

RETHINKING MIDDLE EAST WATER AND TURKEY'S WATER DIPLOMACY*

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Abstract

Turkey has rapidly descended its water resources is located in a region, in the Middle East, has very high level of competition and has occurred numerous examples of conflict in this regard. The people are living in troubled days under increasing water stress, especially even in cases of natural drought occurred in recent years, due to various reasons such as poor water management, increasing population, climate change. In this context, this study is a comprehensive evaluation related to Turkey's water resources in the context of environmental security. It is made comparative analysis of the hydro-politics of the country especially in the context of recent diplomatic initiatives occurred.

Key words: *Water, Water Security, Water Diplomacy, Turkey, the Middle East*

TURKEY AND WATER SECURITY IN MIDDLE EAST

From the ancient times in history, or even since the Sumerians declared a war alleging that their cities had the right to build water channel to the Tigris, water has taken part in the center of all conflicts. As well as arrangement authority on water is regarded as a part of the state rule, if water, as a natural resource, provides a government with economic and political power, the government with the aim of guaranteeing its citizens' access to water may consider that situation as a reason to engage in a war. Gradually decreasing water begins to become a political issue and triggers interstates competitions on water.

If it is considered that approximately 2 billion people on earth confront serious and advanced level of lack of water and that affects the regions located in the Middle East, Central Asia, India and Sub Saharan Africa most, dimension of the effect which the situation will create may be tremendous because water has the potential to be an economic and geopolitical weapon now. Especially it is not difficult to assert that the size and severity of the competitions will increase in a region like the Middle East where political stability is absent and religious hostility, dissidences, debates on

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borders and economic competitions prevail besides lack of water resources. Water insecurity is the region's well-known characteristic.

There are 14 states, in this region, and only Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Lebanon are over the critical threshold. Turkey is considered richer in water suppliers than some countries in the region. But Turkey is a country that has below average rainfall. Another important point about Turkey's water resources that has to be emphasized is the unbalanced distribution of the preparations throughout the year and among the regions. The amount of yearly preparation in the Eastern Black Sea region is estimated to be around 2500 mm/y. This amount decreases down to 230 mm in the Central Anatolia. The flow of some rivers at dry periods moves very slowly, some rivers even dry out and some rivers in high precipitation periods tend to cause floods.

To be brief, water and its resources are not adequate in terms of quality and supply in today's Turkey. It is supposed that Turkey, which has troubles about water due to various causes such as growing population and global warming, will need water more and the possibility of its being listed amidst water-poor countries will increase. Water insecurity created by such causes may obviously threaten national security with respect to the region and neighboring countries.

Therefore, the flow of the watercourses is also very important for Turkey. And what is more, the amount of water consumption per person per year for drinking and domestic purposes is 1,570 m³ per person per year in Turkey and it may decrease in the future. Because Turkey is in the drought belt. And hence, the water scarcity problem may arise in this region and can turn into a problem of water insecurity.

The problems due to using of Tigris and Euphrates's water may sometimes occur between Turkey and its border neighborhoods, Iraq and Syria. In the course of time, especially after the 1950s, some problems related to their use have arisen due to the fulfillment of some projects by the three-states as a one-sided, as well as the strategic and geopolitical importance, and the growing of their needs. But there is not even the possibility of any conflict or war. Turkey bears no political intention to act on a political or military basis against its neighbors.

It is important to have water resources in the Middle East for both the countries there and other countries to maintain stands for a political and economic tool. That truth is considered to lie behind revived water war scenarios aimed at the Middle East. However, if the problem is to be solved and a permanent peace is to be maintained, a regional cooperation policy and strategy is needed. That policy will lessen the interference of these dominant powers with the subject.

There are 26 important hydrological basins in Turkey; two of these river basins are the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. The Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers, which flow to the sea as a single river, forming one single basin, is the most important transboundary waters in Turkey; 53 km³/y originating from Turkey represents about 28.36% of the total domestic transboundary water potential.

About 88.7% of total water potential of the Euphrates sub-basin has originated from Turkey; the rest of its water has emerged from Syria. About 51.8% of total water potential of the Tigris sub-basin have originated from Turkey, 48.1% of its water have emerged from Iraq. This means that Turkey, as the upstream riparian of both Euphrates and Tigris, has the possibility to control this basin.

The importance of the transboundary Euphrates-Tigris basin arises from both the water potential those two rivers carry and the possibility of a conflict that may bring

about because of water scarcity in the region. Turkey as an upstream country has the chance to be able to control those rivers. It resorts to have benefited trying to carry out macro-scale irrigation with hydroelectric power like other countries which have the coast of the rivers. But this position of Turkey does not suit the expediencies of Syria and Iraq, thus there are occasionally some problems rooting in water insecurity among them and these problems tend to get worse. Hydro-political problems caused by those three countries' reconstruction based on the access and allocation and the projects on water are seen.

All the arguments of Turkey about the transboundary Euphrates-Tigris basin provide the right to water. Turkey supports equitable and reasonable use of the rivers, sharing benefits and refraining from causing significant harm to the countries. Because, in addition the principle of "two rivers, one basin" is the only sine qua non, the rivers are capable of meeting the needs of only these three countries. On the other hand, Turkey is ready to discuss the question of the two rivers' waters with an integral approach and in all its dimensions. The idea that by all sizes of the rivers' water and an integrated approach, data and information exchanging, which is demanded heartily, with the other countries should be mutual is another fundamental principle. Since 1970s when Turkey began building up big dams and institutions on the rivers, it has faced serious problems with both of two countries, especially Syria. When the Dam Karakaya as part of the Southeastern Anatolian Project (G.A.P.) was in the process of just a project, Syria oppressed international foundations, which financed the dam such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank liaising with Iraq and they succeeded somewhat. While the Dam Ataturk was being set up, Syria claimed that Turkey tried to put political pressure on neighboring countries, damaged neighborhood relations, led to massive loss on agriculture and affected its hydrological power and water supply in a negative way. Syria struggled for the subject's being addressed on international platform with its assertion that Turkey tried to rule the countries in the aspects of economic and politic within the framework of dependency on water and regulations' being assigned by United Nations (U.N.) International Law Commission. Saying that institutions like International Court of Justice can solve the problems of sharing water, Syria demands that there should be supervisors on the negotiations the states will organize and those should be supervisor during the process of water sharing by the U.N. However, Turkey is on the side of solving the problems by negotiating with the countries instead of carrying it to international platform.

Syria, which has supported terrorism to date, continually brought the Euphrates to the agenda. Turkey tried to prevent the demands Syria possessed on Hatay by making the problem of Orontes River internationally known. Until the death of president Hafiz Essad, this policy of Syria continued but after his son Beshar Essad became the president of the country, the policy changed a bit and Turkey- Syria relations entered a relatively recovery term. Over the reign of Beshar Essad it has been propounded that they have abandoned the idea claiming that the city of Hatay is within their borders on maps to some degree even if not official. On the relations with Turkey, those kind of concrete steps have been taken. The dam to be built up on Orontes River is the most concrete indicator of that. In the framework of Memorandum of Understanding signed with Syria in November 2007, mutual visits and exchange of views were determined to be done to improve collaboration based on sustainable

progress bottomed on water between two countries in the basin of the Euphrates and the Tigris. On the project in which the dam set-up on Orontes River foreseen to be a joint production is predicted to be carried out, common pilot irrigation projects on the district utilizing the water of the Tigris. Therefore, the matter of water seems to turn into a cooperation mean instead of a problem in the forthcoming years. But this moderate policy is at risk of altering due to delicate balances because the Euphrates-Tigris basin is a national security issue for Iraq as well as Syria and this subject constitutes high policy field.

Iraq rejects the problems derived from the Tigris being mutual negotiation subject between Syria and Turkey. It demands that the problems of the Euphrates-Tigris basin should be negotiated separately and Syria should not have a right to talk on the Tigris. For Iraq, its main reason is that the Euphrates-Tigris basin is two different basins and Iraq has the preliminary access right coming from the history. The projects of Turkey lessening the water of the Tigris also irritate Iraq. Nevertheless, because of six projects Turkey construct on the Tigris as part of the G.A.P., Iraq will not experience a significant loss of water as that river basin is not appropriate for irrigated agriculture. These dams arranging the water of the Tigris have the goal of producing electricity. Hence, this state does not give any damage to Iraq and conversely in favour of it.

A PROPOSAL FROM TURKEY: THE THREE-STAGE PLAN FOR OPTIMUM, EQUITABLE AND REASONABLE UTILIZATION OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATERCOURSES OF THE TIGRIS-EUPHRATES BASIN

In order to minimize any conflicts or tension in the Middle East, it will be necessary for the countries allocating the transboundary waters to collaborate towards the development of common projects for joint management of the water resources, for identification of real water needs over the entire watersheds, and for effective use of water. And therefore, Turkey, in line with all these principles mentioned earlier, has developed a plan about use of the water of the Euphrates and Tigris basin: The Three-Stage Plan for Optimum, Equitable and Reasonable Utilization of Transboundary Watercourses of the Tigris-Euphrates Basin. Turkey wishes these waters to bring peace to her neighbors, and for this, has proposed to develop common scientific and technology-based strategies in a three-stage plan to Syria and Iraq. Turkey has presented its opinions and attitudes on this issue with own plan by the three countries for national and optimum use of Euphrates and Tigris water in a judicious way. However, Turkey's proposal has not been accepted by Iraq and Syria.

The Three-Stage Plan aims to reach a common goal as a result of all comparisons to equitable and reasonable utilization of water of the Euphrates and Tigris basin. Accordingly, the three-stage plan should be done among the three riparian countries, Turkey, Iraq and Syria. The first stage towards resolutions should start with developing good relations and professional contact among the hydrologists from the riparian countries. Therefore, the inventory proceedings about water resources would be to determine the total water potential of the Euphrates and Tigris basin. The second stage, the inventory proceedings about irrigable lands, is to determine the irrigation water needed in Turkey, Iraq and Syria. The third stage is finally to allocate

equitably the calculated amount of water according to the determined needs. As a result of these three stages, optimum, equitable and reasonable utilization of water of the Euphrates and Tigris basin will be enabled. But, first of all, it is necessary that Euphrates and Tigris watersheds should be regarded as a single water basin and also, to ensure for all three countries to use this water judiciously, it must be establish the common scientific and technical committees that will employ scientific methods to provide the most appropriate solutions for the single basin.

The Three-Stage Plan proposed by Turkey to Syria and Iraq since 1980's via a joint technical committee of Turkey, Syria and Iraq for the ultimate development of Tigris-Euphrates Basin in an equitable and reasonable context, could not reach a consensus. This plan is a holistic approach for the region. The scope and the goal of the plan are presented as a collaborative work to be carried out by the three countries for rational and optimum usage of this basin water in a judicious way. We hope that this plan offered by Turkey will be received positively by Iraq and Syria, and that concrete steps will be taken by the three countries in order to use these waters for the benefit of their people.

CONCLUSIONS

The Euphrates-Tigris basin besides other water resources of Turkey make up a vantage location on national and regional security in the Middle East being obtained and open a door to act as a regional power because of water insecurity is the region's well-known characteristics. Other states in the region, are aware of future importance of the water resources, also form their policies in that direction. That all states on the district see the water as a high policy is a result of that thought.

But Turkey, until now, has showed major efforts in the framework of good neighborhood relations. Turkey bears no political intention to act on a political or military basis against its neighbors. In order to meet the water demand in the region, the countries should establish cooperation and collaboration. Especially the Three Stage Plan presented by Turkey, in this context, can create an opportunity for Syria and Iraq. I hope that Turkey's plan will be received positively by these countries, countries steps will be taken by the three countries in order to use these countries for the benefit of their people. Therefore, the good will of these three countries is very important for cooperation. And so, their role must provide the cooperation between the countries in the light of such as projects and put these projects into own services. With this Plan, people of the region will use their resources for their own interests, and these regions will regain the peace, trust and welfare they long for. Moreover, it will greatly contribute to ensuring peace in the region. Turkey is always ready for close cooperation with the countries of the region on the use of Euphrates and Tigris rivers, and it is determined not to take side in the case of conflicts arising on these rivers.

When Turkey decides on its water management policy, it should keep dominant powers in mind. They are not on that district but they have relations with the countries there and these dominant powers are interested in the regions. To have water resources on the district is important for both the countries there and other countries because to maintain them stands for a political and economic tool. That

truth is considered to lie behind revived water war scenarios aimed at Middle East. However, if it is wanted that this problem should be solved and a permanent peace should be maintained, a regional cooperation policy and strategy are needed and that policy will lessen the interference of these dominant powers with the issue.

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