



**Ben-Gurion University of the Negev  
Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research**

The Swiss Institute for Dryland Environmental and Energy Research  
Alexandre Yersin Department of Solar Energy and Environmental Physics

## **Was Drought Really the Trigger Behind the Syrian Civil War in 2011?**

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Abstract:

The role of unsustainable resource management in initiating international conflicts is well documented. The Syrian Civil War, since March 2011, offers such a case. The prevailing opinion links the unrest with sequential droughts occurring between 2007-2010. Our research, however, reveals that the winter-rainfed agriculture conditions before 2011, as detected by satellite-derived vegetation indices, were similar and even better for Syrian farmers than those of the Turkish crops across the border. Concurrently, summer-irrigated crops, heavily dependent on Euphrates water originating from Turkey, notably declined in Syria while flourishing in Turkey. These findings are firmly supported by other independent and validated datasets including long-term cross-border discharge, water level in in Syrian and Turkish reservoirs, and transborder groundwater flow. We conclude that the Turkish policy of unilaterally diverting the Euphrates water was the main reason for agriculture collapse and subsequent instability in Syria in 2011. The obvious inference is that while prolonged drought exacerbated conditions, unsustainable anthropogenic water management in Turkey was the proximate cause behind the Syrian uprising.

**Date & Location:**

**Tuesday, November 12, 2019, 11:00**

**Lecture room, Physics Building (ground floor)**