

Institution: University of Sussex		
Unit of Assessment: 19 – Politics and International Studies		
Title of case study: Confronting Dominant Narratives and Powerful Interests on Water and Climate Security		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Jan Selby	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of International Relations	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 01/01/2005 – 31/05/2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 01/08/2013 – 31/07/2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research by Jan Selby and collaborators on issues of water and climate security has critiqued dominant narratives and advanced alternative analytical and policy frameworks at a range of sites and scales. This case study documents the impacts of this research in five specific issue areas: (1) the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Water Committee; (2) the role of climate change in the Syrian civil war; (3) challenging a UN study of Middle East waters; (4) supporting the transformation of the Palestinian water sector; and (5) the global security implications of water scarcities and climate change. Across these domains, the research has: enriched public and policy understandings; generated debate, critique and dissent; contributed to holding governments and international organisations to account; prompted policy changes and institutional reforms; affected international aid and negotiation priorities; and influenced patterns of water infrastructure development and water supply.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Most research on water and climate security issues is Malthusian in orientation, viewing over-population and natural resource scarcities as the key drivers of environment-related conflicts and insecurities; and most of it is also aligned with the interests of the powerful, whether powerful individual states, or Northern actors and institutions. Jan Selby and colleagues' political ecology-informed research confronts both of these tendencies. It contests dominant Malthusian narratives, in particular by revealing the fundamentally political causes and character of water and climate-related conflicts and insecurities. It seeks to analyse and expose patterns of water and climate-related domination. And it advances alternative – and explicitly political – frameworks for understanding and responding to water and climate security crises.</p> <p>This case study focuses on five specific areas of this overall research programme:</p> <p>(1) The Israeli-Palestinian Joint Water Committee (JWC), established in 1995 under the Oslo peace process, was initially lauded as a rational means of managing a scarce resource. Research by Selby, however, showed that the JWC was functioning as a mechanism of Israeli domination – that Israel was using it to limit Palestinian water development; that Israel was also conditioning its approval of Palestinian water development projects on simultaneous Palestinian Authority (PA) approval of new water systems for Jewish West Bank settlements; and that the PA, with the full knowledge of Presidents Abbas and Arafat, had approved every single Israeli application for water facilities for settlements, despite these settlements and associated infrastructures being illegal under international law and a key obstacle to Palestinian statehood. The latter finding constituted the first published evidence, in any sphere, of the PA formally consenting to parts of Israel's illegal settlement expansion programme. Selby's research both documented this and suggested how the PA might respond [3.1].</p> <p>(2) By 2015, the thesis that climate change-induced migration in Syria had been a decisive spark for the country's civil war had become paradigmatic to Malthusian climate security discourse, and a global policy and media orthodoxy. Research by Selby and colleagues, however, found this thesis to be without merit – including that there was no robust evidence of 'climate migrants' contributing to civil war onset in Syria; that north-east Syria's pre-civil war ecological crisis was essentially political rather than climatic in its causes; and that the standard 'climate conflict'</p>		

narrative was largely a product of Assad regime and donor interests in blaming the climate for this politically-induced crisis [e.g. 3.2].

Selby has also (3) analysed and critiqued a high-profile UN study of Middle East water issues for its pro-Israeli and anti-Arab biases [3.3]; has (4) made various proposals for the transformation of the Palestinian water sector [e.g. 3.4]; and at a more general level has (5) sought to rethink and advance new frameworks for understanding the global security implications of water scarcities and climate change – doing this by critiquing Malthusian orthodoxies, by analysing the interests behind them, by drawing attention instead to the political and economic causes of water and climate insecurities, and by highlighting the profound security implications of climate change adaptation and mitigation [3.5, 3.6].

3. References to the research

[3.1] Selby, J. 'Cooperation, domination and colonisation: the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Water Committee', *Water Alternatives*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2013), pp. 1-24 ISSN 1965-0175 <http://www.water-alternatives.org/index.php/volume6/v6issue1/196-a6-1-1> [text removed for publication].

[3.2] Selby, J., Dahi, O., Fröhlich, C., & Hulme, M. 'Climate change and the Syrian civil war revisited', *Political Geography*, Vol. 60 (2017), pp. 232-44 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2017.08.001> This article is the subject of a special section of the journal, published together with three commentaries plus a rejoinder.

[3.3] Messerschmid, C., & Selby, J. 'Misrepresenting the Jordan River basin', *Water Alternatives*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2015), pp. 258-79 ISSN 1965-0175 <http://www.water-alternatives.org/index.php/alldoc/articles/vol8/v8issue2/290-a8-2-13>

[3.4] [text removed for publication]

[3.5] Selby, J., & Hoffmann, C. 'Rethinking climate change, conflict and security', Introduction to special issue of *Geopolitics*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2014), pp. 747-56 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2014.964866>

[3.6] Selby, J. 'The Trump presidency, climate change, and the prospect of a disorderly energy transition', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2019), pp. 471-90 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210518000165>

4. Details of the impact

This research has had impacts in each of the above five areas. It should be noted that, given the intensely political nature of the research, impacts have inevitably been shaped by political interests and circumstances, [text removed for publication].

(1) The Israeli-Palestinian JWC: By way of historical context: Informed by Selby's research [3.1], in 2010 the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) changed its policy for water negotiations with Israel, deciding that it would henceforth veto all Israeli proposals for settlement water infrastructures put before the JWC. Israel retaliated against this shift in Palestinian policy by vetoing all Palestinian proposals for new water infrastructures within the West Bank, such that the JWC became deadlocked and stopped meeting. The publication of Selby's finding that the PA had long been approving settlement infrastructures also led to extensive and heated public debate, especially within the Palestinian water sector, as detailed in a REF 2014 case study.

New impacts in the current REF cycle have included: firstly, continued **public and policy awareness and debate** around the issues raised by the research, as indicated inter alia by: local media coverage of Selby's findings which first exposed the violation of international law in any sphere (for example in *Ha'aretz* which has up to 100,000 readers and the *Jerusalem Post* which has a circulation of 50,000) [5.1a,i]; discussion of them in reports by international organisations and leading Palestinian NGOs [5.2a-c]; reference to Selby's research on the JWC by, for instance, Middle East Quartet Representative Tony Blair and UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Hilal Elver [5.1c,e]; international media coverage of a 2014-15 dispute about

water supply for the new Palestinian city of Rawabi (which centred on the role of the JWC, and on which Selby provided multiple briefings including text used in a BBC documentary by Lisa Doucet) [5.1b,d]; including coverage in Newsweek magazine which reaches 100 million a week [5.1f], and evidence from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) [5.4.a] that Selby's findings were read by and circulated amongst consular officials. As [text removed for publication] [5.3a] testifies: Selby's research '*exposed the JWC as an instrument of Israeli domination and colonisation, including showing that Israel had over many years been successfully blackmailing the PWA to approve illegal settlement facilities... As a result, the JWC is still today widely viewed as illegitimate and unjust*'. He further notes, '*This research was widely circulated and discussed within the Palestinian water sector, and with international donors, and led to heated debate*' with the effect that '*the extensive public dissemination and discussion of the research, and the issues raised by it, delegitimised the JWC within the PWA and amongst Palestinian water experts and international donors*'.

Secondly, impacts on **PWA negotiation policy**: The 2010 change in PWA policy outlined above – a change which was informed by Selby's research – continues to this day; since then, the PWA has not approved any new settlement water facilities. However, the JWC resumed its work in 2017 after the PWA, fearful of the incoming Trump administration, agreed revised committee terms giving Israel carte blanche to expand water supply to settlements without PWA approval (Selby's published commentary on this development [5.1h] was circulated widely among Palestinian experts and donors). As noted by [text removed for publication], the JWC '*continues to be a source of dispute between Israeli and Palestinian water officials, and within the Palestinian water sector – with these disputes still centring on issues made public by Selby*' [5.3a]. [text removed for publication]

(2) Climate change and the Syrian civil war: Selby *et al.*'s research on this issue generated significant international public and policy interest and debate, as evidenced by: extensive direct media reporting of the research findings across media such as the *BBC World Service*, *The Times*, *Daily Mail*, *Sputnik* and *USA Today*; reproduction of a media commentary by Selby *et al.* in India's second largest circulation English language newspaper, *The Hindu* (circulation 1.5 million); media approaches to contribute to related stories (e.g. stories in *Asia Times* and *Syria Direct*) [5.1j-r]; wide readership of the research, including by policymakers (3.2 is open access and has been *Political Geography's* most downloaded article ever since publication) [5.6]; citations in policy and think tank reports (e.g. by the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation and US Army War College) [5.2f,g]; published critical responses to Selby's research [3.2] from the leading global think tanks working on climate security (e.g. Adelphi and the Center for Climate and Security [5.2i,j]); and presentations to policy audiences (e.g. to the European Commission [5.9a]). While politicians and activists still periodically invoke the Syria case as part of their climate advocacy, Selby's research [3.2] refuted the link and led policy actors to be much more cautious in talking about it and in 'securitising' climate change more generally [e.g. 5.8].

(3) UN-ESCWA on the Jordan River basin: Selby and colleagues' analysis of a high profile UN-Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (UN-ESCWA) study of the Jordan basin [3.3] found that the study, despite having been produced by an organisation of Arab states with a record of opposition to the Israeli occupation, reproduced pro-Israeli misrepresentations of the basin's political geography, hydrology and development; on this basis the authors called for the study's retraction. [text removed for publication].

(4) Supporting the transformation of the Palestinian water sector: In addition to the critically-oriented research and impacts above, Selby has also developed a series of proposals and frameworks for the positive transformation of the Palestinian water sector. [text removed for publication]

(5) Global water and climate security: Selby has been an important voice in: arguing for more nuanced understandings of the security implications of water scarcity and climate change; calling for activists and policymakers not to overstate the threats of 'water wars' and 'climate conflict' for political purposes; emphasising the significant security implications of climate change

adaptation and mitigation; and arguing that policy priorities and frameworks should reflect this [3.2 and 3.5]. There remain strong policy interests in ‘securitising’ climate change which are largely impervious to scientific findings. Nonetheless, evidence of Selby’s impact is provided by: regular input to media stories on water and climate security [5.1s-v]; citation in government and think tank reports (e.g. the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Clingendael Institute) [5.2k,l]; invited presentations and keynote addresses to policy and military audiences (inc. the FCO, Department for International Development (DfID), UK Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA), and NATO Defence College) [5.9b-g]; private policy briefings [text removed for publication]; and regular informal briefings (esp. to FCO and DFID staff). As evidenced by testimonies, Selby’s research has, for instance, helped the Dutch government [5.11] to ‘*nuance our theories of change*’ on water, climate change and security, and has ‘*influenced project design*’ of the Water Peace and Security Partnership and ‘*speeches on the subject by Dutch politicians and officials*’. It has also informed the Finnish government’s framing of climate change as a security issue including ‘*in the preparation of the upcoming government’s defence policy report and the inclusion of climate security among the themes of the latest call for the government’s research funding*’ [5.12].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[5.1a-v] Report & supporting documentation/URLs on international media coverage from 2013-2019 highlighting the debate on the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Water Committee, Palestinian Water Authority, climate change and Syria and the war on access to resources referencing Jan Selby’s research

[5.2] Summary report on published reports from FAO (UN), IPCC, Al Haq, World Bank, UNCHR and Think-tanks citing Jan Selby’s research

[5.3a] [text removed for publication]

[5.3b] [text removed for publication]

[5.4a] [text removed for publication]

[5.4b] [text removed for publication]

[5.4c] [text removed for publication]

[5.4d] [text removed for publication]

[5.4e] [text removed for publication]

[5.5a-c] [text removed for publication]

[5.6] Most downloaded: *Political Geography* homepage

<https://www.journals.elsevier.com/political-geography> + screenshot pdf on file

[5.7a-c] [text removed for publication]

[5.8] [text removed for publication]

[5.9] [text removed for publication]

[5.10] [text removed for publication]

[5.11] [text removed for publication].

[5.12] [text removed for publication].