THE JORDAN RIVER BASIN

Water Conflict and Negotiated Resolution

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THE JORDAN RIVER BASIN: WATER CONFLICT AND NEGOTIATED RESOLUTION

The conflict over the waters of the Jordan basin dates back to the late 1800s when the Zionist Organization chose Palestine to establish a national home for the Jews. Several water plans were prepared to harness those waters for the benefit of the side that prepared them. The Zionist Organization had plans prepared as early as 1899 and continued working until Israel was established and the new state took over the chores of more detailed planning and implementation. The indigenous societies, primarily the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, came up with competing plans starting in 1939 and had a Master Plan prepared for the development of the Jordan Valley.

The creation of Israel created a strong tremor in the region. Ever since its establishment, Israel had been rejected by the states of the region. The Jordan River waters became an additional reason for escalating the conflict between Israel and the other riparian parties. Border clashes became frequent at a time when the cold war was escalating, and the communist "threat" was becoming apparent in the Middle East. Added to the other conflicts in the world at the time, the Middle East conflict caused concern for the leader of the “Free World”, the United States of America.

To counter the threat of communist infiltration in the Middle East, and to induce the Arab states to tacitly accept the new state of Israel, the President of the United States dispatched a presidential envoy to the Middle East equipped with a water plan for the utilization of the waters of the Jordan basin by the riparian parties including Israel. The water plan was prepared by US consultants, Chas T. Main, under contract with the Tennessee Valley Authority. Ambassador Johnston made four separate trips to the region between October 1953 and October 1955. During these trips he conducted “shuttle diplomacy” between Israel and a technical committee formed by the Arab League. In each of the four shuttle trips, Johnston met with technical and political representatives of the countries in the region, and introduced amendments to his original water plan. His mission was made more difficult by political developments in the region, and, more importantly, by Arab fears that the water plan had covert objectives such as Arab recognition of and cooperation with Israel, and the resettlement of the Palestinian refugees, victims of the creation of Israel, in the host countries.

Ambassador Johnston reached agreement with the Arab Technical Committee in September 1955, and with the Israelis. Although he put a good defense of the final water plan to the concerned Arab Ministers, the Arab League Council decided, in October 1955, to have more detailed studies done and did not issue the approval that Ambassador Johnston was hoping for.

The final water plan that Johnston negotiated with the Arab Technical Committee and with Israel, known as the “Unified Plan for the Development of the Jordan Valley”, became the basis for the implementation of water projects in the Jordan Valley thereafter. The United States made compliance with the provisions of that plan a condition for US financial support to the parties. The East Ghor Canal Project in Jordan (now the King Abdallah Canal) was started and extended with grant contributions from the United States, and so were the Tiberias–Beit Shean project and the National Water Carrier project in Israel. The provisions of the Unified Plan were, to some extent, observed by Jordan and Israel until the two riparian parties resolved their water conflict during the peace negotiations under the Middle East Peace Process. Major elements of the water agreement between the two countries were based on the Unified Plan worked out by Ambassador Johnston.
1. INTRODUCTION

The Jordan River basin, some 18,300 square kilometers in area, straddles the territories of four separate Arab political entities, and a Jewish one. These are respectively: Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank (represented by the Palestinian Authority), and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on the Arab side, and Israel (see Map 1). Before these entities were created and became separate and independent of one another, unilateral designs for the utilization of the basin waters were laid down. The World Zionist Organization, in their first conference in Basel in 1897, formally targeted Palestine, then part of the Ottoman Empire, to become the lands of a national home for the Jews. Soon after that the Organization dispatched to Palestine a civil engineer, Abraham Bourcart, to study the Jordan basin and develop plans for the utilization of its waters for the benefit of the future homeland (Haddadin, 2001, p. 7–8). In 1913, the Ottoman Director of Works for Palestine, Mr. Georges Frangia, proposed the utilization of the river system for irrigation in the Jordan Valley and power generation (Naff and Watson, 1984).

Upon the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, the territories of the Jordan River basin came under the trusteeship of the League of Nations, which in turn entrusted the territories to a British and a French mandate. Borders were drawn to separate the once united territories in accordance with a British–French–Italian–Russian arrangement worked out in 1916, and Palestine and Transjordan along with Iraq were put under the British mandate, while Lebanon and Syria were put under the French mandate. Thus the territories of the Jordan River basin came under two separate foreign administrations. Britain, acting through her Foreign Minister Lord Balfour in November 1917, issued the declaration that carried his name, in which he expressed the support of His Majesty’s Government to the establishment of a national home for the Jews in Palestine. Jewish immigration to Palestine increased, as did the domestic tension because the Palestinians resented that immigration and were fearful of losing their country to the Jews.

2. CONFLICTING WATER PLANS

Several water plans were prepared under the mandate to utilize the waters of the Jordan basin (Naff and Watson, 1984). Two plans were prepared by Mavromatis and by Henriques of Great Britain in 1922 and 1928 respectively. A concession was awarded by the Ministry of the Colonies in 1921 to the Jewish engineer Pinhas Rutenberg for the utilization of the Jordan and its major tributary the Yarmouk for power generation, and to drain the Huleh marshes. The power concession was sanctioned by the Transjordan Cabinet on January 8 1928 (Haddadin, 2001, p. 16), and a power station was put into operation in 1932. In 1935, the Palestine Land Development Company, an arm of the Zionist Organization, prepared a plan for the transfer of water from the Jordan to the Upper Galilee.

The tensions in Palestine exploded into an all-out Palestinian revolt in 1936 that lasted for six months, demanding a halt to the Jewish immigration and to the sale of lands to the new immigrants. The British government dispatched a commission headed by Lord Peel to find a solution for the mounting unrest in Palestine, and followed it with another headed by Mr Woodhead. The commissions recommended, among other measures, the partition of Palestine between the Palestinian Arabs and the Jews, and setting an upper limit for the quota of Jewish immigrants. In the wake of those missions, the government of Transjordan initiated a study for the utilization of the Jordan waters to determine their capacity to support three states: Jordan, Palestine, and a Jewish state. The study was conducted by a British engineer, Michael Ionedis, who had worked on the Tigris and the Euphrates in Iraq earlier, and later
became the Director of Development in the government of Transjordan. He published his study in 1939, and again in 1953 (Ionedis, 1937, 1953, cited by Lowi 1993, pp.: 43–4 and 226). He estimated, for the first time, the available water resources of the Jordan and the irrigable land in the Jordan Valley. His study focused on the irrigation of the East Jordan Valley but also contained ideas to irrigate the West Jordan Valley.

Map 1. The Jordan River Valley

More plans came into being thereafter. Walter Clay Lowdermilk, an American soil scientist, was commissioned by the Zionist Organization to study the utilization of the water resources in the region. He included in his study the Litani river, a totally Lebanese river discharging into the Mediterranean, and proposed the transfer of
Jordan River water to the arid south of Palestine, and the compensation of the Dead Sea with water transferred to it from the Mediterranean: a proposal originally advocated by Theodore Herzl and adopted by Bourcart in 1899. He published his findings in his book, *Palestine: Land of Promise* (Lowdermilk, 1944). His plans were later elaborated by James B. Hays, an American engineer who worked as a consultant to the Jewish Agency and published it in his book, *TVA on the Jordan*, in 1948. Similar ideas had been proposed by the Jewish engineer Simcha Blass in 1944 (as cited by Kalley and Fishelson, 1993, p. 6–7) These ideas comprised the core of Jewish thinking for the utilization of the Jordan waters and extended into the water plans of Israel after the Jewish state was proclaimed on May 14 1948. The proclamation of the Jewish state was based on United Nations General Assembly resolution No. 181 of November 29 1947, adopting the partition of Palestine into a Jewish State and a Palestinian Arab State. The six independent Arab States, then members of the United Nations, objected to the resolution and the result was the outbreak of war between the proclaimed Jewish state and the adjacent Arab states, who rejected the creation of Israel in their midst at the expense of the Palestinians. Israel gained over 20 percent more territory from the war than was assigned to it under the partition resolution. Armistice agreements were concluded between Israel and the surrounding states in 1949. These did not end the state of war but drew demarcation lines between the warring parties.

In that same year, Jordan commissioned the services of the British consultants, Sir Murdoch MacDonald and Partners, to formulate a plan for the exploitation of the Jordan River waters. MacDonald’s work relied heavily on the work of Ionidis but was more detailed. They decreed that the waters of the basin could not be taken out of it for the benefit of out-of-basin irrigation before all the lands in the basin were adequately irrigated. This notion was advocated by Jordan later on, and by the Arab parties who were involved in the development of the Jordan River Basin. Serious competition between Israelis and Arabs for the Jordan River waters commenced and would soon gain momentum, increasing the chances of renewed Arab–Israeli hostilities. The situation was complicated by the persistence of the state of war between the Arabs and Israel, and was further exacerbated by the pressing problem of the Palestinian refugees who took refuge in adjacent Arab states.

Water projects soon became a cause for military clashes as Israel attempted to implement unilaterally its National Water Carrier project, whose intake on the Jordan River was originally located in a demilitarized zone between Israel and Syria close to Jisr Banat Ya’coub (see map 2). The Israeli project was meant to transfer Jordan River waters to irrigate as much as possible of its arid south and make room for more Jewish immigrants to the new state, something that Arabs strongly resented; they gave priority to the return of Palestinian refugees over receiving more Jewish immigrants.

3. **THE POST SECOND WORLD WAR ENVIRONMENT**

The competition over the Jordan waters between Arabs and Israelis would soon command the attention of the United States, which emerged as leader of the Free World after the Second World War. On the Arab side, the independent Arab states had formed the Arab League in 1945, and it was through this organization that a decision was made to engage in a military campaign to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. All matters related to the conflict with Israel were referred to the Arab League, because it was of concern to all Arabs. However, there were alarming threats to the political stability of the region in the wake of the proclamation of the state of Israel and the military setbacks suffered by the Arabs. By 1953 Syria had witnessed four military coups led by Husni Za’im, Fawzi Silo, and Adeeb Shishki
Egypt woke up the morning of July 23 1952 to the slogans of a military coup, effectively led by Jamal Abdul Nasser who, a year later, abolished the monarchy that had ruled Egypt since the early nineteenth century. Lebanon witnessed a change in its presidency in 1952 when its President, Bishara al Khouri, resigned and another was elected to succeed him. The ethnic balance in that country formed a pillar of the state administration. Iraq witnessed the assumption of constitutional powers by its young king, Faisal II, and the events of 1953 were not conducive to Arab solidarity. Iraq was leaning towards an alliance that Britain promoted for the region to form a belt around the Soviet Union, and Nasser of Egypt resented that idea. Syria oscillated between leaning towards Iraq and towards Egypt, depending on who ran Syria. Hashemite Jordan suffered a setback when her founder, King Abdullah I, was assassinated on July 20 1951. His son Talal succeeded him, but had to abdicate in 1952 for health reasons. The young king Hussein, barely 17 years of age, was proclaimed king of Jordan and assumed his constitutional powers in May 1953 when he came of age. Saudi Arabia, run by the Al Saud royal family, and Jordan had come closer together after decades of enmity between the two royal families on account of the Hijaz, the hub of the Hashemite family, which was overrun in 1924 by the Saudis. Yemen, the seventh member of the League, was a quasi-medieval state under the Hamid Eddin family who acted as Imams of that country. The south of the country was under British protection, as were the coastal territories around the peninsula.

The world scene revealed a tense competitive environment as the cold war had just started. The western allies of the Second World War succeeded in forming a military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949. The countries of the eastern block formed another military alliance led by the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact. The cold war was set in motion, and competition to win over countries and regions around the world intensified between East and West. There were serious efforts by both sides to bring other countries of the world to their side. China turned communist after the triumph of the Red Army, led by Chairman Mao Tse Tung, who routed the Nationalists out of mainland China to Taiwan; that was a serious setback for the West. The divisions in Korea led to hot confrontation between Western powers operating under the United Nations, and communists supported by China. Britain had departed from the Indian subcontinent, and France was facing trouble in Indo-China as the communist-led resistance dealt them a heavy blow at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

The United States, leader of the Western World, was clearly on guard against communist infiltration in the developing world, the former colonies of Western countries. The Middle East was fertile ground for communist infiltration because of the blame the Arabs placed on the West for creating Israel, the plight of the Palestinian refugees, and the potential support the Arab countries were likely to receive from the Soviet Union. Communism, it was thought, would flourish in the environment of poverty, want and humiliation, and in the high expectation by the public of large-scale assistance from the Soviet Union in support for just causes.

### 4. THE MILITARY CLASHES OF THE EARLY 1950S

Military clashes were frequent in the early 1950s, especially on the Israeli fronts with Syria and with Jordan. Infiltration by irregulars from Jordan across the ceasefire lines triggered military responses from Israel. More serious were the clashes that erupted when the Israelis decided to start work on the intake of their major project, the National Water Carrier, on the Jordan River just south of Jisr Banat Ya’coub in a demilitarized zone (DMZ) (see map 2). The Israelis, who claimed sovereignty over the DMZ, moved construction equipment into the DMZ, drawing fire from the Syrian military dug in on the Golan Heights.
Map 2. The ceasefire line between Syria and Israel (1949)
On the ceasefire line with Egypt, which administered the Palestinian Gaza Strip, infiltrators, primarily Palestinian refugees, inflicted losses on Israeli lives and property, and caused problems to Israeli security forces. These infiltrations were to increase in frequency and organization in 1954 and 1955, prompting the Israeli army to wage military incursions inside the Gaza Strip and carry out retaliatory operations against refugee camps, triggering clashes with the Egyptian army protecting the strip.

All the above clashes were reported to the UN through official complaints by the assaulted party to the Security Council. The debates in the Security Council soon reflected the underlying cause of the hostilities: the takeover by the Jews of the Palestinian properties and territories as the Arab side explained it, and the hostilities that the Arab countries harbored for the Jewish State as the Israelis put it. This was happening as the cold war was picking up momentum. The United States kept a careful watch on the situation, and was eager to promote calm and stop the military clashes to serve its own purposes.

5. INVOLVEMENT OF THE UNITED STATES

The conflict between Arabs and Jews over Palestine dates back to the late nineteenth century. Competing plans for the water resources of the Jordan River basin were only one minor cause of conflict. The primary cause had been the opening of Palestine to Jewish immigration, ownership of land in Palestine, and the idea of establishing a state in the midst of the Arab Middle East. The establishment of the State of Israel represented the beginning of a new era of military confrontation that lasted for decades, broken in 1979 with a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, and in 1994 with another between Jordan and Israel.

The frequent clashes across the ceasefire lines on the Jordanian, Syrian and Egyptian fronts commanded attention from the United States, which feared possible communist infiltration into the region. Communist parties were active underground in the Arab states that hosted the Palestinian refugees. Furthermore, the unstable situation in the newly independent Arab countries, and the level of need associated with low economic and social development in the region caused political conflict and social discontent. In addition to containing communism, United States interests included:

- the desire to forge the integration of Israel in the Middle East
- the assurance of Israel’s continued existence and security
- the protection of Western influence and interests in the oil fields and the extensive oil reserves in the region.

One early Western response was the establishment of a new agency in the United Nations, UNRWA, in 1949 to care for the welfare of the Palestinian refugees who took refuge in the West Bank, Gaza and neighboring states. The United States joined forces with UNRWA to implement a rural development plan in the Jordan Valley for the benefit of Palestinian refugees in Jordan to help in their resettlement. Water, it appeared to the United States, would serve as a reasonable starting point for collective regional economic development. On the one hand, it could stop the violent clashes over water that had been frequent in 1952 and 1953, and on the other hand, it could be used as a vehicle for some sort of social and economic cooperation between the Arab states and Israel.
6. THE UNIFIED JORDAN VALLEY PLAN

The UNRWA plan would depend on the use of the Yarmouk waters and called for the construction of a high dam on the river at Maqarin, also known as the Bunger Dam after the American engineer who discovered the site. Responding to Israeli protests as a riparian party on the river over not including her as a party in the plan, the United States withdrew its support to the Bunger Dam project in 1953 and UNRWA froze its involvement. However, as military clashes persisted between Israel and its neighbors, the United States had to come up with an alternative. United States President Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed Ambassador Eric Johnston as his personal envoy to the Middle East on October 7, 1953. His mission was to work out a unified plan for the development of the Jordan Valley among rivals.\(^1\)

Prior to Johnston’s appointment, and in parallel with the US slowdown of support to the Bunger Plan, UNRWA, upon recommendation of the British Foreign office and United States approval and tacit participation, moved to propose a plan for the sharing and utilization of the waters of the Jordan River basin.\(^2\) They contracted the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) to conduct a study of the development of the Jordan Valley, ignoring political boundaries (Lowi, 1993). TVA, in turn, subcontracted the task to the American consulting firm, Chas T. Main, with the consent of the United States.\(^3\) Its goal was to provide incentives for projects that would aid in the resettlement of Palestinian refugees by creating viable and sustainable means of living in the Jordan Valley. Mounting congressional pressures to solve the Palestinian refugee problem encouraged the United States to contribute towards the financial cost of their resettlement in the host countries (Stevens, 1965).

No particular set of legal criteria was adopted to formulate the allocation of water quotas to the different riparian parties. The international law for the utilization of international watercourses in consumptive uses had not been fully developed. Certain doctrines had been in vogue since the nineteenth century, among which was the Harmon Doctrine. This was named after the American attorney who decreed that “a state was free to assume over the watercourse that traverses its territory absolute sovereignty as though the watercourse inside its territory is its own property.” However, that doctrine was decreed for matters related to navigational uses of the watercourse, and could not possibly be applied to non-navigational uses. As a diagonally opposite principle considered for application on international watercourses was the principle of absolute integrity of the river basin, by which only in-basin uses of the waters of a natural drainage system (river) are allowed. Out-of-basin transfers of water for uses outside the basin are prohibited. Later, a third principle emerged and started to gather momentum: the principle of equitable utilization and avoidance of appreciable harm. However, none of these principles was adopted as the one applicable in any given case of international waters allocation.

The TVA Plan ignored political boundaries so as to avoid the political complications arising out of the non-recognition by Arab states of the new State of Israel, and to avoid the complications of adopting a common formula for water allocation. The course TVA followed was to determine the amount of water needed each year to cultivate arable lands in the basin, and to allocate water shares accordingly. This same principle was subsequently used by the technical aides of the US envoy, Ambassador Eric Johnston, as he started his shuttle diplomacy in the Near East. The allocation of water would therefore be sensitive to: a) the area of the arable land, b) the cropping pattern assumed, c) the cropping intensity, and, d) the water duty per unit cultivated area. These factors would prove substantial in Mr Johnston’s mission.

Ambassador Johnston was provided with the Main/TVA Plan on his first visit to the Middle East. In terms of water sharing, the plan gave annual allocations to Israel
(394 MCM) from the Jordan and from groundwater to irrigate 416,000 dunums, Jordan (774 MCM) from the Yarmouk, the Jordan and the side wadis, to irrigate 490,000 dunums, and Syria (45 MCM) from the Yarmouk to irrigate 30,000 dunums, and did not allocate any quota for Lebanon. Lake Tiberias was to be used as a common reservoir for water, thus enhancing the possibility of cooperation among the riparian parties. A canal would run from the lake to irrigate the West Jordan Valley, the territories of which belonged to Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom, and another canal from the lake would irrigate the East Jordan Valley of the Hashemite Kingdom. Additionally, the Yarmouk floods would be diverted for storage in the lake.

Johnston was instructed to include several important points in his negotiations (Lowi, 1993, p. 86). First, the distribution of water should conform as closely as possible to the recommendations of the TVA/Main report. As a minimum, and as an incentive to subscribe to a cooperative plan, Jordan should receive a substantially greater volume than it would from its unilateral development of the Yarmouk, envisaged under the Buner dam plan; and Israel (which had announced its plan to divert Jordan river water to irrigate the Negev) should renounce all rights to divert for irrigation more than a specified volume of water from the Jordan River and tributaries. Israel had attempted to build the intake of the National Water Carrier on the Jordan River bank inside the middle demilitarized zone with Syria, and had tried to start drainage of the Huleh marshes inside that zone also. Secondly, armistice line adjustments should be affected, so that Israel would not exercise exclusive physical control over Lake Tiberias, the outlet from the lake, and the diversion canal from the Yarmouk to Tiberias. Thirdly, demilitarized zones in the Jordan Valley should be eliminated and, fourthly, development of the Litani River must not be considered in the present context. Ambassador Johnston was accorded full latitude to advocate variations in the TVA/Main Plan within the above terms of reference and was instructed to use future levels of military and economic aid, plus UNRWA contributions, as bargaining chips with the riparian states.

Ambassador Johnston’s mission came at a time when feelings ran high on both Arab and Israeli sides because of military clashes over Israel’s attempts to unilaterally implement its plans to drain the Huleh marshes and her attempts to build the intake structure of its National Water Carrier aimed at the diversion of the Jordan River waters; the mission came also just after a serious Israeli raid into the West Bank town of Qibyah in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. In addition, the Arabs, especially Jordanians, were apprehensive and wondered why the United States was favoring the Main/TVA Plan when it had withdrawn its support from the Buner Plan a few months before the Johnston mission started.

Ambassador Johnston was faced with the task of gaining a hearing among Arab officials. Three elements characterized the Arab attitude. First, they viewed Johnston’s mission as yet another manifestation of American pro-Israel policy. Second, they viewed America’s intention not as a humanitarian gesture to improve socio-economic conditions throughout the Jordan River basin, but rather as an attempt to promote Arab cooperation with Israel and seduce Arabs into recognizing the Jewish state. Third, they feared that America’s intention was to resettle Palestinian refugees in the Jordan Valley in lieu of implementing United Nations Resolution 194 of December 11 1948, which called for their repatriation and compensation. Of primary concern to the Arabs was their commitment neither to recognize the State of Israel nor to cooperate with her at any time before the causes of conflict were adequately resolved. Only when the Arab parties were assured that they did not have to consider any direct dealings with Israel over water were they persuaded to listen to the Johnston proposals.

From the beginning of the talks it became clear that any water scheme involving Arab acquiescence would have to be carried forward under neutral United Nations
authority. Any other course implying cooperation with Israel or breaking the Arab boycott of that country was unacceptable.

6.1. Arab Reaction to Johnston’s Proposals

The reaction in Jordan was the most indicative of the response to Johnston’s Mission. He arrived in Jordan shortly after the Political Committee of the Arab League met in Amman on October 23, 1953 and concluded that it: “utterly refuses consideration of any joint project to utilize the waters of this river (the Jordan) with the enemy Israel.” The Foreign Minister of Jordan, in a long memo to the Prime Minister, concluded that the Unified Project that Johnston carried with him was not meant to benefit Jordan or the Arab refugees, but was intended to pressure and influence the Arab countries to share economic benefits with Israel, and eventually urge them to negotiate for peace. The memorandum was clearly critical of the Johnston Mission, the TVA, the United States Department of State, and the UNRWA. The attitude was not conducive to open cooperation with the Mission.

6.2. Reaction of Israel

Johnston tried to persuade the Israelis to ascribe their extensive water plans to some internationally approved formula for the sharing of the Jordan waters. The Israelis feared that their subscription to a regional plan could drag out the implementation of their projects indefinitely due to the Arab’s reluctance to participate. The public position of the government of Israel, however, was announced by the Foreign Minister, Moshe Sharette (later Prime Minister), in a broadcast on November 30, 1953 in which he expressed Israel’s willingness to sit with her neighbors to agree on a regional water plan. “In absence of such plan,” the Minister added, “Israel would be free to use the water of the rivers which flow in its territories as its own property.” Clearly, although not explicitly cited by the Foreign Minister, such a pronouncement tied in with the aforementioned “Harmon Doctrine” that allowed a state to exercise absolute sovereignty over that stretch of the international watercourse that traverses its territories. The minister also stressed that Israel would not compromise its freedom of policy in exchange for American aid (Stevens, 1965, p. 20). Domestically and in much lower voice pitch, however, Sharette appeared to favor serious consideration of the Johnston proposals, possibly because it would foster improved relations with Israel’s Arab neighbors and bring the international financing of water development Ambassador Johnston was able to offer.

On his part, Johnston maintained a low profile. In a television interview on December 1, 1953, he cautiously described the objective of his trip to the Near East by saying: “I did not go to the Near East carrying a specific plan. I had in my little bag a proposal. This proposal aims at coordinating the development of the Jordan basin. I did not expect a (yes or no) answer to these proposals; to the contrary, I feel that an answer given without a comprehensive study will not be mature.”

6.3. Proceeding with the Proposals

Despite the tense environment, Johnston’s initial plan was to overcome the apprehension of the concerned parties and stimulate the formulation of counterproposals to the Main/TVA Plan. In the Arab ranks, Egypt, recently transformed from the Kingdom to the Republic of Egypt, was anxious to assert her role as a leader of the Arabs and to gain American support over the Suez Canal conflict with Britain. The Egyptian leadership was able to convince the Arab League’s Political Committee to establish, on January 12, 1953, an Arab Technical Committee to continue the study of the utilization of the waters of the Jordan and come up with an
Arab counterproposal to the Main/TVA Plan. The Committee held meetings in Cairo from January 14 to January 16, and laid down specifications for an Arab Project to counter the Main/TVA Plan. It made the following recommendations (Ghobashy, 1961, citing the Arab League, 1954):

- The Arab project for the development of the resources of the Jordan River should preserve the irrigation of cultivated areas in the basin of the Jordan River and its tributaries, and these areas should benefit fully from the utilization of electric power generated from these waters.
- The Arab project should safeguard the full utilization of the Jordan River waters for the benefit of the Arabs.

The plan was completed in March 1954 and revised a few months later for submission to the Arab League. Reference to the preservation of cultivated lands in the basin meant the allocation of water shares for Israeli cultivated lands in the basin, an initial promising sign of Arab acceptance of Israeli shares in the waters. In its final form, the Arab Plan allotted water shares to all the riparian states, including Israel (see Table 1). The Arab Plan emphasized the irrigation of lands inside the River basin, and opposed the transfer of water outside it. Obviously, the Arab Plan adopted the then-emerging principle of “integrity of the river basin” that was advocated by the consultants, Sir Murdoch MacDonald and Partners, in their 1951 report on the Jordan waters. Compared to the TVA/Main Plan, which accounted for 1,213 MCM of surface and spring water, the Arab Plan accounted for 1,348 MCM from such sources. The difference in the total flow of the river and its tributaries is attributed to the absence of a reliable reference with accurate flow measurements.

The Arab Technical Committee recommended that maximum storage of the Yarmouk be made through a dam on the river at Maqarin and only the surplus water be stored in Lake Tiberias (about 60 MCM). Their decision was justified by the higher salinity in the lake, which would aggravate an already saline soil in the Jordanian side of the Jordan Valley, and by the higher evaporation losses from the wide lake compared to the narrow and deep Maqarin reservoir.

In Israel’s response to the Main/TVA Plan, the American engineer J. S. Cotton (working as a consultant to Israel at the time) reviewed the plans and came up with another version. Contrary to the in-basin principle, stressed in the MacDonald Report of 1951 on which the Arab counterproposal was based, the Cotton Plan included out-of-basin water resources, the Lebanese Litani River, and out-of-basin water transfers to irrigate lands in the Negev. The water needs of the Jordan Valley in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan were to be met by drawing Yarmouk water through a canal system under Jordan’s control. Cotton’s estimates of the water resources available for use, including the Litani, amounted to 2,345.7 MCM (see Table 2 for allocation). Besides Israel’s quantitative objection to the Main/TVA Plan that Johnston advocated, she objected to the involvement of the United Nations in the operation of joint water resources.

6.4. Johnston’s Negotiations Through Shuttle Diplomacy

The differences among Arabs and Israelis in attitudes, objectives, allocated quantities, storage and water quality issues, supervision of implementation, and means of water conveyance were extensive. The reconciliation of these differences was quite a challenge to the diplomatic skills of Ambassador Johnston, and a technical challenge to his engineering escorts.

Johnston received counterproposals from both the Arab side and the Israeli side through diplomatic channels. He set out for his second round in Cairo on June 11, 1954. The political environment in the Middle East and the rapid developments had
great impacts on Johnston’s mission at the time. While the environment was tense, the strategy Johnston adopted was one of neutrality, appearing on the side of the party to which the Mission members were talking, and emphasizing the benefits his proposals would bring to them. With the help of Egypt, Johnston was able to achieve a change in the Arab mood that once ran high in rejecting the Johnston Mission and proposals. General Mahmoud Riyadh of Egypt’s Ministry of War announced that the Arabs did not reject the Johnston proposals outright, but would not accept them as they were. Johnston met with the Arab Technical Committee and discussed with them the Arab Plan. Agreement was reached on four crucial points:

- **Storage**: in principle, storage of the Yarmouk floods would be made in Arab lands for purpose of irrigation and power generation.
- **Allocation of water**: it was agreed that quantities allocated to Syria and Lebanon would be the same as indicated in the Arab Plan without affecting the share allocated to Jordan as stipulated in the Unified Plan.
- **Supervision**: after agreement with the American side on the general framework of the project, the concerned Arab States would take the necessary measures at the United Nations to form the International Committee stipulated in the Unified Plan and to define its scope of work.
- **The American side suggested postponing a decision on the power plant on the Hasbani at Al Ghajar until a detailed study of that proposal was completed.**

### Table 1. Details of water Allocation in the Arab Counterproposal (Arab Plan, 1954)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Riparian</th>
<th>Site of Irrigation</th>
<th>Area (1,000 dunum)</th>
<th>Water MCM</th>
<th>From River</th>
<th>From side-Wadis</th>
<th>From Ground-water</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>Hasbani Basin</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Banyas Basin</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boteilha</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upper Yarmouk</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower Yarmouk</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>119</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>Upper Huleh</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hashahar</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y?Bavneil</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yarmouk</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Triangle</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Biesan Ghor (no allocation)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>234</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>N.E Ghor</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M.E Ghor</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S.E Ghor</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total East Bank</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N.W Ghor</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M.W Ghor</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S.W Ghor</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total West Bank</strong></td>
<td><strong>194</strong></td>
<td><strong>401</strong></td>
<td><strong>302</strong></td>
<td><strong>71</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>490</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>698</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
<td>All riparians</td>
<td><strong>878</strong></td>
<td><strong>1 431</strong></td>
<td><strong>1 047</strong></td>
<td><strong>301</strong></td>
<td><strong>83</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Arab Plan for Utilization of the Jordan River and Its Tributaries, Arab League files, Cairo, Egypt, 1954.
### Table 2. Annual Allocations Under the Different Plans (MCM)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lebanon</th>
<th>Syria</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Israel</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main/TVA Plan</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>1213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Plan¹</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>975³</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>1431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton Plan²</td>
<td>450.5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>1290</td>
<td>2345.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Includes 64 MCM of groundwater in Jordan and 19 MCM of groundwater in Israel.
2. Includes 911 MCM of surface water and 64 MCM of groundwater.
3. Includes all the Litani River water

Points of disagreement remained as follows:

- Water duty: the American side wanted to have the figures of the Unified Plan adopted while the figures of the Arab Plan were about 15 percent higher.
- Israel’s share: the American side insisted that Israel be allocated approximately the overall share as stipulated in the Unified Plan.
- In-basin use: the American side insisted that the use of water by Israel not be limited while the Arab side insisted that Israel use the water inside the basin.
- Yarmouk storage: the American side insisted that the additional cost that the Yarmouk storage will bring about must not exceed $10 million over what was estimated in the Unified Plan that specified 95 meters for the height of the Yarmouk dam.
- Adassiya diversion: the American side insisted to have the Adassiya diversion built promptly while the Arab side insisted that no implementation would be made in the Yarmouk basin before the whole basin project is decided.

The Arab Technical Committee realized that the negotiations were working to their advantage and that they should try to formulate a project that would bring the maximum benefit to the Arab countries. Failure to continue the negotiations, they correctly thought, would give Israel the chance to implement her own project, which would divert all the waters of the Jordan River outside the basin to the coastal plain and the Negev. Most importantly, the Arab Technical Committee agreed to consider the diversion of Yarmouk floods for storage in Lake Tiberias, a provision contained in the Chas T. Main Plan that Johnston carried to the parties in the first round (see above.) The Arab political reaction to that was negative at the outset because it meant that Arab waters would be stored in the lake, which is totally controlled by their enemy.

After his meetings with the Arab Technical Committee, Johnston proceeded to Israel for talks with the Israeli committee headed by Sharette. His challenge was no less complicated than the one he confronted with the Arabs. He alluded to more development assistance and cooperation in the use of atomic energy in desalination of seawater. More importantly, Johnston elaborated on the role the Unified Plan on the resettlement of Palestinian refugees as a big plus for Israel. Ambassador Johnston then presented his argument to drop the Litani out of the considered resources. He remarked that asking Lebanon to give up the Litani, a Lebanese river, for the benefit of the region was like asking Israel to give up the Israeli Yarmouk–Jordan Triangle for the benefit of the region. Johnston stressed that the division of water in the Unified Plan was a fair one and assured Israel of her right to utilize her share anywhere she wanted, a notion the Arab side did not share.

Ambassador Johnston noted that Israel’s need for the Litani water would be years away and that time was on Israel’s side if she succeeded in integrating herself into the region. He used American preparedness to finance the projects to lure Israel into agreeing to the plan. Despite the fact that Israel had to give up the immediate prospect of the Litani and relinquish a minor quantity of water, he noted that Israel
would have a measure of Arab cooperation immediately and a solution to the refugee problem. He urged the Israeli team to accept three principles: a prior claim to water lay with the Kingdom of Jordan for the resettlement of refugees; Lake Tiberias would be used as a common storage reservoir, and allocations for Israel and Jordan would be withdrawn therefrom; and a neutral body would supervise the distribution of water. Israel had a negative response to the first two principles, and a provisional positive response to the third.

At the end of the second round, Johnston described the situation as hopeful. Although no agreement had been reached, both sides had indicated acceptance of the principle of unified development. The most difficult issue outstanding was the division of the waters.

The third round of shuttle diplomacy began on January 27, 1955. An interim report submitted in mid-January by the Baker–Harza consultants entrusted by Jordan to study the development of the Jordan Valley (Michael Baker Inc., and Harza Engineering Company) helped Johnston adjust Jordan’s water requirement figures downwards. That enabled the Ambassador to increase Israel’s share to 448 MCM (up from 394 MCM stipulated in the proposal he first carried) at Jordan’s expense, which was still far from Israel’s hopes. Another difficulty Johnston still had to face was Israel’s insistence that she use the whole of Lake Tiberias for her own purposes. The report stipulated the withdrawal of 160 MCM per year from the lake to Jordan. Israel feared Arab claims of sovereignty over the lake if their water was stored there. The most he was able to extract from Israel was the possibility of leaving the question of Lake Tiberias open.

Ambassador Johnston then returned to talk with the Arab side in Cairo over the Baker–Harza Interim Report. The Arab Technical Committee expressed their rejection of the consultants’ proposals for a small dam on the Yarmouk and insisted that a 400 MCM capacity dam be built at Maqarin to maximize storage in Arab lands and minimize storage in Lake Tiberias. They also disagreed with the cropping pattern and water duty assigned to Jordan’s arable lands, and with the irrigation efficiency, all of which reduced the estimated irrigation requirements in Jordan.

It is interesting to note that neither side, Israeli or Arab, was in favor of common storage in Lake Tiberias. All had their own reasons that were different from the others, but all shied away from the measure, which could have triggered cooperation between the parties. Johnston, on the other hand, favored it to induce cooperation among adversaries.

While in Cairo, Johnston received a memorandum from the Israelis demanding an increase in their shares and refusing any limitation on their freedom to use the waters as they wished. He informed the Israelis that they could proceed with their diversion scheme (called the Banat Ya’qub) of the Jordan only after they approved the Unified Plan; otherwise any attempt to implement the diversion would prompt the United States to revive the Security Council Resolution of November 27, 1953 ordering Israel to stop work. That was the leverage the United States had over Israel short of using economic aid as a means of pressure.

After Cairo, Johnston proceeded to Amman where he lobbied for his plan. He told King Hussein that Jordan would benefit most from the plan, which would decrease Israel’s water basin use by almost half and give Jordan 52 percent of the waters, with the rest going to the other Arab parties. He handed the Jordanians a Draft Memorandum of Understanding and asked them to sign it with him, but the Jordanians opted to wait for the other Arab states. The political environment was such that for Jordan to act alone would be unthinkable. Johnston then approached the Syrian Government, which was in transition. They agreed to Syria’s water shares, storage in Lake Tiberias (in general terms), and on international supervision. The issue of the Maqarin Dam, its size and financing, was postponed until a Syrian government was in place. Jordan, obviously, was careful not to go it alone with
Johnston for fear of being tagged as siding with the United States (and Israel), and did not want to suffer again the hostility she had had to face from Egypt and Syria on account of the Baghdad Pact. She opted to act collectively with the other Arab states to avoid negative criticism.

After Damascus, Johnston proceeded to Lebanon where he had a landmark meeting with the Arab ministers, who converged on Beirut by invitation of Lebanon’s Prime Minister. The Memorandum of Understanding produced at the meeting contained the following:

The waters of the Jordan and Yarmouk Rivers are to be stored and regulated primarily through reservoir facilities to be constructed on the Yarmouk River and through the operation of Lake Tiberias as a reservoir. Yarmouk flood waters, which [are] exceeding the storage capacity of a 300 MCM reservoir and irrigation needs, [are] to be spilled into Lake Tiberias for release to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. A neutral body, acceptable by all parties, will be established to oversee withdrawals and releases of water. Regarding water sharing, Jordan [will] be allotted 537 MCM from the Jordan and Yarmouk Rivers (in addition to internal resources of wells, springs and wadis within the Kingdom of Jordan); Syria [will] be allowed to withdraw 132 MCM (20 MCM from the Banyas, 22 MCM from the Jordan and 90 MCM from the Yarmouk); and Lebanon [will] be allowed to withdraw 35 MCM annually from the Hasbani River. Israel will be allotted 25 MCM per year from the Yarmouk and the remainder of the Jordan after subtracting the above shares for Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

With the Arab agreement in hand, Johnston proceeded to Israel in the hope that he could persuade the Israelis to accept the terms of the Draft Memorandum he had concluded with the Arab ministers. The Israelis agreed to the Syrian and Lebanese shares, but demanded that the Israeli share be increased and that the Jordanian share from Lake Tiberias (160 MCM as stipulated in the Baker–Harza Interim report) be reduced. Johnston was unable to reconcile the Israeli demands with the Draft Memorandum, and no agreement could be reached.

On July 5, 1955, Israel gave Johnston in New York her own Memorandum of Understanding. It differed from the Arab Memorandum in that the share allotted to Israel from the Yarmouk was set at about 60 percent more than the 25 MCM stipulated in the Beirut memorandum. The share allotted to Jordan from Lake Tiberias was 37.5 percent less than the 160 MCM included in the Beirut Memorandum, and included 30 MCM of water from saline springs. The Israelis agreed to provide storage facilities for Yarmouk floods in Lake Tiberias and agreed to the formation of a neutral engineering board for supervision.

Ambassador Johnston made his fourth trip to the region on August 25, 1955. He started with Jordan whose Cabinet had been changed on May 30, 1955. Johnston briefed the new ministerial committee on the status of his negotiations and pointed out that Jordan had become the central party that would determine the fate of the agreement. He said that President Chamoun of Lebanon would not object if Jordan accepted it. Johnston also said that Prime Minister Nasser of Egypt expressed the same opinion when he met with him.

Hours before his second meeting with the Jordanians on August 27, US Secretary of State John Dulles made an announcement that renewed Arab apprehension. He said that in order to secure a lasting and stable peace in the Middle East, the United States would pay adequate compensation to the Arab refugees, underwrite some of the expenses for a regional water development project, and guarantee new and permanent political boundaries which would replace the old Armistice lines (Lowi, 1993, p. 100). By publicly linking Johnston’s mission to the resettlement of Palestinian
refugees, Dulles reinforced Arab refusal to recognize the State of Israel or embark on any measure of cooperation with her.

The announcement made Johnston’s task doubly difficult as it threw more political shadows on his mission than did the economic and technical aspects combined. After the announcement, Johnston’s preaching to the Arabs of the economic benefits and his insistence that the political status quo would not be affected by his plan fell on deaf ears. An additional complication arose when a third assessment by Johnston’s team (with consideration of Israeli views) indicated a further reduction could be made in the water share for Jordan. The team proposed to reduce Jordan’s allocation from Lake Tiberias to 100 MCM (down from 160 MCM). As a pre-emptive move, the Parliaments of Syria and Lebanon issued separate resolutions rejecting Johnston’s proposals on political grounds.

Johnston proceeded to Cairo, Damascus and Beirut to make every effort to have his plan endorsed. He was met with deep suspicion. At a later meeting with the Arab Technical Committee, on September 8 1955 in Beirut, Johnston presented them with the Revised Unified Plan. It differed from the Beirut Memorandum on three issues. It accepted a higher dam with 300 MCM capacity (126 meters high) at Maqarin, with 50 percent more US financial support. Any further raising of the dam (which the Arab Committee favored) would be made at the expense of the Arabs. Also storage of Yarmouk water in Lake Tiberias would be deferred for five years, and the Jordan share from the Jordan River and the Yarmouk River would be decreased from 537 MCM in the Beirut Memorandum to 477 MCM, that is, by 60 MCM (thus the share to be drawn from Lake Tiberias would fall to 100 MCM). The Americans suggested that it would be necessary, to avoid loss of water, to compensate Jordan with an amount of 30 MCM of saline water for the decrease in its share. Despite profound reservations, the Arab Technical Committee decided to approve the Revised Unified Plan and in late September recommended that the Arab League Council should accept it.

Johnston flew to Cairo and met on October 8 with Premier Jamal Abdul Nasser at his home in the presence of leading Egyptian officials. Nasser assured Johnston of his support and asked for time to convince the other Arabs. A meeting of the Arab Foreign Ministers was due to convene in Cairo the following day to look into the Johnston proposals as modified after the Beirut Memorandum, and into the positive recommendations of the Arab Technical Committee. Johnston was given the opportunity to defend his proposals in front of the ministers of the concerned parties (representatives of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, and the Secretary General of the Arab League.) Johnston enumerated the virtues of his plan:

Acceptance of the plan will immediately place a ceiling on the amount of water Israel may take from the River Jordan. Except by force, there was no other way to impose a limitation on Israel.

The Plan will assure the Arab states and particularly Jordan of the right to store Yarmouk floods in Lake Tiberias. Without this guaranteed accommodation in Lake Tiberias, a large volume of water indispensable to Jordan’s development will be lost.

The representatives of the states concerned debated the issue. The Jordanians felt that the best solution was the Revised Unified Plan, while the Syrian and Lebanese government rejected it. Their intervention, especially that of the Prime Minister of Syria, and the lack of arguments by other delegates in favor of the Plan, proved to be the stumbling block that stopped the Arab League from accepting the recommendation of the Arab Technical Committee to accept the Revised Unified Plan. Any argument in favor of the plan would tarnish its advocate with the intention to cooperate with the enemy. The League concluded that the Unified Plan, as revised, could not be accepted and that further investigation and consideration of the issue.
was necessary. The resolution against the Revised Unified Plan was communicated to Ambassador Johnston by the Secretary General of the League (see text in Haddadin, 2001).

Nonetheless, Johnston was hopeful that Nasser would be able to bring the Arab parties to agree to the plan within two or three months. Johnston proceeded from Cairo to Israel and conducted meetings with Prime Minister Sharette and Minister of Finance Levi Eshkol. The Israelis agreed to share the 30 MCM of saline water that they suggested in their July 5 memorandum equally with the Arabs, and also accepted the figures for water division. The share of Jordan from Lake Tiberias would thus be 100 MCM, including 15 MCM of saline water. Israel’s share from the Yarmouk would be 25 MCM, as stipulated by Johnston’s proposal.

In its final version, the Unified (Johnston) Plan made the following allocations:

- From the Jordan River: Lebanon, 35 MCM from the Hasbani tributary; Syria, 42 MCM (20 from the Banyas tributary and 22 from the main course of the river); Jordan, 100 MCM (including a ceiling of 15 MCM of saline water, the balance to be drawn from Lake Tiberias); Israel, the remainder of the flow.

- The Yarmouk: The total usable flow, including drainage water that returns to the river after irrigation, was estimated at 506 MCM (467 + 39): Syria, 90 MCM (with the assumption that 39 MCM would return to the river after Syrian use for use downstream – the Syrian net depletion is 51 MCM per year); Israel, 25 MCM for use in the Yarmouk Triangle, and 14 MCM would be lost to evaporation, mainly from the reservoir of the dam that would be built on the river; Jordan, the remainder of the flow (estimated at 377 MCM including 39 MCM of return flow from Syria).

It is interesting to note how the share of the Hashemite Kingdom that was given priority in allocation at the outset of Johnston’s mission was eroded with the passage of time in Johnston’s subsequent three rounds (indicated in Table 3).

Table 3. Time Profile of Jordan’s Water Share

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>705 + 15 saline = 720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the refusal of both the Israelis and the Arabs to use Lake Tiberias as a main storage reservoir, Johnston got the two sides to agree to the use of the lake as a storage facility for less Yarmouk floods (about 70 MCM) than originally envisaged. As for the exercise of sovereignty by the concerned states over water shares, Johnston decreed that each riparian party could do with its share whatever it pleased. Absolute sovereignty was hence exercised over the water share after it had been allocated, not before.

In his attempts to make ends meet and please the respective parties, who were essentially adversaries, Johnston took account of an assumed rate of return flow back to the river system after water had been used upstream for irrigation. For example, the total flow of the Yarmouk: Johnston considered this was 506 cubic meters per year as compared with 467 cubic meters per year of natural average flow. The increase of 39 MCM per year is the return flow back to the river after upstream Syrian uses in irrigation within the basin. The rates of return flow were diminished over time through the abstraction of groundwater using submersible pumps. The inclusion of
return flows would have an environmental impact on the water of the river, as it brought with it more dissolved solids than the natural water normally carries.

The reason for Israeli acquiescence in the plan was clear. It would be to their advantage either way. If the Arabs accepted it, the Israeli share was fair and the Arabs would have implicitly waived their opposition to the establishment of the state of Israel. If the Arabs rejected the plan on political grounds, then the Israelis would be justified in resuming their work on the river diversion at Jisr Benat Ya’qub, which had been suspended since the beginning of Johnston’s mission in October 1953. In view of the Israelis’ position and the presentation to the Arabs by Ambassador Johnston, it would be hardly a surprise to the Arabs if Israel went ahead with its unilateral diversion of the Jordan River. Nasser did not deliver on his pledge to have the Arabs approve the Plan, and the atmosphere soon became clouded with the fallout from the Suez Campaign in 1956. Israel resumed her plans of diversion of the Jordan waters from, not from Jisr Banat Ya’qub as originally planned, but from the northwest corner of Lake Tiberias, and the diversion project became operational in 1964.31

NOTES

1. Israel’s clashes with her neighbors, the continued border clashes, and Israel’s defiance of a decision of the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and refusal to stop work in the DMZ between Syria and Israel created an unusually tense situation. The Security Council, who supported the decision of the Chief of Staff through a resolution on October 27, 1953, took up the issue. It was at this point that the United States Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, threatened Israel with cutting off United States aid if Israel did not promptly comply with the Security Council resolution; Israel complied on October 28, 1953. This move on the part of the US helped reduce the Arab apprehension about the Johnston mission.

2. Georgiana Stevens (1965) reported in 1965 that the TVA sponsored study was under UNRWA and US auspices.

3. Letter of submittal of the study by TVA to UNRWA dated August 31, 1953. Also a desk study was performed by Chas T. Main, and was known as the TVA/Main Plan, which served as an initial proposal to the adversaries in the Jordan River Basin. The Plan excluded the Litani River because it is not part of the Jordan watershed. It further described only in-basin use of the Jordan River, although it mentioned that each side may make different claims.

4. One dunum is 1,000 square meters, or one tenth of a hectare.

5. Israel’s plan to divert Jordan River to the arid south constituted the building of a National Water Carrier to channel the water from north to south. The construction of the Carrier was started from its southern end, and the unilateral diversion of water by Israel, upon its completion, could claim volumes to Israel’s choice.

6. These Demilitarized zones were drawn up in the Armistice Agreement with Syria. The zones were territories of Mandate Palestine extending between the lines demarcated in the Agreement for the Israeli Forces and those demarcated for the Syrian Forces (Syria’s international borders with Palestine). For development of the Litani River, see Secretary of State J. F. Dulles to Eric Johnston, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, vol. 9, 13 October 1953, no. 686, pp. 1348–52.

7. That raid was led by Ariel Sharon and resulted in the massacre of sixty-nine Jordanian nationals in their homes. It was mounted as a retaliation to the losses Jordanian infiltrators were inflicting upon Israeli civilians across the cease fire lines.

8. Johnston was Vice-Chairman of the American Christian Palestine Committee, a pro-Zionist philanthropic organization.

9. Johnston had met in Beirut that same day with the Lebanese Prime Minister, Abdallah el Yafi, and was informed in no ambiguous terms that Lebanon and the Arab countries utterly rejected the discussion of any joint project with Israel to develop water resources, or to enter into direct or indirect negotiations with her about this subject.

11. It is interesting to note that no representative of the Jordanian Government, the primary Arab beneficiary from any plan to develop the river basin, was appointed to that Technical Committee until April of the following year. Jordan was not very popular in the Arab League at the time because of the resentment the League’s members harbored towards Jordan’s unification with the West Bank in 1950. The appointment of Jordanian members on the Committee was prompted by the need for Jordanian cooperation.


13. The plan was based heavily on Lowdermilk, Blass, Hays, and Savage, who had worked for the Zionist organization shortly before Israel was established. See the report on the Cotton Plan in the National Archives of the State of Israel, Foreign Ministry document (Record Group 93), box 3688, file 2. Cited by Lowi in Water and Power, p. 211.

14. On the eve of Johnston’s arrival tensions between Israel and the Arab states were running high. Throughout the month of June, there had been numerous shooting incidents across the Israel–Jordan Armistice lines, culminating at the end of the month in the outbreak of fighting in Jerusalem. There were incidents on the Armistice lines with Syria as well, and Egypt and Israel quarreled over freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tiran. Moreover, Colonel Adeeb Shishakli of Syria, and General Mohammad Najib of Egypt had recently both been ousted from power. “An atmosphere of internal dissention prevailed in all the countries of the region” (Nimrod, 1965, p. 24).


18. Johnston tried to convince the Israelis that a water-sharing agreement with the Arabs would clear the political air, and for that reason alone, it was important to make concessions.


20. Although the report showed that there was more arable land to be irrigated than previously estimated, it assigned lower water duties than previous studies did.

21. Yarmouk was set at 40 MCM per year in the Israeli Memorandum as compared with 25 MCM in the Beirut Memorandum. Lake Tiberias was set in the Israeli Memorandum at 100 MCM including 30 MCM of water from saline springs as compared with 160 MCM in the Beirut formula with no saline water. Jordan’s share of 537 MCM in the Beirut Memorandum consisted of 377 MCM from the Yarmouk and 160 MCM from Lake Tiberias.

22. State Department Records, National Archives of the United States, Washington D.C, declassified on 10/8/1994. This Memorandum would form the reference for subsequent Israeli positions claiming that Johnston had accepted it, and Johnston insisting the Memorandum represented the Israeli viewpoint only.

23. The team’s justification was that the area in the Jordan Valley that would be irrigated in any given season amounted to 8 percent of the irrigable area, up from the 3 percent assumed by Baker-Harza.

24. Johnston reduced this amount in his debate with the Arab Technical Committee, but it was counted as part of the Jordan allocation, not as a bonus for Jordan.

25. For the Jordanian response, there are handwritten notes taken by one of the Jordanian delegates attending the meeting; found in the Jordanian file on the Johnston negotiations, Prime Ministry, Amman, Jordan. Sheet 3 has notes on the Syrian positions: “We would not accept a Unified Project,” said the Prime Minister of Syria, Mr. Said al Ghazzi, “the parliamentary debate in Syria showed us that not any Syrian government can accept a Unified Project. The Parliament of Lebanon decided a similar decision. We further think that in Jordan there are nationalistic men who reject the Unified Project. We therefore hope that the technicians would continue studying the independent Arab project and submit its details and cost in full.”

26. The meeting of the concerned Foreign Ministers decreed that: “Representatives of the Arab States concerned, namely Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, have studied the Arab Plan
for the Jordan Valley and its tributaries evolved by the Arab Technical Committee and have come to the conclusion that, in spite of the efforts exerted, certain important points still need further consideration. It was, therefore, decided that the experts be asked to pursue the mission with which they have been entrusted until an agreement safeguarding Arab interests is reached.”

27. Israel, however, later contested the figure of 25 MCM and insisted that its share from the Yarmouk was 40 MCM as stipulated in their July 5 memorandum.

28. For the text of the plan, see Haddadin, 2001.

29. The allocation to Jordan was to be carried to the West Bank (now Palestinian territories) via a canal constructed in Jordan to carry Yarmouk water to the east Ghor.

30. The use of this facility was deferred for five years until a neutral engineering board would decide on its feasibility.

31. The Banat Yacoub diversion was technically handicapped because of the unfitness of the Battouf depression to store the diverted waters before they would be pumped into the National Water Carrier.

The June war of 1967 enabled Israel to control the Banyas and her incursion into South Lebanon in 1978 gave her control of the Wazzani Springs. She was able to deny the Arabs their shares of Upper Jordan River waters, block the exit of the Jordan River from Lake Tiberias and use the lake for her own storage purposes.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


**Index entries:** Zionist Organization, Jordan, Israel, Jordan basin, Yarmouk, Arab Technical Committee, Unified Plan, Eric Johnston, East Ghor Canal