

Water Security, War, Building Peace and Public Diplomacy

Selected Personal Experiences

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by,

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Introduction

Diplomacy and water are not new. **Water has been used as a weapon in warfare for millennia;** Often violating international humanitarian law such as protections for civilian water infrastructure under the **Geneva Conventions or raised in water and peace sessions such as at the recent WWF in Bali.**

However, the water and War focus often passes over the most salient aspects of water: Water's powerful role in building social community; generating wealth through provision of preconditions of economic activities; convening adversaries and providing common language for joint and creative dialogue; integrating, in a practical way, diverse interests and values, and; providing a principal tool for preventive diplomacy and for building cultures of cooperation, if not peace.

A reading of the **databases on the topic reveal that water rarely causes or decides wars decisively,** but water can cause massive civilian suffering, displacement, and environmental damage

When UNESCO commissioned me and archeology Professor Fekri Hassan to write a track on Water and Civilization, we

found that during the Roman Empire conflicts with the Barbarians boatsman associations organized across the whole rivers of the Rhine and Danube emerged. Their job was to offer special offices for arbitration on river uses. Why? It was essential for both Romans and Barbarians to keep river bone traffic moving.

Medieval scholar Roger Masters describes the collaboration between Machiavelli and Leonardo DaVinci to divert the Arno River as a tool of war against a fellow city state . The founder of China, YU the Great, who unified diverse Asiatic regions, was so revered because of his civil works to protect the population from floods. The Valencia Water Tribunal, with North African, Roman and Islamic roots is our oldest continuous democratic institutions

In 1808 Mr. Jefferson authorized the Gallatin report which outlined how to use the vast waters of North American to essentially help build one nation out of diverse entities on the continent. In 1828 the young U.S. supreme court codified the key power of the Federal government versus state power out of solving an interstate conflict on water tariffs. And there are many more such fascinating stories throughout history.

Today's organizers asked me to share some personal experiences with public diplomacy and water. I will briefly share experiences in 4 different and consequential personal cases over the last three decades.

1) Multilateral Peace Talks on Water in the Middle East: water and formal diplomacy (between track one and track two diplomacy)

In the early 1990s, I helped write the water resources briefing books to prepare US Secretary of State Baker for the Madrid Middle East negotiators that produced the multilateral peace talks. One of the five tracks was water. The US became the gavel holder for this track, and I served on the US negotiating team for four years. Water had become a venue for building cooperation, trust and confidence. Water had already been such a venue in the Middle East. Even as the parties were in kinetic conflict, they met continually about water in the so called ‘table talks’ along the Jordan river.

I remember the tension filled air in Vienna Austria as I delivered the opening talk. As I looked around the room, however, it was like old home week for me. Around the table were familiar faces and close colleagues. That was the first time I experienced rather than simply intellectualized about the reality of water as a tool in public diplomacy. We were talking about serious issues with huge consequences with representatives of peoples who had been killing each other.

The second time such reality hit was at an early reception. A Palestinian representative was speaking with two Israelis. They asked, “How much water do you really need?” A number was floated and the Israelis said this should be easy to divert from the national carrier. The Palestinians retorted, they did not want

that water they wanted their water. In short, they wanted to see certain physical water from specific places that symbolically were theirs; water that they saw as stolen from them. What a lesson about the powerful symbolism of water; about the need to find some rituals of mutual acknowledgments of hurt.

During one acrimonious period: the parties (under orders from their governments) virtually sat around the table for a day saying little to nothing. However, at the breaks they would jointly gather and draw out solutions to regional water issues on pad of paper! The following day we arranged a private plane to fly from Washington to the TVA operations center in Knoxville, Tennessee. The morning at the airport was deadly quiet and you could hear a pin drop on the plane. Twelve hours later on the way home the plane sounded more like one of the local sports bars. This group of high-level techno-political experts had just spent the day engaging in what they knew and loved – together! To this day I still hear some of the participants' talk of that plane ride back to D.C.

Obviously, things were not always rosy. We came close to historic agreements several times only failing at the last minute. But the talks did establish some things. They **demonstrated that technical cooperation on shared resources could continue amid political tensions; laid groundwork for ongoing institutions like MEDRC and joint committees. It was more about building capacity and dialogue than binding regional treaties. e.g. continued MERC impacts**

In fact, 10 years later I was asked to a lunch at the Dutch Ambassador's residence in DC. The topic was how to start talks in post intifada. Why was I there? It turns out that the only existing organization in the region that had all the parties as signatories was the regional desalination center MERDEC created by the water multilaterals! The Dutch Ambassador and others thought such an organization is just what was needed to bring parties into dialog.

It is impossible to ignore the importance of public water diplomacy after such experiences. The multilaterals used water as a venue of dialog to bring together parties who otherwise were in serious conflict. This is but one case. There are many others.

2) World Bank Water Sector Strategy: power of multi stakeholder transnational participatory evaluation

In the early 2000's, building on the WB water policy of the 1990s, the World Bank water teams had made several attempts to pass a water sector strategy through the World Bank's board of directors in the decade following the first water policy. All failed; in large part stopped by an ideology that strongly opposed funding large infrastructure and dams. The WB senior water advisor asked me to design and run a participatory evaluation on all continents of the proposed water sector strategy that had been field tested over the previous three years. I accepted, on the conditions that this evaluation be transparent, be run exactly the same way in all countries, include a cross section of key stakeholders (indigenous as well as external), and that the results would not be altered. Several weeks after its completion, an elated WB water advisor called me and said,

“....you may be interested, the Bank board just rapidly passed the sector strategy, after all these previously failed attempts...”

What happened? Stakeholder preferences from around the world, visually reflected in the distribution of simple “dot” voting on flip charts, produced a powerful message in stark terms. That visually captivated the WB board: it induced them to ask: “Who are we working for?” Indigenous NGOs strongly favored the sector strategy while international NGOs based in Western capitals opposed it; and the visual display of this was dramatic.

The realities underneath these results were not new and other factors were at play. I suspect many in this room are familiar with the outlined scenario. However, the participatory evaluation was clearly catalytic. What had become a strong ideological coalition of Western donor nations fueling a specific ecological conditionality was overcome by the realities of clients’ needs; clients for whom the international institution was supposed to be working. I was as surprised as everyone.

But, whatever your feelings about the ecological issues at play, the public diplomacy messages are important. It shows how transnational stakeholder participation can impact serious international policy. After all, once the World Bank writes policies or sector strategies most of the other Bank’s follow and so do the many donors and ESAs.

3) Establishing the Dublin Principles – power and influence of cross national affinity interest consensus on world water policy

Before the 1990s Rio environmental conference. I was working at the World Bank with the senior water advisor on WB's first water policy. Many in the water community from international organizations feared that Rio would leave water out; that it would be lost amid other environmental concerns. A water conference was called in Dublin to discuss and articulate the world water community's water concerns. I do not think anyone anticipated the powerful impact the output of this conference, the Dublin Principals, would have over the tumultuous next decade of political-diplomatic and professional debates on water. Those principals continue these debates.

At the last minute at the conference, actually at the conference, I was asked, by the UN and the World Bank, to design a process for hundreds of experts to discuss water proposals for Rio. Things were not going so well. The WB arrived with its proposals as did others. Suspicions of hidden agendas of the powerful participants were everywhere.

I immediately suggested a radically different (for the time early 1990s) format for discussions. We created series of roundtables which allowed facilitated discussions among participants. Several individuals were pressed into facilitation service at each table. Sparing you the "process" details of how we engaged hundreds; during the main day and into the evening we came up with a series of statements. These statements we then posted on a large wall for the next morning. As participants entered the room they were asked to check agree-disagree on a five-point

Likert scale under each proposal. The result clearly identified those items in agreement that they disagree, those that were in agreement and those showing no clear sign of consensus. Thus, the basis of the four Dublin principles readily emerged.

When the Dublin principles were brought to the official UN Rio conference, they were initially shunned as they did not meet official international procedural standards. Significant objections were raised and water did get into a chapter. However, the consensus built those days in Dublin and reflected in the principles was so strong that they held and were supported by most water of the community regardless of what officials said. Consensus among the affinity groups of water professionals and NGOs overrode formal international organizations and changed the public diplomacy of water; the water community still holds to these principals and, they have been adopted by those formal organizations that initially may have rejected them, they have been a basis for much of what was to follow such as IWRM and other initiatives. This has been a lesson in the power of consensus in public diplomacy.

4) Creating the Global Water Partnership (GWP)- new transnational partnership influence on national and international UN world water policies

In the late 1990s, aid funds for water were shrinking. The World Bank and several ESAs initiated a movement to form a new world partnership to strategically affect direction of water aid worldwide. In part this was a recognition that formal UN water diplomacy through the UN's 26 water agencies, called UN Water, were too fragmented to offer strategic vision. Would such

an idea see the light of day? Well, it did; and, it continues to have significant impact on national water aid policies.

Less than ten years after its founding in Stockholm in the late 1990s, its advocacy of integrated water management (IWRM) has changed the face of world water policy debates. I was privileged to design and mediate the process that created the GWP and several years later the process that created both the GWP's strategic direction of IWRM and its definition.

Like the Dublin principles much of the success and existence of GWP is a tribute to effects of carefully designed and executed consensus building process among divergent stakeholders, many of whom started with notions that they were at cross purposes; e.g. the World Bank and UN water agencies; among ESA's themselves; and others. This process story, which continues to evolve, is documented elsewhere for the interested.

At its heart, the GWP is a new form of nested international partnerships among lenders, donors, UN and national agencies, indigenous NGOs, and many others. This partnership has opened a new type of public diplomacy institution (such as suggested in the USC CPD) and a traceable track of influences on the public diplomacy and water debates worldwide.

Conclusions

These are but a few of many further similar experiences involving similar principles and a variety of processes over the next two decades, involving International Organizations, water Ministers and senior leaders stakeholders ,NGOS and other worldwide and domestically in the US. Along the way

advancements in software and hardware have and are greatly enhancing processes for working together such as shared real time modeling.

I would like to conclude with these few personal messages and suggestions:

Strategically we should identify priority areas of security concerns and then ask: “How can water actions be used as means to achieve security ends in each priority area?”

Our water diplomacy must move beyond only humanitarian assistance (important as it is) and ask: “How can we work to prevent and reduce vulnerability to water related disasters?”

Our water diplomacy must take care that our rhetoric does not create the conflicts we seek to avoid. For examples touting water as causing war.

Our water diplomacy needs to understand that our well-intended rhetoric, based on realities we experience in the rich world, is often coming across to the poor as, “Do what we say not what we did..”, or “preserve but do not use” Which translates as conditionality that is more likely to sustain rather than transform poverty.

Our water diplomacy must move beyond environment alone and ask: “How to use water to create platforms for growth while designing mitigation of costs to environment?”

Most faith traditions across civilizations use water as symbol of reconciliation, healing, regeneration; we should remember that water debates mirror debates of social ethics.

From thousands of years past, Lao Tzu's words testify to public diplomacy and water: he says:

‘....The sage's transformation of the world arises from solving the problem of water. If water is united, the human heart will be corrected. If water is pure and clean, the heart of the people will readily be unified and desirous of cleanliness. Even when the citizenry's heart is changed, their conduct will not be depraved. So, the sage's government.... consists of talking to people and persuading them, family by family. The pivot (of work) is water....’

Thank you for your attention.