

Meeting Outline

- We held our August meeting at 1 PM GMT on October 10th, 2022.
- There were 20 contributors in attendance.
- We began the meeting with some administrative updates.
- Dr. Martina Klimes then moderated a Q&A with Dr. Larry Susskind and Dr. Shafiqul Islam, who reflected on what they had learned in the ten years since their first book and article on Water Diplomacy.
 - you can read their recent reflections in Science & Diplomacy here:
 - <https://www.sciencediplomacy.org/perspective/2022/water-diplomacy-our-ten-year-journey-learning-doing>
 - which is part of larger special issue on “a decade of science and diplomacy” here:
 - <https://www.sciencediplomacy.org/issue/55>
- We then opened the floor to contributors’ comments, questions, and reflections on the issues raised.

Administrative Updates

- Editorial review and peer review are ongoing.
 - Thank you to the reviewers for their diligence and to the authors for their patience.
- Open Access
 - We are in ongoing conversations with the group that has committed funding. As part of this process, some draft chapters may be shared with this group. If you have any concerns, please let us know.
- Asana
 - We are no longer actively using Asana to manage the submission process. You are still welcome to use it if you wish, but the majority of contributors preferred to use email, so we will be using that going forward.

Notes From the Q&A Session

What has changed over the last ten years?

Larry remarked upon three notable changes in the past ten years.

1. Science diplomacy has evolved alongside water diplomacy to the point where it can be difficult to make clear distinctions between them. In both fields, there is much more awareness that people engaged in any sort of practice that invokes “diplomacy” should have some diplomatic training in addition to whatever background they may have in science or water.
2. Individuals have proven to be more important than countries in some circumstances. Skilled and trustworthy individuals can disproportionately affect water diplomacy negotiations and our thinking about these issues more broadly.
3. Evidence-based arguments are important to water diplomacy negotiations, but technical and scientific considerations will not carry the day. You can (and should) do as much science and bring as much data as

you want into the discussion, but you should not expect that evidence alone will move the process forward. Therefore, it is critical to continue training and investing in individuals who can develop their skills as diplomats above and beyond what they may bring to the table regarding evidence-based arguments.

What would be some advice you would give to a group starting a new process?

Larry remarked again upon the importance of individuals. Larry suggested that one of the best things you can do is find people who are prepared to commit to developing professionally in these areas and ensure that they are adequately supported. Critically, it would be best to look beyond those who are due for promotion, have a certain title, or went to a certain school. Rather, choose individuals based on their competence and willingness to develop professionally over what could be a five-to-ten-year commitment.

What has changed about the way we perceive boundary-crossing problems?

Shafik remarked that ten years ago, we were still thinking about water diplomacy in terms of transboundary (i.e., international) waters. We have come to appreciate that water diplomacy is also applicable not just when boundaries are political but also when boundaries are natural (e.g., between ecosystems), societal (e.g., between communities), or sectoral (e.g., between industries). We also understand that these issues arise at different scales (e.g., transnational, subnational, and community), and we have organized the case studies in the Handbook to reflect the differing needs of each scale.

However, at each scale, we suggest it is helpful to think of water as a flexible rather than a fixed resource. Negotiation is critical in generating creative options that can take advantage of this flexibility to create mutual benefits and lasting agreements.

Can you say more about the importance of science in negotiation?

Shafik remarked that one of his lessons over the last ten years was the importance of distinguishing between “scientific facts” and “social facts.” Scientific facts are reproducible, falsifiable, and generalizable. On the other hand, social facts are context-dependent understandings, traditions, and beliefs that one cannot empirically refute. Because we view scientific facts as “objective,” – it is common to prioritize them over social facts, which seem “subjective.” However, it would be more accurate to call social facts “collective” rather than “subjective.” Social facts are norms and beliefs held in common by a group and can be even more potent than scientific facts regarding negotiations and motivating collective action.

Investing in science is most fruitful when there is an uncertainty of information, and scientific facts are the bottlenecks to progress. However, science will do little when there is an uncertainty of action when two groups with divergent social facts disagree about what is appropriate, desirable, equitable, or just. Making progress in negotiations requires an appreciation for the reality of these social facts and a willingness to attend to them.

One contributor noted that:

- Social facts can change as cultures change or even as regimes change. In some parts of the world, even ten years ago, it may have been considered treasonous even to consider negotiating with another riparian on a transboundary river. That is changing now.

Shafik responded that the changeability of social facts is important to recognize. This changeability can be good because some social facts can be debilitating when allowed to persist and spread. For example, this year's flooding in Pakistan was so devastating, partly due to a rise in "disaster orthodoxy"—a collective belief that natural disasters are "acts of God" that cannot be prepared for or predicted. Dangerous "social facts" like this cannot simply be countered with "scientific facts" alone. They require persuasive arguments combining numbers and narratives to shift collective views.

Another contributor noted that:

- When created properly, laws can help signal and guide changes in social facts. This is why laws are often so hard to change – nobody wants to give up the ability to divert blame (e.g., acts of God) away from their own poor planning.

Where do we need more focus in water diplomacy? What will we be talking about ten years from now?

Larry remarked that we need more context-rich case studies. We need people involved in the negotiation process willing to share their experiences so we can learn from them.

Shafik agreed that the practice of water diplomacy involves a lot of "learning by doing" – there is no Newton's Law that describes a simple rule for the practice of water diplomacy. We know that "context matters," – but it is important to understand *how* context matters – and this is what case studies help us understand. We know that one case will not generalize to every other case– but there are likely lessons that are applicable to other contexts with similar capacities and constraints. We will learn more effectively from case studies if we pay close attention to how context shapes actionable and trackable outcomes.

One contributor remarked:

- As most of us recognize, many water diplomacy processes are long and sometimes indefinite. In many cases, we do not know if we are sharing a success story or not, given that the process is unresolved. What are some practical ways for negotiators to share our stories about these processes while recognizing their sensitive nature as ongoing and unresolved?

Larry replied that one of the reasons that many agreements remain brittle is that negotiations do not provide provisions for ongoing reflections and evaluations. If every agreement was required to publish a periodic public assessment that all parties agreed to, we would have a way of gathering information that we could share globally. This would also have implications for those engaged in the process. It would provide a framework and motivation to track and collectively review the outcomes of their decisions and actions. Determining these "lessons learned" shouldn't fall on the shoulders of one party – it should be the collective burden of all parties so they can learn together.

How much of the growth and development of water diplomacy has been driven by increased foreign aid to those areas (like the Water for the World Act) versus other factors, i.e., a greater understanding of the impacts of climate change?

Neither Larry nor Shafik saw much evidence that aid has been particularly important in driving the growth and development of water diplomacy compared to other factors. However, Larry remarked on the importance of who is giving the aid to whom and that south-south assistance patterns have been more effective than north-south.

Various contributors remarked that:

- Aid can and has helped with maintaining treaties. Aid that targets multiple countries is better than aid targeted at one country in this regard.
- Aid can have positive and negative effects. Aid for large infrastructure projects, such as dams, can have significant regional security implications. Sometimes the financial cost of physical security for these projects outweighs the infrastructure costs covered by the aid. These large projects can destabilize and overshadow other development and humanitarian operations.
- Aid alone may not necessarily bring parties together. Still, it may shift the content of the negotiation and what is on the agenda: e.g., dam building, the integration of cross-sectoral concerns, and the importance of broadening participation and inclusion. For example, some conditions on aid money and donor money require a greater balance of gender representations.
- Aid does not seem to be a primary factor in the growth of water diplomacy initiatives, especially relative to other factors, such as a growing recognition of climate change impacts and the mutual benefits available through cooperation. Aid can be beneficial, but aid organizations must take care not to create a hurdle to ongoing or future negotiations or impede the opportunity to cooperate or build joint infrastructure.

How can water diplomacy proceed in the context of active aggression or war?

Larry remarked that in a situation in which war is ongoing, the parties know that peace will eventually break out. It may take a long time, and many lives will be lost, but peace will come. In the interim, water diplomats are unlikely to be able to make progress through official channels. However, it's not pointless for people with certain knowledge, background, and personal contacts on the other side to meet informally (with no authority) to discuss what advice they would give to the two parties when they are eventually ready to talk.

Shafik agrees. It may be futile to talk about water negotiations in the middle of a war, but these conversations can continue in informal backchannels between water professionals from both sides. When the timing is right, these plans can be brought forward.

One contributor noted that:

- The study of hydro-hegemony was born from an analysis of countries officially at war or otherwise had poor relations. One of the primary findings of hydro-hegemony is that conflict and cooperation can coexist.