Targeting Water Infrastructure in Middle East Conflicts

Erika Weinthal (Duke University)
Co-PI: Jeannie Sowers (University of New Hampshire)

Prepared for the Panel on “Threats to Water Diplomacy and Good Practices in Peacebuilding”
Geneva Peace Week
November 9, 2018
Targeting environmental infrastructures

- Central feature of post-2011 Middle East wars
- Degradation of energy, water, waste, and sanitation systems
- Important for human health, economic activity, and ecosystem services
Project Questions

• What are the ‘costs’ of war for human security and ecosystems from targeting infrastructure?

• What can be done to enhance accountability?

• How do humanitarian actors and local communities try to cope?
MENA infrastructural wars:

- Normalizing “shutting cities off”
- ‘Urban’ networks extend far into hinterlands
- Centralized water-energy systems = vulnerable to disruption
- Protracted conflict → cumulative deterioration of public services
What happens with power cuts?

- Water and wastewater systems shut down
- Contamination of water supplies, soil, crops
- Collapse of public health systems
- Illness and disease (e.g. cholera)
Targeting environmental infrastructures, international law, and civilians in the new Middle Eastern wars

Jeannie L Sowers
University of New Hampshire, USA

Erika Weinthal
Duke University, USA

Neda Zawahri
Cleveland State University, USA
Implications

- Health and livelihood impacts for several generations
- ‘Reconstruction’ complicated by fragmentation and scale of destruction
- New evolving arrangements for service provision among armed groups and truncated states
- Exacerbation of climate change and population growth impacts on ecosystem sustainability
Thank you!

This research is supported by:
The Gerda Henkel Stiftung, Germany
Duke University, U.S.
University of New Hampshire, U.S.