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## **WATER SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST ON THE EXAMPLE OF IRAQI KURDISTAN**

### ***Abstract:***

*Water security in the Middle East on the example of Iraqi Kurdistan Water is an important geopolitical resource on which the demand is growing daily. Due to the arid and semi-arid climate, the Middle East region is experiencing severe water shortages, which is why water is considered a resource of geopolitical importance. The states of the Middle East region regards water resources through the prism of national security. Iraq is facing a serious threat due to the ‘South-eastern Anatolia Project’ launched in Turkey. The issue of water security is also a significant challenge for Iraqi Kurdistan, whose regional government may use water as a political weapon against official Baghdad, further exacerbating the already strained relationship between the two sides and creating another source of tension in the region. The article will discuss the problem of annual resources in the Middle East and the challenges associated with it. The issues of the South-eastern Anatolia Project, arid and semi-arid climate, and their impact on the redistribution of water resources in the face of climate change as a cause for new conflicts will be discussed.*

### ***Keywords:***

*Water Security, Iraqi Kurdistan, Kurdistan Regional Government, South-eastern Anatolia Project, Middle East*

## **Introduction**

Water is a resource of geopolitical importance, on which the demand in the world is growing gradually. Water consumption is rising amid global warming,

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rapid population growth, and industrial growth, making states think big. About 97% of the available water is saline oceanic water and 77% of the remainder is stored as ice, and 22% as groundwater and soil moisture, while 0.35% is in lakes and marshes. The water within the atmosphere is 0.04%, then there are only 0.01% freshwater supplies in rivers which provide 80% for human beings on the earth and, therefore, rivers carry 0.003% of all the water available on earth<sup>2</sup>.

Due to the arid and semi-arid climate in the Middle East region, there is very little water. The water resources in the region are unequally redistributed. Turkey, Syria, and the Lebanese coastline are relatively rich in water resources. In other countries, water is a serious shortage.

Water played a crucial role for the peoples of the Middle East, as evidenced by the historical artefacts of ancient civilizations formed in Mesopotamia. Ancient water irrigation systems are still admired today. After World War I, the political map of the modern Middle East was formed and the foundations were laid. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, independent entities emerged in its Arab dominions that were briefly subject to the mandate system. Ownership and control of water resources soon became a vital interest for the newly created states after gaining independence. The construction of dams on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers has laid the groundwork for a qualitatively new “water war” between Turkey, Syria, and Iraq in the Middle East.

According to the standard definition of experts and United Nations, water security is: „The capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of and acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability”<sup>3</sup>. Based on the research topic in the definition above, political stability and socio-economic development are essential for us. Consequently, these aspects will be meant when water security is mentioned in the article.

The article aims to study geopolitical aspects of water security through an example of Iraqi Kurdistan and research the regulatory mechanisms of conflicts caused by water. The article must answer the following questions: What impact does South-eastern Anatolia Project have on the relationship between Turkey, Syria and Iraq and on general political stability in the Middle East? What effect does the factor of water have on relations between the central government of

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<sup>2</sup> N. Al-Ansari, *Hydro Geopolitics of the Tigris and Euphrates*, “Recent Researches in Earth and Environmental Sciences”, vol. 1/2019, pp. 35-70.

<sup>3</sup> *UN-Water Brief Defines Water Security*, SDG Knowledge Hub, <<https://sdg.iisd.org/news/un-water-brief-defines-water-security/>> (20.06.2021).

Iraq and the regional government of Kurdistan? To answer the questions described above descriptive, historical and political analysis research methodology is applied in the paper. The issue is analysed through the lenses of Political Realism and Relativistic-Quantum Noology.

### **Geographical description of the Euphrates-Tigris and the South-eastern Anatolia Project (GAP)**

The Euphrates and Tigris rivers, which originate in Turkey, are important water resources for the states of the region (Turkey, Syria, and Iraq). The Tigris River originates in Turkey and flows through 20% (400 km) of the river, 2% (40 km) into Syria, and the remaining 78% into Iraq. The second important river is the Euphrates, which is 2786 km long and originates from Turkey and joins the Tigris River in Iraq to form a single river called the Shatt al-Arab (195 km).

Iraq first started building dams on the Euphrates River in 1914, and a second dam in the 1950s. At the same time, Turkey and Syria began working on dam projects, although neither built a dam until the 1960s. In 1966, Syria laid the foundation for the construction of the Tabqa Dam on the Euphrates, which was followed by a similar move by Turkey, and the construction of the Keban Dam on the Euphrates began.

The construction of dams on the Euphrates and Tigris has laid the groundwork for a new kind of conflict in the region between Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. For all three countries, these two rivers are a vital resource, both for their economies and their future development. As it was already mentioned, the constructed dams soon sparked an international conflict between the sides. The construction of the Keban Dam by Turkey on the Euphrates River has caused serious concern on the part of Syria, while the construction of the Tabqa Dam on the Euphrates River by Syria has caused serious outrage in Iraq, that escalated military mobilizations twice (1974-1975). Mobilized troops by the sides on the Syrian-Iraqi border only retreated after the Soviet Union and Saudi Arabia mediated to defuse the conflict between the sides. Aforementioned crisis ended with an agreement under which Iraq received 58% of the Euphrates River and Syria the remaining 42%. Such an agreement partly eased tensions between the sides, although a new crisis hotspot was soon created in the region after Turkey began implementing the GAP project.

The GAP project started in 1977 and it is considered to be the grandest and expensive project in the history of Turkey. It is noteworthy that the idea of carrying out such a project on the Euphrates and Tigris still existed during the Turkish period, although for some objective and subjective reasons it could not be implemented. The GAP project covers 9 provinces of Turkey (74.000 sq. km). The total cost of the project is \$ 32 billion. As already mentioned, the

project is grand and large-scale, as after its completion there will be 90 dams and 60 power plants, which is 28% of Turkey's total hydro resources. Turkey considers GAP to be a national project of the country to strengthen the capacity of its hydropower plants and the agrarian sector of the country. It is estimated that after the completion of the GAP, 30 billion kilowatts of electricity will be available and up to 2 million hectares of water will be provided, which in itself will lead to serious intensify and growth of the agro-industrial sector. Based on 1994 figures, the GAP authorities predict that the project will eventually increase vegetable production by 40%, cotton by 300%, barley by 40%, and wheat by 100%. Around the Ataturk Dam, the region has been transformed into one of the most important centres of cotton production in Turkey<sup>4</sup>.

While the GAP project is important for Turkey's economic development, it also poses a threat to Syria-Iraq, who rightly believe that dams built on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers in Turkey will significantly reduce the level of these rivers in their territory. In addition to reducing river flows, the sides argue that large-scale construction will cause serious environmental pollution in the Euphrates-Tigris basin. The pursuit of such a water policy by Turkey has other political purposes, and it primarily serves the desire to gain dominance, hegemony in the region, and gain control of neighbouring countries. Water control can be seen as a political tool as a mechanism for exerting pressure on the sides and increasing political pressure. The GAP project, which has an external economic aspect, also has internal political goals. The Turkish government aims to resolve the Kurdish issue through the GAP project in south-eastern Turkey, as the estimated 15 million Kurds living in Turkey are a serious problem for Ankara.

In addition to reducing the amount of water in the Euphrates and Tigris, there is also a climatic factor in the large-scale project of Turkey, which is a serious challenge not only for the region but also for the world. Due to the disproportion between the annual rainfall (150-300 millimetres) and evaporation (1,500-2,500 millimetres), more than 90% of Iraq's land can become desert, as 100 square kilometres of fertile land is lost every year due to salinization. Fertile Crescent, often known as the cradle of civilizations, is no longer fertile.

### **International status and theoretical approaches of the Tigris and Euphrates**

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, water soon became an important issue for the newly created states in the Middle East, which led to the signing of treaties between the sides on the exploitation of the Euphrates and Tigris. The

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<sup>4</sup> K. Yildiz, *The Kurds in Syria*, London, 2005, pp. 65-76.

1923 Lausanne Agreement between Turkey and Iraq on the waters of the Euphrates was signed, which was followed in 1946 by the signing of another treaty of good neighbourliness between the sides. Lausanne agreement Turkey should have consulted with Iraq before it promised to build anything on the river. Under the 1946 Good Neighbour Agreement, the Turkish side undertook to warn Iraq of plans for the river. Turkish-Iraqi relations have been strained since the Turkish side intensified work on the GAP project, but the crisis between the two countries soon eased due to the start of the Iran-Iraq war. Official Baghdad made concessions and opted for a policy of manoeuvring with Turkey because Turkey remained an important trading partner for it during the war. In addition, the Kirkuk-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline passed through Turkey. Given the current situation, it would be unprofitable for Iraq to deepen the crisis with the Turkish side. Such a given situation and interdependence even proved to be beneficial for both sides for that period. Following the end of the Iran-Iraq war, official Baghdad resumed its criticism of the GAP project and called on Turkey to work out a tripartite agreement on the redistribution of water.

The legal dispute between the Turkish and Arab sides of the Tigris and Euphrates is viewed differently by the sides. Syria and Iraq consider the Euphrates and Tigris rivers to be international rivers, while the Turkish side rejects their view of the international status of these two rivers and appeals for common and rational disposal across the Tigris and Euphrates. Moreover, Turkey believes that it even has the right to use these rivers indefinitely<sup>5</sup>.

According to the general principles of international law, there are several theories regarding the issue of water:

- absolute territorial sovereignty often referred to as the Harmon Doctrine, suggests that the upstream state has an indefinite advantage over its transboundary water resources within its national borders;
- absolute territorial integrity is preferred to the downstream state and the upstream state prohibits any project that may result in a reduction in water flow in the downstream state;
- limited territorial sovereignty is the most widespread principle, according to which downstream states have equal sovereign rights and upstream states must respect downstream rights over water. This principle also promotes the rational and equitable disposal of water resources;
- community of riparian states implies improper use of water resources and lack of political boundaries<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> M. El-Fadel, Y. El Sayegh, A. Abou Ibrahim, D. Jamali, K. El-Fadl, *The Euphrates-Tigris Basin: A case study in surface water conflict resolution*, "Journal of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Education", 1(31)/2002, pp. 99-110.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

According to the existing theories, it is easy to guess which state of the region which one prefers. Such an approach is dictated by their national interests. Turkey, which originates in the Tigris and Euphrates, of course, justifies its projects on the principle of absolute territorial sovereignty and does not take into account the rights or interests of the downstream states.

Syria supports the absolute territorial integrity approach because the dams built by Turkey on the Euphrates and Tigris are seriously reducing the amount of water in these rivers flowing into Syrian territory. Iraq, on whose territory the Euphrates and Tigris expeditions finally end, is in the most unprofitable position, as the flooding of rivers by Turkey on the one hand and by Syria, on the other hand, will have a catastrophic impact on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers in Iraq. Iraq is claiming its historical right to these rivers and is in favour of redistribution of the Tigris and Euphrates under the principle of limited territorial sovereignty.

Such an approach by the states and the lack of consensus between the sides underscores once again the fact that the principles and norms of international law are virtually weak. The anarchic nature of the international system and the instinct of self-preservation of the state in this anarchic system once again reinforces the realistic school thesis about the egotistic actions of states. Such data lay the groundwork for a crisis that can sometimes escalate into large and endless conflicts.

There are many reasons to be optimistic. Since 1948, there have been 37 incidents of acute conflict over water, while approximately 295 international water agreements were negotiated and signed in the same period<sup>7</sup>. These statistics further reinforce the inaction of the agreements reached under international law and push the world to look for new optimal ways.

It is self-evident that with existing paradigms and theories issues cannot be resolved, because they are unable to see the whole picture. Kurd's water security must be examined with other issues of Kurds. Quantum-Relativistic Noology, which is a novel method of approach to international relationships proves that realism, idealism, and other international relations theories examine global politics in the context of conflicts and competitions, where differences are only defining the combative individuals. According to realism, combative subjects are nations, but pluralism implies more actors and not only a nation, these actors are international corporations, non-government organizations, religious and ethnic groups, etc. According to structuralism: economical classes developed global economic system centres and backward peripheries. Resulting from the existing task of the international relation study field it's not reaching

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<sup>7</sup> *Transboundary Waters*, UN Water, <<https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/transboundary-waters/>> (20.06.2021).

out from the attempts of describing the strategies of plundering the vital resources.

It is easy to notice that the source of modern world problems is plundering the vital resources if we observe International political processes, each nation is dictated with this idea and tries to eliminate one another, and also they try to enforce the system of their values. According to Quantum-Relativistic Noology, the strategy of plundering the vital resources is characterized by timed optimization and requires putting the new paradigm in motion in international politics, “because mono-global paradigms cannot fixate the political order between nations within the influence of dominant nation's functional task of an international political system forming and stabilization”<sup>8</sup>.

An effective political program is founded based on the science of Quantum-Relativistic Noology – ‘Doctrine of Optimalism’ which implies establishing the optimal relations between the nations with consideration of their characteristics<sup>9</sup>. The 4 types of classes of nations can be described and characterized in the existing international system in the following way.

- the supreme representative body of the nations of the class of mania of form (Greeks, Germans, Spaniards, Italians, Czechs, Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, Arabs, Turks, Iranians, Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesians...) corresponds to the legislative function; one of the major principles of the optimal structure is allocation to the nations of this qualitative type of territories in exclusive use (intolerance to another is the integral characteristic of the nations of this qualitative type, neglecting of this fact is a condition creating the danger of global destabilization)<sup>10</sup>;

- the supreme representative body of the nations of the class of mania of overcoming (Russians, Serbs, Mongols, Kurds-Ezids...) corresponds to the function of the international buffer force, including protection of above mentioned exclusive territories that means the creation of a military-industrial complex and a military machine of global disposition<sup>11</sup>;
- the supreme representative body of the nations of the class of mania of relaxation (Americans, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Indians...) corresponds to the international court, regulation of the international market and external contacts of civilization, including the function of

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<sup>8</sup> E. Khvichia, *Informational Civilization in the Globalized World and Georgia*, PhD dissertation, 22.06.2012, Georgian Technical University, p. 50, <<http://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/171161/1/Disertacia.pdf>> (22.06.2021).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> E. Khvichia, *Optimalism (National-Globalism) – Imperative Paradigm of Globalism. (Programme of Optimization of Global Political System)*, <<http://noosphereinstitute-georgia.blogspot.com/p/optimalism-national-globalism.html>> (10.06.2021).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

defence of civilization from an external threat that means also a military institute of the corresponding function which at the same time will be the main parity factor with the military institutions of the nations of the class of mania of overcoming<sup>12</sup>;

- the supreme representative body of the nations of the class of mania of ruling (Georgians, Irish, Scots, Corsicans, Sicilians, Basques...) corresponds to the function of representation of civilization before the nations-members of the civilization, that means supervision of factors of unobstructed functioning of the ‘Global Centre’ (including military parity) and monitoring of strategic prospecting researches in scientific, technological and other spheres commercially unprofitable at the given stage<sup>13</sup>.

### **The Struggle Between Baghdad and Erbil and Water security of Iraqi Kurdistan**

Results of the first world war and with forming the new world order founded modern near-east political map. Although because of some subjective and objective reasons Kurds did not get the opportunity to develop an independent country and the majority of Kurds are divided into 4 countries in the region (Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran). The habited locations by Kurds are called Kurdistan and as we pointed out before they are apportioned in 4 countries. The battle of Kurds for their political, social, economic, and cultural rights continues to this day in different countries of the region, although we must point out that in Iraq Kurds are exceptional with efficiency and particularism. The Kurdistan of north Iraq is autonomous since 1974, and the positions and political rights of Kurds have been strengthened since the end of Saddam Hussein's regime.

Iraqi Kurdistan is a mountainy region of the north of Iraq, its land is 40 thousand kilometres squared. From the north, it is adjoined with Turkey, northeast – Iran, and the western border is with the Arabic Republic of Syria. The population of Iraq's Kurdistan is 4.8 Million. Iraq's northern Kurdistan which represents the south part of the whole Kurdistan is noticeably different from other parts of Kurdistan. Iraqi Kurdistan is rich in natural resources such as gas and oil which adds financial and economic advantage and allows it to operate independently. From a water resource perspective region's important rivers is Tigris – the source of flow starts from Turkish Kurdistan and the Great Zab and the Little Zab – which take the source of flow from Zagros mountains at Iran's territory. Kurdistan's branches of agriculture and other directions are

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem.*

strictly dependent on these rivers. Other important water resources of the region are Lake Dukan, Darbandikhan Lake, and Duhok Lake.

Water volume has been reduced on Iraq's territory by Turkey and their gigantic dam constructions, and it threatened the security of water resources. Euphrates and Tigris flow has been reduced by 30% from 1980 and this percentage will increase to 50% by the year 2030 according to Iraq's government<sup>14</sup>. The populational increase in the last period increased the quantity of water usage in Kurdistan of Iraq. Because of all these Kurdistan of Iraq decided to resolve the issue independently from Baghdad. In 2014 Kurdistan of Iraq initiated the plan to reduce the risks with existing threats, and according to the initiation, there will be additional 245 water dams in the region.

17 Dams in the region have been lacking water for a while now. Kurdistan of northern Iraq is influenced by Iran as well in water reduction matters because Lesser Zab and Sirwan from Iran's side realized projects significantly reduce the water flow in the region. In 2019 realized projects by Iran on Lesser Zab and Sirwan significantly influenced Kurdistan of Iraq, so it leads to limitations of production of electro-energy and potable water. Aside from this serious issues were made to the region's irrigational system, which conveyed negatively on the region's agriculture.

The levelled initiation by the government of Kurdistan is a serious threat for official Baghdad because they announce that built dams in Kurdistan's region will further reduce the water volume on the remaining territory of Iraq. The relationship between Baghdad and Erbil is tense for years and this kind of action will aggravate the situation between the two sides and the relationship will be more intense.

The water security matter for Kurds can be discussed on three different levels. On the local level Implementing this initiation serves the well-being of the social and economic. Regional level the water security for Iraq has a political shade and we can view it as an instrument to keep up the pressure against official Baghdad. Kurdish side of this initiation offers to resolve the water security issue on one hand but on another, it tries to acquire more independence from Baghdad. After fully implementing The Kurdistan of Iraq's initiation results can be lethal for Iraq and the country will have to face a serious water crisis. On an international level, the Kurdish water security matter goes beyond the attention, Because the empowered Kurdistan is as threatening for Turkey and Iran as it is for Syria-Iraq.

As it was mentioned before, reviewing Kurdish water security is not expedient and it needs to be reviewed as a Kurdish problematic section. It is a

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<sup>14</sup> P.-J., Dockx, *Water Scarcity in Iraq: From Inter-Tribal Conflict to international Disputes*, "Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies", Report 203/2019, pp. 7-28.

fact that in the region Kurdish country cannot be developed yet and this will continue until the Doctrine of Optimalism will come to action. As it was mentioned the if the Doctrine of Optimalism is initiated nations will have their psychic type and considering the psychic type nations will have their role and function in the international system which the author of Quantum-Relative Noology Emzar Khvichia calls this 'Global Development Centre'. Although before implementing the Doctrine of Optimalism it is necessary to form a confederation of Turkey-Syria-Iraq where Kurdish national schools will be cast and Kurdish people will be able to self-identify and develop themselves as a nation. Meanwhile, Kurds should define their psychic type and should determine it because that way search for their role and function in 'Global Development Centre' will be simplified. The mentioned confederation is a necessary prerequisite for them to be able to create a Kurdish country in the future. The fact that creating the Kurdish country should be in Russia's interests should be marked Because both of the nations carry the supreme representative body of the nations of the class of mania of overcoming. For Russia, one nation that carries the class of mania is an additional resource for the class of mania of overcoming and the role and function that they have to fulfil effectively with the result of the doctrine of Optimalism in the founded new world order.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be said that the factor of water plays an essential role in forming regional politics in the Middle East. It is clear that Syria and Turkey see water security as an integral part of national security because water significantly impacts the country's socio-economic development. The latter notion was observed in an example of the „South-Eastern Anatolia Project”.

The water security issues are complex in the case of Iraq's Kurdistan as well, which further strains relations between Baghdad and Erbil. In the region, Kurd's water security matter aggravates correspondingly to climate change and population increase. According to Quantum-Relativistic Noology Kurds and Iraqi Arabs are different psychic types of nations. Consequently, future relations will be tenser and it all will result in water security aggravation. Kurd's water security and generally, the solution of Kurd's issue can only be possible if the Doctrine of Optimalism is put to action, which can only be achieved with an effort of strong international actors. Otherwise, this issue will be stretched in time without any feasible result.

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