

## **Global Context of Crises, and Local Patterns of Rivalry and Cooperation**

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Cooperation was essential between the three riparian nations if they were to effectively coordinate their use of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The global political environment presented obstacles, however. During the course of the Cold War the riparian nations found themselves in different political camps. The governments of Syria and Iraq had allied themselves with the Soviet Union and Turkey had joined the NATO coalition. This further stressed diplomatic ties, which in turn further stressed cooperation between the riparian water authorities.

1975 marked the first of three water crises between the riparian nations. During the course of 1974 both Turkey and Syria independently reduced the flow of the Euphrates river in order to fill the reservoirs at the Keban and Tabqa dams, respectively. This reduced flow to Iraq coincided with an intense drought. Iraq asked the Arab league to intervene but Syria refused to cooperate on the basis that they were receiving less water from Turkey. Iraq threatened to bomb the Tabqa dam and moved its military to the Syrian border. A last minute mediation with the help of Saudi Arabia and the Soviet Union helped to avert war and ended the first water crisis.

Water disputes continued and throughout the 1980s transboundary water issues became the primary source of diplomatic friction between the riparian nations and their respective Cold War alliances did little to ease the tension. The ad hoc meetings between low-level water authority officials had stopped around the time of the first water crisis and the riparian states had continued with their domestic programs of development, with a general lack of transboundary coordination.

To further complicate matters, the Iraqi and Syrian governments, both Baathist, were regional rivals. The first water crisis had seriously strained their diplomatic relationship, which in turn strained cooperation on the management of the Euphrates for several years. Syria also had an adversarial relationship with Turkey at the time, which stymied attempts by the two nations to jointly manage the lower Euphrates and its headwaters. Iraq and Turkey had a more amicable relationship. Despite blustery rhetoric from the two nations, their complementary economies and trade deals allowed for more amicable diplomatic relations, which in turn allowed for more cooperation concerning the management of the Tigris river.

In spite of political tensions and regional rivalries the riparians began to come together in order to manage the rivers in an effective and coordinated manner. In 1980 the first permanent Joint Technical Committee (JTC) was established between Turkey and Iraq. This allowed the respective water authorities to share information and coordinate with one another on a regular, rather than ad hoc, basis. In 1983 Syria joined the JTC, bringing all three riparian nations together for the first time to discuss and negotiate the management of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The JTC held 16 meetings between 1983 and 1992.

But the progress brought by the JTC had yet to reach state-level politics. In 1990 the Turkish government had completed the construction of the Atatürk dam in southeastern Turkey. The Turks then proceeded to significantly reduce the flow of the Euphrates in order to fill the reservoir, severely limiting the amount of water that Syria and Iraq received. Both countries vigorously protested the limitation of the Euphrates and called on Turkey to allow the river to resume its usual flow. The second water crisis once again strained the relations between the three nations.

The JTC continued to meet for another three years before being suspended indefinitely in 1993. Even though the JTC was a step in the right direction in terms of coordinated management it still had its fair share of flaws. The JTC meetings proved ineffective for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the patterns of water use and the riparians' related legislation and institutions were not up for discussion during the course of the negotiations. This simply meant that the riparian nations refused to negotiate their individual use of the rivers or the institutions and legislations which they used to do so.

Secondly, national management and allocation policies were treated as though they were black boxes. Riparians refused to discuss, in detail, the manner in which they managed and allocated the water they were using. There was pervasive distrust between the riparian countries, in part due to the Cold War and regional politics, which prevented any meaningful and candid exchange of information.

Finally, when negotiating the division of the Euphrates river, all parties involved approached the negotiation as a zero-sum game. If one country yielded on its claim to the Euphrates it would be losing, regardless of whether their yielding benefitted the region as a whole.

As the 1990s progressed the riparian states fell back to running development programs without any serious coordination. The Turkish and Syria governments signed the Adana Accord in 1998, which addressed security issues and allowed for talks to begin which concerned matters ranging from tourism to trade. These talks also included negotiations concerning water.

This increasing cooperation between the Turkish and Syrian governments led to the GAP RDA-GOLD Protocol, which was implemented in 2002. This protocol's aim was to encourage mutual development and growth and allowed for training programs, exchange programs, and joint projects between the two countries. This represented a significant step forward in water management in the region, as it was the first government level treaty signed that dealt with water consumption, management and allocation in a concrete and effective manner. Unfortunately, however, the protocol has not been implemented in its entirety and has only acted as an informal consultative framework, with infrequent exchange programs.

Another progress marker was the establishment of the ETIC, or Euphrates Tigris Initiative for Cooperation, in 2005. This group was established by academics from Iraq, Syria, Turkey and the US to focus on the social, economic and technical needs of the people in the Tigris-Euphrates river basin. ETIC was an unofficial, neutral and non-binding initiative whose purpose was to increase mutual understanding between the riparian nations and advocate for sustainable development, operating in tandem with socioeconomic efforts. Related independent initiatives on dam safety and GIS mapping have been conducted by members of the respective water authorities of the region as well.

This cooperation spurred experts from the riparian countries to begin exchanging information concerning modern irrigation systems, dam safety and climate change. This effort was facilitated through ETIC conferences and networking, as professionals shared information, and trained each other in critical skills for data collection, mining and analysis. Additionally, an independent training facility was set up in Istanbul specifically to host technical experts from the three countries.

These developments for riparian cooperation and management offered hope for peaceful cooperation with regard to water resource management. Unfortunately, political instability, terrorism and civil war have wracked the region, crippling the efforts. Further, Syria's civil war has seriously damaged its water infrastructure while terrorism in Iraq has strained its ability to effectively manage its water resources, as well. The Ministers Cooperative Network and the JTC will be dormant for some time in the current situation, at least until a solution is found for the region's instability.

## **Conclusion for Chapter One**

The evolution of water resource management and associated national and foreign policies in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, the riparian nations of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, has been both predictable and volatile since the 1960's. Development of the economy, of the social benefits of becoming a "developed country", and of the natural assets of the terrain of each country drove each country to invest heavily in water management projects. Turkey's Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi, or "GAP" project, is perhaps the most well known of these projects. Since the inception of such projects local and global perspectives on water management have become more inclusive of environmental, social and political demands. ETIC was formed in response to these needs.

The water development projects of the Euphrates Tigris region began with modest goals of preventing floods and droughts, but quickly became more ambitious. As the scope of the water resource uses increased, the number and significance of the issues also increased. There are a host of complex issues created by the new technologies that affect people, wildlife and the environment. While our focus here has been on the particulars of the ET region, these are global issues that could be addressed productively in a comparative research environment. We hope to see a conference like the one we hosted, take on the global scale at our university or perhaps online. Please get in contact with the organizers, if you are currently pursuing related topics.

In addition to the intrinsic challenges of water management and cross-border negotiation of water usage, local academics and professionals capable of addressing these challenges are increasingly fleeing from the region with

the increasing number of conflicts, terrorist groups occupying the region, and persecution from local groups, governments or foreign occupiers. The work of ETIC continues, but much of the work must now operate remotely. Universities and other organizations in the business of knowledge production, and knowledge sharing, may continue to host these activities. There is hope that with the internet and satellite technology that the regional knowledge will continue to be developed and exchanged amongst the riparians.