

## ISSUES

- MENA's freshwater resources are facing serious risks to their sustainability due to overexploitation and interstate competition over transboundary resources. These risks threaten to undermine public health, erode past Millennium Development Goals achievements, and jeopardize the already weakened prospects for realizing the most critical Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), including SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 6 (clean water), and SDG 8 (decent work). Climate change is a threat multiplier in MENA's semiarid/arid environment due to delayed adaptation and extremely high exposure to the harmful impacts of global warming. MENA is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world to climate change impacts.
- Five MENA countries — Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, and Libya — face the additional dangerous consequences of protracted warfare for their environments, water resources, infrastructure, and public health, with potential further destabilizing repercussions for their societies.

## US INTERESTS

- Ensure that a durable long-term peace in war-torn MENA countries can be restored and safeguard against the risk of renewed instability, which requires the preservation of the freshwater resource base essential for viable, stable postconflict states.
- Safeguard against the collapse of other MENA countries due to unmitigated environmental stress that is closely linked to socioeconomic stress in many areas of the region.
- Mitigate conditions that drive population displacement, and avoid the spread of conflict contagion from MENA's conflict zones, where water resources are becoming acutely scarce and degraded and livelihoods dependent on them severely compromised, to more stable areas of the region.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure that universally accepted legal principles applicable to the protection of freshwater resources and infrastructure in times of war, as well as related plans and measures, are explicitly incorporated into all negotiation tracks and peace talks concerning MENA's hot-conflict countries.

- Establish a program of financial support for MENA's agriculture-based countries whose purpose is to strengthen farming communities' capacity to adapt to rising water scarcity and climate change impacts.
- Support and fund the development of an assessment framework and protocol for freshwater resource risks, and their extensive and varied implications throughout MENA countries, to regularly inform the U.S. Department of State of pre-crisis level emergent situations and allow for timely constructive engagement and proactive responses.