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The Impact of Environmental Crises on Interstate Relations in the Middle East and North Africa (2007–2024)

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Abstract

The Middle East and North Africa region, known for its distinctive geographical characteristics and limited natural resources, has long faced various environmental challenges. Since 2007, these challenges have intensified and evolved, affecting not only environmental sustainability but also the political, economic, and social dynamics among the countries in the region. It is crucial to analyze how regional nations respond to environmental crises and to explore the consequences for international relations and regional security. This understanding is crucial for comprehending the emerging dynamics in the region and recognizing the necessity of cooperative policy responses to environmental challenges. Accordingly, the central research question is: How have environmental crises affected interstate relations among countries in the Middle East and North Africa between 2007 and 2024? In addressing this question, the hypothesis suggests that environmental crises, by exacerbating conflicts over the exploitation of shared natural resources, threatening stability and security, and creating opportunities for both positive and negative external interventions, have significantly impacted the diplomatic relations of the region's countries. This article employs a quantitative method and an explanatory approach for hypothesis validation.

Keywords: Environmental crises, Neighborly relations, Middle East and North Africa, Shared natural resources, Environmental security.

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Introduction

Neighborly relations among countries represent one of the most intricate facets of international politics, continuously shaped by various factors. Due to shared borders and mutual dependencies, neighboring countries often find themselves in a complex interplay that can foster opportunities for cooperation and grounds for tension and conflict. The Middle East and North Africa region, characterized by its unique geographical position, diverse climate, and limited natural resources, has long confronted numerous environmental challenges. These challenges can drive neighboring countries to either cooperate or compete for scarce resources. Recognized as one of the hottest and driest regions in the world, it struggles with issues such as water scarcity, desertification, air pollution, and climate change. In recent decades, particularly since 2007, the severity and scope of these crises have intensified, leaving profound impacts on the region's ecosystem and intergovernmental relations. These crises frequently transcend national borders and, in many instances, have become catalysts for conflict or avenues for cooperation among the regional states.

In this context, investigating the impact of environmental crises on diplomatic relations among countries in the Middle East and North Africa can enhance our understanding of regional interactions and highlight the necessity for collaborative policies in this area. This research uses quantitative methods and an explanatory approach to analyze the various dimensions of environmental crises and their effects on the neighborly relations of countries in the region from 2007 to 2024. Exploring this topic can provide insights into regional challenges and facilitate the development of effective policy and crisis management strategies. The central question guiding this research is how environmental crises have influenced the neighborly relations of countries in the Middle East and North Africa from 2007 to 2024. To address this question, the hypothesis posits that environmental crises, by exacerbating conflicts over the use of shared natural resources, threatening stability and security, and creating opportunities for positive and negative external interventions, have significantly affected the relationships among the region's nations.

1. Environmental Crises and the Dynamics of Neighborly Relations

The Middle East and North Africa region is currently grappling with numerous environmental crises, with the management of shared

water resources emerging as one of the most pressing challenges. Over the past two decades, countries in this region have often engaged in conflicts over the control of these vital resources, exacerbating the existing water crisis due to ineffective management practices. The region can be categorized into "downstream" and "upstream" areas based on access to water. Many nations share rivers that lack comprehensive management strategies and are subjected to overexploitation. Consequently, these countries have sometimes taken actions that undermine the essential interests of their neighbors in a bid to dominate these precious water resources (Naseri & Haqpanah, 2018, pp. 352-351).

1-1. Nile Basin

The Nile River, renowned as the longest river in the world at 6,671 kilometers, flows through northeastern Africa and encompasses a basin that includes 11 countries: Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya, the Central African Republic, Rwanda, and Eritrea (Dehshiri & Bahrami, 2019: 54). In 2011, Ethiopia commenced the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile, aiming to enhance electricity production. This initiative raised significant concerns in both Egypt and Sudan, as these countries heavily rely on the waters of the Nile. Egypt, in particular, fears that the dam may diminish its vital water resources, which are essential for agriculture and overall water security. Tensions escalated in 2013 when Ethiopia diverted the river flow to facilitate dam construction, an action perceived by some in Egypt as a direct threat to their water security (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2023).

Over the years, numerous negotiations have sought to address the disputes surrounding Nile water. In 2015, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan signed an agreement known as the "Declaration of Principles," aimed at fostering cooperation in the filling and operating of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. However, these negotiations often ended without resolution, with each country voicing its respective concerns and claims. In 2021, the United Nations Security Council urged the resumption of negotiations, underscoring the importance of achieving a mutually beneficial agreement for all parties involved (United Nations, 2021). By 2024, the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) was implemented, marking a pivotal advancement in the collaborative management of Nile resources. This agreement aims to establish the Nile Basin

Commission, set to succeed the Nile Basin Initiative, and oversee the equitable and reasonable utilization of Nile water. It is regarded as a significant step toward enhanced cooperation among Nile Basin countries and the sustainable development of water resources (Nile Basin Initiative, 2024).

Climate change has introduced further challenges for the countries of the Nile Basin. Alterations in rainfall patterns and heightened evaporation rates threaten river flow and may worsen water scarcity issues. Research indicates that climate change could result in diminished access to water resources, negatively impacting the region's agriculture, energy production, and water security (Nature Water, 2024).

1-2. Tigris and Euphrates Basin

The Tigris and Euphrates Basin, a critical source of fresh water, has historically been a contentious issue in the relations between Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. As the upstream country and primary source of these rivers, Türkiye has considerably diminished the downstream flow to its neighbors through extensive dam construction projects, such as the GAP project. Statistics indicate that these initiatives have reduced the flow of the Euphrates River to Syria by as much as 60% and to Iraq by up to 90%. This reduction has significantly impacted the availability of water resources for agriculture, drinking, and energy production in both Iraq and Syria, escalating diplomatic tensions between these countries and Türkiye. Consequently, Iraq and Syria have accused Turkey of using water resources as a political tool. Iraq has consistently accused Türkiye of infringing upon the rights of downstream nations and has, at times, sought UN intervention. Reports suggest that Iraq has threatened to restrict trade and diplomatic relations with Türkiye if this trend persists (Kibaroglu, 2021, p. 64).

The diminishing access to water resources in Iraq has resulted in significant consequences, including the loss of agricultural lands, a 40% decline in agricultural production, and the displacement of more than 7 million people from affected areas. This crisis has not only intensified internal challenges within Iraq but has also severely strained relations between Iraq and Türkiye, as Iraq accuses Türkiye of exploiting water resources for its political maneuvering. The drought and subsequent water scarcity have increased the dependence of downstream countries on food imports, complicating trade relations between Iraq and Türkiye. As Iraq has lost its capability to produce exportable goods due to these water shortages

and environmental degradation, Türkiye has leveraged this issue as a tool for economic pressure (UNEP, 2023).

In response, Iraq and Syria have sought to establish an informal alliance with Iran to counter Türkiye's hydro-political strategies, leading to new geopolitical rivalries and heightened regional tensions. Political strains between Damascus and Ankara have escalated, particularly in recent years, as Turkey has unilaterally restricted Syria's share of water resources. Additionally, the reduction in the flow of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers has caused the Mesopotamian marshes—one of the region's most vital ecosystems and a primary source of agriculture and fishing for Iraq—to dry up. This drying has also intensified dust storms, inflicting over $20 billion in annual economic losses on the countries within the region. Consequently, Iraq and Syria have protested heavily. Türkiye has dismissed requests from both nations for equitable water distribution, using its upstream position as a means of political leverage. This approach has shifted relations among these countries from collaboration to confrontation, with Iraq and Syria accusing Türkiye of violating international rights and exhibiting hegemonic behavior (UNDP, 2021).

Thus, the Tigris and Euphrates Basin has been instrumental in shaping the relationships among the countries of the region. These rivers serve as essential sources of fresh water, agriculture, and energy; however, the unequal management of these water resources has intensified crises and altered the dynamics of neighborly relations. Environmental issues within the Tigris and Euphrates Basin have notably impacted relations between Türkiye, Iraq, and Syria. Türkiye's approach to controlling water resources, instead of promoting collaborative efforts, has exacerbated conflicts, diminished regional cooperation, and fueled mistrust among neighboring nations.

1-3. Jordan River Basin

The Jordan River Basin serves as one of the most vital water sources in the Middle East and has faced significant challenges due to environmental crises and climate change in recent decades. This river, which originates in the mountains of Lebanon and flows into the Dead Sea, provides essential water resources for Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Syria, and Lebanon. Over the past twenty years, the river's volume has dwindled to less than 10% of its natural flow as a result of excessive water extraction for agricultural and urban uses. This decline, compounded by the impacts of climate change,

has led to ecosystem degradation and loss of biodiversity. For instance, the decreased inflow to the Dead Sea, resulting from the overuse of the Jordan River's resources, has caused a marked drop in the water level of the Dead Sea. The drying of surrounding areas, once vibrant habitats for wildlife and plant life, has triggered desertification and an increase in dust in the region (Makonnen & Hoekstra, 2020, pp. 793-794).

Disputes over shared water resources are a primary cause of regional tensions in the Jordan River Basin. Israel, which utilizes the majority of these resources, frequently faces criticism from neighboring countries, including Jordan and Palestine. Reports indicate that Israel consumes over 60% of the Jordan River's water for agricultural and drinking purposes, while Palestinians only have access to about 25% of the available supply. This disparity has led to significant social and political issues, particularly in Palestinian areas like the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Selby, 2013: 8).

Additionally, Jordan, recognized as one of the world's most water-scarce nations, heavily relies on the water resources of the Jordan River. The population in Jordan has surged from approximately 5.7 million in 2007 to over 10 million by 2024, intensifying the strain on the country's water supply (World Bank, 2022). Climate change has also played a significant role in diminishing the region's water resources. Rising temperatures and declining rainfall, coupled with frequent droughts, have led to a reduction in the flow of the Jordan River. Studies indicate that average temperatures in the region have increased over the past two decades, resulting in heightened evaporation and decreased surface and groundwater reserves (UNESCO, 2023). This situation has not only worsened the water crisis but has also contributed to political disputes among the countries in the region.

Environmental crises have significantly influenced the relations among neighboring countries in the region. Disputes concerning the distribution of shared water resources have emerged as a central issue in the growing mistrust between Israel, Jordan, and Palestine. Jordan's grievances regarding Israel's excessive water extraction and the restrictions placed on Palestinian access to water have frequently been pivotal in regional negotiations. These conflicts have not only complicated diplomatic cooperation but have also exacerbated social and political instability in the area (Zeitoun & et al., 2012).

Despite these tensions, there have been initiatives aimed at fostering regional collaboration in the management of shared water

resources. One notable endeavor is the Red Sea-Dead Sea Water Conveyance Project, which seeks to ensure a supply of drinking water while contributing to the restoration of the diminishing Dead Sea. Supported by the World Bank and various international organizations, this project presents an opportunity to alleviate tensions and foster new partnerships in the region (World Bank, 2022). Nevertheless, the execution of such initiatives is hindered by a multitude of political and financial disputes among the countries involved. The environmental crises and water scarcity in the Jordan River Basin not only intensify disputes and mistrust but also underscore the critical need for regional cooperation in sustainable water resource management.

2. Environmental Crises as Threats to National and Regional Security

In recent years, environmental crises have emerged as one of the most significant threats to the security of countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Issues such as climate change, drought, water scarcity, and desertification have prompted widespread crises that affect multiple facets of national security. This analysis explores the repercussions of these environmental challenges from 2007 to 2024, focusing on their impact on the political, economic, social, military, and environmental security of the region's nations.

2-1. Political Instability and Crisis of Legitimacy

Environmental crises, particularly in nations with inadequate natural resource management, can swiftly lead to political instability. Governments that do not effectively respond to these crises risk losing legitimacy, as public dissatisfaction and protests often arise. At times, this unrest escalates into internal crises or even civil wars. Iraq serves as a poignant example of this phenomenon, particularly in 2018. In Basra Province, water scarcity and deteriorating water quality, coupled with a lack of public services, sparked widespread protests against the government. These challenges were exacerbated by declining water levels in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and climate change-related issues, resulting in significant public discontent over the government's failure to address these problems. The crisis not only jeopardized the country's political stability but also created a profound divide between the government and its citizens (Al-Monitor, 2018). Similarly, in Syria, a severe drought from 2007 to 2010 devastated 75% of agricultural land and prompted a wave of rural-to-urban migration. This demographic

shift placed immense pressure on urban areas, heightening public dissatisfaction and contributing to social unrest, ultimately serving as a central factor in the outbreak of the Syrian civil war. In this context, environmental crises rapidly evolved into social and political challenges, undermining the government's legitimacy (Femia & Werrell, 2012, p. 1).

2-2. Migration and Social Fragmentation

Environmental crises, particularly droughts and desertification, have resulted in population displacement and forced migration. These movements not only exacerbate social and economic issues but also heighten ethnic and social tensions in various regions. The influx of migrants' places considerable pressure on urban infrastructure and, especially in low-income countries, leads to social challenges and heightened discontent. In Iran, environmental crises such as prolonged droughts and the depletion of groundwater in southern provinces—especially in Sistan and Baluchistan—have triggered significant internal migration to larger cities like Tehran and Shiraz. This migration has sparked social tensions between newcomers and local populations as migrants grapple with economic hardships while further straining limited urban resources. Notably, around 800,000 individuals migrated to Mazandaran between 2021 and 2023, and many fleeing areas were severely impacted by climate change (Rostami & Asad Paski, 2024).

Similarly, in Syria, internal migration driven by the drought crisis of the 2000s, particularly after 2007, has created numerous challenges for major cities. As migrants moved from rural regions to urban centers, they added stress to urban infrastructure and public services. This migration crisis significantly increased dissatisfaction among the population and ultimately contributed to the political and social turmoil that played a fundamental role in the onset of the Syrian civil war (Femia & Werrell, 2012, p. 2).

2-3. Economic and Food Security Challenges

Environmental crises, particularly drought and water scarcity, have a direct and detrimental impact on agricultural production, thereby threatening the food security of nations. A decline in agricultural output leads to increased reliance on food imports, creating economic and social pressures on the populace. In Iraq, the diminishing water levels of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers have significantly reduced the production of key crops such as wheat and barley. This decline not only jeopardizes the food security of the

Iraqi people but also imposes considerable economic strain on the country, which has become heavily reliant on food imports. This economic crisis has particularly adverse effects in rural areas where agriculture is the primary source of livelihood (UNICEF, 2021). Similarly, in Egypt— the world's largest importer of wheat— decreased rainfall and rising temperatures have resulted in lower agricultural yields, further increasing dependence on food imports. Morocco has also experienced the repercussions of climate change and water shortages, with a reported 30% reduction in wheat production in 2021, which adversely affected the country's food security. Other countries, such as Yemen and Lebanon, have likewise faced economic and social challenges due to climate change and environmental degradation. These conditions have contributed to rising food prices and significant fluctuations in global markets, intensifying the threat to food security in these nations. Economically, the ongoing environmental crises have hindered growth in many countries in the region. Specifically, during 2019 and 2020, a decline in agricultural production and rising unemployment in the agricultural sector resulted in lower gross domestic product and heightened poverty levels across the region (World Bank, 2023).

2-4. Militarization of Resource Conflicts

Environmental crises, particularly water scarcity, have intensified military tensions among regional nations. The competition for limited water resources, especially in arid and semi-arid regions, can escalate into military conflicts, jeopardizing regional security. These tensions have become increasingly significant not only in diplomatic and political contexts but also in military considerations. For example, the water crisis surrounding the Helmand River is a primary factor contributing to border tensions between Iran and Afghanistan. Afghanistan's construction of new dams on the Helmand River has considerably diminished the water resources essential for Iran, raising concerns about the repercussions of these dams on agriculture and livelihoods in the border regions. In recent years, this water crisis has sparked border conflicts between the two countries. In some instances, these tensions have even escalated into armed confrontations, adversely affecting border security and political stability in both Iran and Afghanistan (Dagres, 2023). Similarly, in the case of Egypt and Ethiopia, disputes over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project have also heightened military tensions. Egypt, heavily reliant on Nile water for

agriculture and drinking water, is apprehensive about the dam's potential impact on its water resources and has issued repeated threats of military action against Ethiopia. While serious military conflicts have yet to arise between these nations, the tensions surrounding this project have emerged as one of the region's most pressing security challenges (Al Jazeera, 2021).

2-5. Natural Disasters and Ecological Devastation

Climate change has heightened the intensity of natural disasters in various regions. For instance, in Iran, severe floods in 2019 affected the Khuzestan and Lorestan provinces, resulting from heavy rainfall and snowmelt. These floods caused significant damage to homes, roads, and agricultural infrastructure, adversely impacting the lives of many residents. Furthermore, the drying up of the Hoor al-Azim and Gavkhouni wetlands has led to an increase in dust storms, which not only pose a threat to public health but also jeopardize the nation’s economy. Such natural disasters, particularly in vulnerable economic and social conditions, can lead to social unrest. In Saudi Arabia, sandstorms exacerbated by rising temperatures and desertification have created numerous challenges for both the economy and residents' quality of life. These storms have diminished air quality, damaged infrastructure, and caused transportation difficulties. Overall, these crises threaten the environment while also presenting significant issues for the nation's economy and infrastructure (Francis et al., 2022, p. 6).

3. External Interventions and Environmental Geopolitics in MENA

Environmental crises—ranging from water scarcity and desertification to climate-induced displacement—have become defining challenges in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). These crises, often exacerbated by inadequate governance and the mismanagement of natural resources, have drawn sustained attention from external actors including states, international organizations, and multinational corporations. While some of these interventions have provided technical, financial, and infrastructural support to mitigate environmental degradation, others have simultaneously served broader strategic, economic, or geopolitical interests. The result is a complex interplay of assistance and influence that shapes the region’s environmental governance and political landscape. The European Union (EU), for instance, has engaged with MENA countries through initiatives such as the “Sustainable Water Integrated Management and Horizon 2020

Support Mechanism" (SWIM-H2020), which ran from 2016 to 2019. This initiative aimed to reduce marine pollution and encourage the sustainable use of scarce water resources in the Mediterranean basin. Targeting countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, and Tunisia, the program sought to improve institutional capacities and promote regional cooperation. Its contribution to diminishing tensions over water scarcity illustrates how environmental diplomacy can function as a conflict-prevention mechanism (EEAS, 2018). The World Bank has also played a pivotal role in shaping environmental policy across MENA by promoting green economic development and climate adaptation. Its Climate Change Roadmap for 2021–2025 outlines a multifaceted strategy covering sustainable food systems, resilient water security, low-carbon energy transitions, urban resilience, and innovative financing. Between 2021 and 2023, the Bank contributed $6.3 billion to climate-related initiatives in the region, with a target of reaching $10 billion by 2025. These investments are designed both to mitigate emissions and to improve regional resilience to future environmental shocks (World Bank, 2023). Similarly, the United States, primarily through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has implemented several projects related to water governance and sustainable agriculture. Notably, the Water Management Initiative (WMI), operational from 2017 to 2022, enhanced Jordan's capacity to manage water and wastewater systems. USAID's technical support contributed to policy reform and institutional strengthening in both Jordan and Palestine, positioning the U.S. as an influential actor in regional environmental governance (USAID, 2020).

China has emerged in recent years as a key player in MENA's environmental infrastructure development, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran have aligned parts of their sustainable development strategies with Chinese investment frameworks. China's role in financing and constructing major renewable energy projects across the region reflects its commitment to green development, while also expanding its political and economic footprint. These partnerships, while offering technological and financial benefits, have also heightened regional dependency on Chinese capital and expertise (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2019).

Yet, these engagements are not free from contention. In some cases, environmental crises have served as gateways for broader strategic interventions. The U.S. involvement in Syria offers a

salient example. Prolonged droughts in the 2000s diminished agricultural productivity and triggered rural-to-urban migration, contributing to the onset of civil unrest. These environmental stressors provided the context for U.S. military and diplomatic engagement in Syria. Framed around counterterrorism and humanitarian concerns, this involvement also served to expand American influence and secure control over natural resources. However, such interventions often failed to address the root causes of the crisis and, in some instances, deepened instability (Gleick, 2014, p. 334). The EU's engagement in Libya and the broader Sahel region illustrates a similar duality. In response to the humanitarian and environmental fallout from the 2011 Libyan civil war and worsening desertification in countries like Mali and Niger, the EU deployed military and police forces to stem migration and address terrorism. While these actions aimed to contain the environmental crisis and bolster security, they also led to increased dependency on European aid and limited local agency in managing environmental recovery (Selby, 2017, p. 238). China's environmental footprint in MENA has also raised concerns. While its investments in dams, water management systems, and renewable energy projects contribute to environmental modernization, they simultaneously consolidate China's leverage over critical infrastructure. In countries such as Iraq and Iran, long-term financial dependencies and strategic alignments have emerged, suggesting that these projects are as much about geopolitical positioning as they are about environmental problem-solving (CSIS, 2023).

Taken together, external interventions in MENA's environmental crises from 2007 to 2024 reflect a dual logic of support and strategic interest. Development assistance, capacity building, and investment have undeniably enhanced regional resilience and fostered cooperation. Yet, these same interventions often operate within a framework of geopolitical calculus, where humanitarian and environmental concerns overlap with the pursuit of influence, market access, and strategic footholds. In this context, environmental crises function not only as challenges to be addressed, but also as opportunities to be leveraged—raising important questions about sustainability, sovereignty, and the long-term consequences of externally driven environmental governance.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the impact of environmental crises on the relationships among countries in the Middle East and North

Africa from 2007 to 2024. The findings indicate that environmental crises have significantly influenced these relationships by exacerbating conflicts over shared natural resources, posing threats to stability and security, and creating opportunities for both positive and negative interventions by external actors. These impacts can be examined at three key levels: conflicts of interest, threats to stability and security, and external interventions.

One of the most significant consequences of environmental crises is the escalation of conflicts over shared natural resources. Water scarcity, diminished agricultural output, and climate change have intensified disputes among neighboring countries regarding managing and exploiting water resources. For instance, the disagreements among Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam in the Nile Basin have heightened political and economic tensions in the region. Similarly, Turkey's dam-building initiatives and the resultant decrease in water flow to downstream nations like Iraq and Syria have strained regional relations concerning the Tigris and Euphrates Basins. In the Jordan River Basin, conflicts over water allocation among Israel, Jordan, and Palestine have fostered mistrust and diminished constructive dialogue. These disputes have not only impacted bilateral relations but have also hindered regional cooperation in resource management.

Environmental crises pose significant threats to regional stability and security. These challenges have strained neighborly relations by fostering internal instability, prompting forced migration, and heightening social insecurity. The depletion of natural resources and environmental degradation have eroded public trust in governments, undermining their political legitimacy. This deterioration has resulted in internal crises and weakened regional interactions in nations such as Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. Climate change-induced migrations have also escalated social tensions and intensified competition for scarce resources in host countries.

Moreover, the consequences of environmental crises on the economy and food security, particularly in agriculture-dependent communities, have intensified regional competition and, in some instances, heightened military conflicts over control of natural resources. Natural disasters triggered by climate change, including severe droughts and floods, have devastated economic and social infrastructure and disrupted regional cooperation.

Environmental crises have presented opportunities and challenges for external actors to intervene, resulting in positive and negative outcomes. On a positive note, EU initiatives focusing on water

resource management and pollution reduction have fostered greater cooperation among Mediterranean countries. Investments by the World Bank and international development agencies in water security and sustainable agriculture have enhanced the capacity of regional nations to tackle these crises. Additionally, Chinese investments in renewable energy and economic infrastructure have bolstered sustainable development and strengthened regional economic ties.

Conversely, interventions by extra-regional actors—often framed as crisis management or development assistance—have often exacerbated existing crises and heightened regional dependence. Frequently driven by political and economic agendas, these actions have undermined local sustainability and strained neighborly relations.

Environmental crises in the Middle East and North Africa have had complex and predominantly adverse effects on relationships among neighboring countries in the region. These crises have heightened tensions, mistrust, and hostile competition, although, in certain instances, they have also created opportunities for regional collaboration. Unfortunately, these opportunities often remain unfulfilled due to insufficient political will and inadequate institutional capacity. Consequently, neighboring countries tend to engage in hostile competition rather than cooperation. This escalating tension has disrupted bilateral relations, diminished regional integration, and weakened cooperative institutions. Disputes over national priorities and resource exploitation policies have led countries to adopt more individualistic approaches, prioritizing short-term national interests over collective regional goals. Amidst resource shortages and weaknesses in crisis management, many nations have found themselves relying on external interventions, which frequently carry their own political and economic agendas. This not only jeopardizes political autonomy but also exacerbates geopolitical competition among external actors, further undermining regional cohesion.

While opportunities for collaboration in areas such as water resource management and pollution reduction have existed, these have frequently been overlooked due to the absence of sustainable institutional frameworks and internal political rivalries. Consequently, environmental crises have exacerbated divisions and heightened interstate competition, hindering the ability of nations in the Middle East and North Africa to forge the solidarity and cohesion required to tackle these crises effectively. To mitigate these adverse effects, it is crucial to strengthen regional cooperation and develop joint policies in key areas like natural resource management, food security, and

sustainable development. Only through these measures can neighborly relations evolve from a state of competition to one characterized by effective interaction and convergence.

To enhance regional cooperation and effectively address environmental crises in the Middle East and North Africa, it is essential to focus on a number of key strategies and policies aimed at reducing tensions and fostering solidarity:

1- Establishing Joint Institutions for Water Resource Management: In light of the prevailing water crises in the region, the creation of intergovernmental institutions devoted to managing shared water resources, along with the formulation of coherent agreements regarding the optimal use of cross-border waters, can mitigate competition and foster cooperation in this essential area.

2- Strengthening Scientific and Research Cooperation in Environmental Fields: Organizing conferences, workshops, and collaborative research projects focused on climate change, biodiversity, and renewable energy can enhance knowledge and technology exchange, playing a critical role in addressing environmental challenges.

3- Developing and Implementing Joint Food Security Policies: It is vital to design joint programs aimed at sustainable agriculture and optimal utilization of soil and water resources. These initiatives can increase food production and mitigate food crises, particularly in drought-affected and economically vulnerable nations.

4- Creating a Regional Network for Climate Change Monitoring: Establishing collaborative systems for monitoring and assessing climate change within the region—encompassing data on temperature, precipitation, and environmental pollution—can empower regional countries to make informed and timely decisions.

5- Developing Joint Projects in Renewable Energy: With the significant potential for solar and wind energy in the region, initiating collaborative projects to develop clean and renewable energy sources can reduce reliance on fossil fuels while enhancing economic and technical cooperation among the countries involved.

6- Supporting Sustainable Development and a Green Economy: Formulating economic and financial policies that guide regional countries towards a green and sustainable economy can enhance sustainable development by optimizing the use of natural resources and minimizing pollution.

7- Developing Green Transportation and Trade Infrastructure: Establishing transportation and trade corridors designed to reduce environmental impacts and greenhouse gas emissions can facilitate the exchange of eco-friendly goods and services among regional nations.

8- Promoting Environmental Education and Public Awareness: Increasing public awareness of environmental challenges and providing education on optimal resource use and environmental protection can cultivate solidarity in tackling crises and bolster social responsibility.

9- Creating Mechanisms for Preventing and Responding to Environmental Crises: Regional countries should develop cooperative mechanisms for swiftly addressing environmental crises such as floods, droughts, and dust storms, thereby enabling more effective crisis management through coordination and resource sharing.

10- Strengthening Environmental Diplomacy: Enhancing environmental diplomacy through negotiations and dialogues at intergovernmental and regional organization levels can foster convergence and resolve environmental disputes in the region, leading to the formulation of joint and binding policies among regional states.

Ultimately, an effective response to environmental crises in the Middle East and North Africa requires robust regional cooperation and solidarity. By adopting unified policies across various domains, we can avoid destructive competition and promote constructive interaction and collaboration. Bolstering intergovernmental institutions, establishing rapid response mechanisms for crises, and raising public awareness will pave the way for positive change and foster neighborly relations based on convergence, coordination, and shared interests. In this manner, the region can transform environmental crises into opportunities for sustainable development and mutual growth.

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