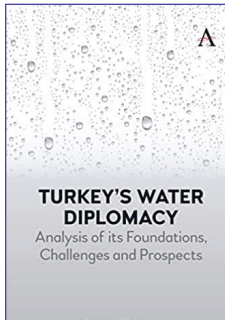


Regional Transboundary Water Diplomacy and the Need for Common Developmental Goals



Turkey's Water Diplomacy: Analysis of its Foundations, Challenges and Prospects

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In hydropolitics, Türkiye is largely an “upstream-power” which makes water a huge asset in water-related politics in its regional and domestic dynamics. In this context, there is an attempt to analyse Türkiye’s Transboundary water policy amid the prolonged droughts, regional security dilemma, and the global climate crisis. The book “Turkey’s Water Diplomacy: Analysis of its Foundations, Challenges and Prospects,” by Aysegül Kibaroglu, prepares a historical, geographical, institutional, foundational, legal and policy-oriented approach to explain Türkiye’s evolving position with the International Water Law, the actors and processes engaged in their transboundary water policymaking. Water diplomacy for Türkiye has to be understood as a combination of natural and societal variables, and a product of competition. The author attempts to make policy-relevant recommendations with a focus on the strategically relevant Euphrates-Tigris River basin, from a Science Diplomacy perspective. The geographical location of Türkiye places them in a sensitive geopolitical-diplomatic and security dilemma between its relations with the Middle East and the European Union. How do we interpret the timing and relevance of the book

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on Water Diplomacy? How have the transboundary relations in the Euphrates-Tigris (ET) evolved through recent history? An attempt has been made to review the book by Aysegül Kibaroglu.

By the year 2018, Türkiye had begun to show tendencies of more anti-Western, anti-American, more authoritarian, confrontational, isolationist, pro-Russia, and nationalistic. In recent years, Türkiye has militarily engaged in regional conflicts. In Syria, it carried out three large-scale incursions and one military operation. In northern Iraq, one can observe their growing military presence. In the Armenia and Azerbaijan inter-state conflict, Türkiye was seen being involved. The country has also actively participated in the regional geopolitical conflict- as a party in the conflict between Qatar, UAE, and Saudi Arabia, a strong naval competition with NATO allies France and Greece. In the year 2018, following a presidential decree, the Ministry of Foreign affairs was reorganised giving more power to the principles of the presidential system, leading to an informal overlap of nationalism and Eurasianism into the Turkish politics and foreign policy. The growing authoritarian trajectory has thus affected the country's engagement in regional diplomacy exposing Türkiye to military volatility and isolationist tendencies. In this context, the author brings to the forefront the institutional setting and the roles of state institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, and the State Hydraulic Works in the country's transboundary water policies.

The book skillfully traces the evolution of Türkiye's policies and practices of water diplomacy in the Euphrates-Tigris River basin. Additionally, the author highlights the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' well-established approach of having water issues different from security concerns

and rightfully deviates from this stance by securitising the water dispute with Syria and other neighbours. Three of the five eastern neighbours of Türkiye have some form of political/military conflict with the country and it would be imperative to call water-related issues a security concern- even if it is different from the official stance of the government. With the elections approaching in 2023, water-based developmental concerns would play a major role in highlighting the economic factors. The opposition party in Türkiye the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) is known to place greater emphasis on regional stability, showing an intent to re-establish ties with the Assad regime, and the likeliness of enhanced engagements with the regional leadership.

Türkiye has been one among the three countries that rejected the UN Watercourses Convention (UNWC) in 1997 as it does not favour its interests in the Aegean Sea. The political rhetoric believes in the potential of the country's water resources. Hence, the utilisation of water resources for development remains the core aim of the country's developmental goals. The author has played an active role, as the co-founder of the "Euphrates-Tigris Initiative for Cooperation (ETIC)" a Track II initiative with her colleagues from Syria, Iraq and Türkiye. She has also worked in an advisory capacity with a regional development agency, the Southern Anatolia Project (GAP), and the Regional Development Administration (RDA), which works with the social and environmental development agenda.

Chapter-wise Understanding of the Book

The first chapter analyses the institutional setting by looking at six institutions in-detail on the Turkish side of the ET basin and concludes by recommending the GAP RDA as the

regional coordination agency for the socio-economic development. The second chapter addresses the legal aspects, the minutes-of-meeting, discussion reports, information notes and official manuals published by official ministries, and the statements of relevant officials made in the conferences and other international forums. International Customary Laws are practiced and endorsed by the authorities working with water-diplomacy, where the concepts of 'no significant harm,' and 'equitable utilisation,' are largely applied. The chapter three looks at the state's legal approach towards and since the UN Watercourses Convention, it talks of the reorganisation in its bureaucratic structures and the evolving stance of Türkiye towards the international water law. The author mentions the newly created Turkish Water Institute under the MFWA that has been entrusted with scientific research for the strengthening of national and international water policies. And while geography plays a major role in transboundary engagements, the chapter four analyses the water diplomacy of Türkiye from a historical perspective that led to the creation of their transboundary water policy, from the year 1923, the early years of Türkiye.

The period of smooth relations of Ankara with Damascus and Baghdad between the 1920s and the 1950s observed various bilateral treaties for the delimitation and use of the transboundary rivers. The chapter discusses the impact of the Cold War on Türkiye's regional and bilateral approach to water relations. The author further traces the shift in water policies in the neighbourhood, and the evolving relations with the European Union in the context of Türkiye's ambitions of joining the European Union, requiring them to consider the principles and legalities of "European Environmental Law, namely

the EU Water Framework Directive." This harmonising with the European Union water policies has been reflected in Türkiye's policy approach to its Middle Eastern neighbours. Chapter five looks at the non-state actors in water diplomacy and the Track II diplomatic approaches for problem solving, including the NGO, academia, and other private citizens. The direct engagement with the second-tier experts from the riparian countries, that have positively brought forth results that have helped in the water diplomacy framework. The book concludes by making policy relevant recommendations to enhance and address the future approach to transboundary water diplomacy and its challenges.

Contextual Inputs, Analysis, and Conclusions

In the first chapter, when the author recommends the GAP RDA for socio-economic developmental goals, the author would need to include the concerns and the institutional representation of developmental institutions of the neighbouring countries for whom the agenda would impact. The GAP agenda of 22 dams and 19 hydro-electric power plants, has been one of the factors of conflicting relations in the region. While the agenda includes urban-rural infrastructure development, agriculture, energy, transportation and other developmental initiatives, the agency will have to engage in the concerns raised by the Syrian side of pollution, and the reduction in the flow of the Euphrates water towards their side of the rivers. In the case of chapter two, the region has unequal power distribution along with an imbalance in the infrastructural development, an equitable approach would need to be further defined. More emphasis on the domestic and regional legal approach, with national laws addressing the concerns of bilateral water

conflicts, would be beneficial. The chapter three takes a peek at Türkiye's principles and practices that were developed in-line with International Customary Law and manages to put in context the Türkiye foundational approach to water policies. The fourth chapter explains the geopolitical challenges faced by the country. However, the regional dilemma faced by Türkiye, as a formal member of the European bloc but a geophysical part of the Middle East does not limit to water policies but also has the potential to make the country face problems of decision-making at various standards. Türkiye could be seen as a regional hegemon with its Eastern neighbours, and thus the power dynamics of such a position would be reflected in their policy-making strategies. The historical-evolutionary approach of the fourth chapter explains this evolution of power dynamics amid its current political regime. The regional responses/ the stance of the neighbours would have broadened the scope of this chapter.

A holistic regional approach to the analysis, while is beyond the structure of the book, would add a perceptual viewpoint to the issue of transboundary water politics. The parties in Track II diplomatic approaches mentioned in Chapter five could also place an emphasis on the positive engagement of the business and infrastructure development industries between the countries. The water diplomacy could essentially evolve to include common water-based/ river-regions' developmental goals. The institutional settings could thus include long-term developmental ambitions as part of the transboundary water policy. Similar developmental standards in the years 1920s-1950s as mentioned in chapter four explains the possibility of engagement for the socio-economic concerns of the region if the diplomatic strategies place emphasis on the same. The role of socio-economic elements would thus work as a parallel element to the water-related issues of the region.