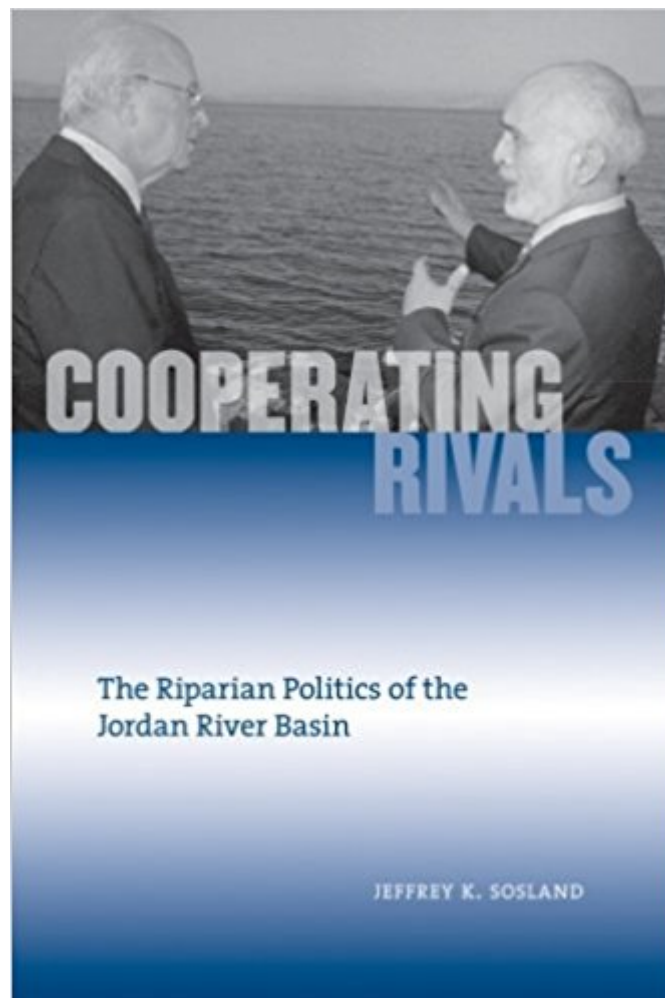




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Cooperating Rivals: The Riparian Politics Of The Jordan River Basin (SUNY Series In Global Politics)



Synopsis

Examines cooperation and conflict over water in the Middle East. This book examines the politics of water scarcity in the Middle East's Jordan River Basin (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority) between 1920 and 2006. Jeffrey K. Sosland demonstrates that while water scarcity might generate political tension, it does not by itself precipitate war, nor is it likely to do so. At the same time, efforts to promote water cooperation, such as those initiated by the United States, have an identifiable political benefit by creating rules, building confidence, and reducing tensions among adversaries. Sosland concludes that while this alone might not resolve the overall conflict, it does create positive long-term value in achieving peace. This is a detailed, well-documented account. **CHOICE** "Cooperating Rivals is by far the most detailed and profound analysis of the complex geopolitical, political, and hydrological interrelationships between countries and their leaders on the Jordan River Basin." Hillel Shuval, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem "I especially like Sosland's ability to pull together and weave into one coherent narrative all of the relevant information on this complicated subject. This includes not only technical hydrological data, but also the political and economic concerns of the various state parties and political groups such as the PLO, and the relationship of water issues to improving or harming the chances for a peaceful solution of the various Arab-Israel disputes." George E. Gruen, Columbia University

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information on this complicated subject. This includes not only technical hydrological data, but also the political and economic concerns of the various state parties and political groups such as the PLO, and the relationship of water issues to improving or harming the chances for a peaceful solution of the various Arab-Israeli disputes." -- George E. Gruen, Columbia University --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This is an excellent book which I thoroughly enjoyed reading. While it is a scholarly work, it tells an important story in an interesting and enjoyable way. Over the past half century, the Arab-Israeli conflict has become one of the pivotal challenges of world diplomacy and the dispute over scarce water resources there often has played center stage. Sosland does an excellent job in taking the reader through the historical evolution of water-related issues from the 1920s to the present providing a much better understanding of current situation. The author presents a convincing argument why the next Middle East war will NOT be over water but why water nevertheless has played an important role and will continue to do so in Middle East peacemaking. Sosland maintains this was so with the Jordanians and the Palestinians (mid-1990s Oslo II) and adds water will play a key role in any future potential negotiations between Syria and Israel. My two favorite sections in the book were Chapter 4 "The Yarmouk, 1967-1994" where the author details the fascinating secret talks between Jordan and Israel, in their effort to share available water many years before their 1994 peace treaty, and Chapter 6 "The 1990s Madrid Peace Process and After, 1991-2006." Not only does Sosland do a great job of explaining the negotiations, but he also covers all of the hydrological plans for addressing Arab-Israeli water scarcity, from desalinization and water recycling to institution building. This is a well researched book with extensive endnotes providing more info on topics of interest. US and Middle East policy makers ought to read this before beginning meaningful negotiations on regional water issues.

Sosland, assistant professor of international business and trade at the American University, states that there is no record of any war any time in the last 4,000 years having been precipitated by water scarcity. So much for all that nonsense about "water wars," especially in the Israeli-Arab conflict, as Patrick Clason of the Middle East Quarterly tells us. In fact, water in that context has proven to be more a subject for cooperation than for military conflict. Not that this cooperation has been smooth. Indeed, the heart of Sosland's account is the details of the tough bargaining stands, unilateral actions, and sneaky cheating on agreements in which all sides have engaged. A particularly entertaining chapter sets out the 1967-94 Jordanian-Israeli secret cooperation that involved periodic

high-level meetings at a picnic table on the banks of the Yarmouk River near the spot where it feeds into the Jordan. That cooperation illustrates one of Sosland's main conclusions, namely, secret cooperation facilitated by a third party--usually the U.S. government--has worked best. It also undercuts the claim in his conclusions that multilateralism (that is, the involvement of many states in a broad negotiating process) has been useful. To the contrary, Sosland's account establishes that the multilateral water talks launched at the 1991 Madrid peace conference accomplished little, despite Washington's best efforts. Sosland's account is very much that of a political scientist concerned about governments, not that of an economist or hydrologist. He barely mentions how subsidized water prices have encouraged farming, which consumes the vast majority of water throughout the Jordan River basin. He only makes passing references to advances in technology that have allowed the basin's agricultural output to more than double in the last few decades without consuming more water. He hardly refers to the increasing use of recycled water in agriculture and industry, which saves fresh water for urban consumers. In short, *Cooperating Rivals* is strong at describing the cooperation of governments but weak on analyzing the overall water problems of the Jordan basin.

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