative, multinational governance systems. All of these factors bear on the issues that we are discussing.

I started by saying that the issues of water insecurity and its implications for regional peace and prosperity have been discussed on past occasions. I shall set out just one or two examples. They have not led to concrete action and they illustrate why it is sensible to look at a new programme. First, in its quite remarkable periodic exercises in scenario planning, Shell considered not oil but water security in the Middle East. It considered social, economic and political dynamics in that context. Its analysis illustrated the dangerous confluence of factors that might increase regional insecurity.

The demands for reliable water sources in the region become sharper when considered against the background of demographic change. Developments in medical science are likely to have a large impact on a region's population, especially when it becomes increasingly possible to intervene in, for example, genetically carried diseases that have lowered life expectancy in the Middle East. Although the number of live births per mother halved between 1960 and 2001, it remains likely that the upward trend in population will continue. A far larger, healthier and, by definition, initially far younger population will in due course place greater demands on water resources. The more this trend develops, the greater the competition for water resources will be. Indeed, as Shell suggests, it will become more significant than competition for oil resources. Between the nations of the region, the population grew from 173 million to 366 million between 1970 and 2001. However, the amount of fresh water per capita halved in that period. The greater the competition, the sharper the possible conflicts over control of river flows, especially where there are few viable developments in the use of seawater or desalination.

The second example comes from the work of [RUSI](#) and [Chatham House](#), which suggests that states in the region have begun to turn their attention to securing the military capacity, if necessary, to secure their future water requirements. I do not suggest that this inevitably leads to an arms race but it is likely to produce a significantly different military doctrine in the region. In a troubled region, that could promise still more trouble, as several noble Lords have said.

These have been brief summaries of important past analysis. I suggest with great respect that this report might have been a little stronger if it had also made an assessment of those efforts. However, what this research unquestionably adds to the past thinking flows from what I have tried to summarise. If water insecurity is liable to prepare people for potential conflict, it is imperative to argue that the better alternative is regional co-operation among nations that have not co-operated to any great extent.

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Water sources know no boundaries and the route between open and inland seas almost always passes through more than one polity. Cross-border management of this scarce resource is possible only if it is a peaceful option. A good deal of work, including by the Swiss Foreign [Minister](#), has been done in observing that five of the seven nations covered by this report are already experiencing a structural deficit in water, with a huge depletion in the rivers of the region.

I am able, with some enthusiasm, to support the creation of joint water co-operation councils. Given the river flows-I will return to artificial channels-it is rational to advocate the creation of a council involving Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Turkey, although there are obvious problems in the practicality of the grouping at this stage. I can see the rationale for a further joint water council, involving Turkey, Syria and Iraq, to manage the [Tigris and Euphrates](#) river basin. On the artificial channel proposals, I also support the idea of pressing the [World Bank](#) to go beyond its report and its research stage to see whether it can drive this towards reality.

My reservations are all obvious. In many countries, in each council grouping, there is more of a history of mistrust over water than there is of co-operation. That must change, but it will not happen soon. Some of the countries-Syria is the most obvious, as the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, noted-show that they are more likely to tear themselves apart and their political institutions are not likely to deal adequately with that. So that change will not happen any time soon either. The report suggests circles of co-operation, with Israel becoming involved only in a second phase. That may be a statement of regional realism, but I suspect that if there is not parallel development-or an attempt at parallel development-across all the nations in the region at the same time, one key and very valuable goal of this report could be undermined. That goal is this reality: with water co-operation and water security, it is not only available, potable water that hugely improves the human condition, but the development of the prospect of diplomatic normality, of peaceful co-operation in other spheres and of mutual economic development-in short, the creation of social circumstances in which health, education and all other advances become possible.

I wholly subscribe to that perspective, but I observe that the possibility of delaying the entry of one of the major military powers in the region, a state which has projected military power when aspects of its security are believed, by it, to be at risk, may significantly limit the potential for peace and normalisation that this kind of programme could achieve. This analysis may be wrong, but I think it identifies an important risk which may not have been addressed fully in the report.

If this report is to be successful in the way it is received, it needs to do a number of things with great effect. First, we must ask whether the proposals constitute a viable plan, owned and led in each of the participating nations and to which the international community and the domestic military of those nations can contribute without shaking local ownership. Secondly, will the institutional forms created generate coherence and greater coherence from the outset? There is a risk that they could be a theatre for staging conflict and we need to be sure to mitigate that risk. Thirdly, are all the lead nations involved? I have already commented on that. Fourthly, will the programme build local capacity, to ensure local ownership of technical and managerial objectives? I believe it has that capability. Fifthly, will the programme help focus aid and development priorities, providing the best and most sustainable outlets for aid expenditure? Sixthly, will the programme create employment, providing routes out of poverty and will it grow employment by cutting the costs of starting and doing business? The provision of potable water has, in general, been a significant factor in achieving that objective. Finally, is there a reliable and detailed audit of the impact of this kind of programme on all the local economies, showing the value of peace building as opposed to conflict and helping the programming of donor support? I admire much of what is in this report. If it can begin to address those questions about long-term stability, it will be a very important contribution indeed.

5:35 pm



Baroness Northover (Whip, House of Lords; Liberal Democrat)

My Lords, I thank my noble friend [Lord Alderdice](#) for bringing this interesting and challenging report to the attention of the House. I know that he works tirelessly on the issues of peace and reconciliation, and he is to be commended for this work. Given his profound experience in [Northern Ireland](#) and elsewhere, it surely behoves us to listen to him closely. I thank all noble Lords for their

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contributions to this debate-contributions that are clearly borne out of deep experience. I especially congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Williams of Baglan, on his excellent [maiden speech](#). His detailed knowledge of the region shows the profound challenges that the region faces and how important it is that we listen to those with possible routes through. I look forward very much indeed to his future contributions. I know that we will all benefit from his engagement here.

This report presents us with an innovative and striking proposition. We are all aware that factors such as resource scarcity-including that of water-climate change and population growth may increase the potential for conflict. The noble Lord, Lord Triesman, rightly emphasised the key importance of population growth in the region. On water, the facts seem to bear out the potential for conflict. By 2025, more than 2.8 billion people in 48 countries may face water scarcity. Meanwhile, the [International Water Management Institute](#) has estimated that demand for water for agriculture alone could increase by over 30 per cent by 2030. My noble friend [Lady Falkner](#) flagged up the great significance of climate change in all this.

However, this report puts forward the premise that water should become an instrument of co-operation rather than conflict. As the report notes, water sources and rivers are no respecters of national boundaries. As my noble friend Lord Alderdice and others have so eloquently explained, water could become a theme of dialogue and co-operation between nations. All in a particular region must, of necessity, have an interest in resolving the challenges posed. This could then assist in other areas. As he said, this may not be achieved in a day or a week. The true resolution of conflict is a long-term challenge.

From noble Lords' accounts, we can see how deep are the problems in terms of conflict, simply over water-not that there is yet even an agreed set of data, as my noble friend Lady Falkner pointed out. Set that against some of the political problems, as laid out, for example, by the noble Lord, Lord Williams, and my noble friend Lady Falkner, and one can see the depth of the challenge. However, as my noble friend said, doing nothing is no longer an option.

The Government place high value on innovative approaches such as those that look at how to use issues of mutual concern, such as shared and scarce resources to reduce conflict. Seeking to reduce conflict is a key element of our foreign and development policy. We have committed to spend 30 per cent of development aid in fragile and conflict-affected states by 2014-15. The Building Stability Overseas strategy published in July of this year, which spans the [FCO](#), the MoD and DfID, sets out the [UK Government's](#) overarching approach to try to prevent conflict and tackle instability through a strong integrated approach, bringing together all these areas of development, diplomacy and defence. A key pillar of this strategy is to invest in upstream prevention to tackle the underlying drivers of conflict and build capacity to manage tensions within and between nations constructively.

The type of approach suggested in this report on using water management as a source of regional co-operation rather than conflict has been seen to work well in some areas of the world that share scarce water resources. The [Department for International Development](#) is currently supporting regional initiatives, mainly in Africa and Asia, which have shown that water resource management can serve as an entry point for co-operative development. These include the water initiative under the [Southern African Development Community](#), the [Nile Basin](#) initiative, and the South Asia Water Initiative.

The initiatives have already helped to build trust and stronger relationships between countries, and this improves the management of water within and between countries for the benefit of all. These approaches have worked well where initiatives were effectively co-ordinated and avoided duplication of effort.

Another lesson, which the report supports, is that, while distribution and management of water is highly political, it is sometimes better to treat co-operation on water as a technical, rather than a political, issue and hence to encourage practical co-operation between experts rather than politicians. We have heard from both the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, and the noble Lord, [Lord Palmer](#), details of some of the university and other collaboration which is currently under way. That is very encouraging.

The noble Baroness, Lady Deech, rightly emphasises the importance of co-operation in science and technology and noble Lords will be no doubt be interested in the UK Government's recent initiatives in this field. Tonight, my [right honourable friend](#) the [Chancellor of the Exchequer](#) will travel to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories; during his visit he will launch the new UK-Israel high-tech hub and give

Where has this idea of a "Occupied Palestinian territories" come from? This is a nonsense, the land os Israel tiny though it is - is the Holy promised land, where did this unknown phrase "Occupied Palestinian territiry" come from? What is the Balfour declaration? Was the land ever Palestinian, I think you will need evidence to prove this claim? Look at Israel's history and show us what is your so called "Occupied terrortory" isn't it a complete fabrication, if you dont agree then please prove what it is and how it came to be. I see no evidence of it anywhere do you?

Submitted by Jacqueline Brunger

political profile to the importance of co-operation in this field.

The report we are discussing today specifically focuses on the Middle East, where the fair and effective distribution of shared water resources is an absolutely key issue. Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories are its main focus. The report, however, is cognisant of the enormous political difficulties, including those between Israel and its Arab neighbours, and therefore presents a road map for action which begins with efficient internal management, storage and distribution. It also proposes the interesting idea of establishing a co-operation council for water resources for Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey and, separately, a confidence-building initiative between Israel and the [Palestinian Authority](#). We pay tribute to the authors and the sponsors for exploring and raising these ideas.

Noble Lords will be very well aware of the dramatic changes that have affected the region and the challenges and opportunities that they bring. The report was, of course, published before the remarkable events of the Arab spring, to which the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, and the noble Lord, Lord Williams, have referred. Many states are undergoing rapid transition and leaders in those countries have pressing issues to deal with so that they can respond to the legitimate demands of their population. The Government are committed to working through the Arab Partnership with the international community to support the democratic transitions that we hope are under way. However, we are aware that each of these countries will face a great range of challenges, not least in resource allocation. The noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, is surely right to say that, as we focus on what is happening in the Arab spring, we should not forget the other challenges that these countries will face.

In the region, the UK funds the [Global Water Partnership](#), which has supported a regional water partnership for the Mediterranean. Partners have included Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey, among others. These independent regional groups have promoted the concept and implementation of integrated water resources management as a vital approach to managing this area's resources.

Water is, as we have heard, one of several important subjects for negotiations between Israelis and the Palestinians. Noble Lords have shown how acutely aware they are of this problem. UK officials regularly raise concerns over water issues with Israeli counterparts and we have brought the Foresight report to the attention of the EU donor and co-chair of the water sector working group with the Palestinian Authority. I reiterate that our immediate focus remains to bring the parties back to peace negotiations. However, my noble friend Lord Palmer urges us not to wait for the political process before advocating co-operation on water.

My noble friends Lord Alderdice and Lord Palmer emphasised how much Israel can contribute through its technological expertise—a point also emphasised by the noble Baroness, Lady Deech. I agree that the use of technological solutions may well be one of the key ways to address water shortages. Individual, practical and immediate water management measures should not need to wait for political negotiations to be completed.

The noble Lord, Lord Triesman, posed a series of challenges, which showed his very deep knowledge of this area. I hope that the authors of the report respond to those challenges, and I should be extremely interested in knowing what those responses are.

My noble friend Lady Falkner wondered whether DfID would consider working in waste water management in [West Bank](#) territories. There are currently 30 donors, [NGOs](#) and agencies working on water issues in the West Bank, and DfID has therefore decided not to focus on water issues because of this good coverage. However, as I said, UK officials have brought the report to the attention of these groups. Nevertheless, we would be happy to host a round table meeting on the challenges of conflict over water in the region and all noble Lords will be encouraged to feed into this.

In conclusion, I again thank noble Lords for their participation in this very important debate. It has highlighted the issues of water and conflict, and the need to identify innovative and new approaches to address some of the challenges that they will increasingly pose in the future. We have a shared interest in preventing conflict, promoting constructive dialogue between nations to manage scarce resources and ensuring a sustainable supply of water to all populations. We therefore very much commend those who are working to develop ideas on how best to achieve this.

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