

New Syria and New Hydropolitics of the Euphrates River

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2 Jan.2025

The political change in Syria has also changed the balance of power in the region. The Middle East is a geography of shifting sands. For this reason, it seems difficult to fully predict the short and medium term consequences of this change. However, it can still be said that this new situation will have some geopolitical and hydropolitical consequences in the region. In this context, the hydropolitics of the Euphrates River, which originates from Turkey and 89 percent of its water comes from Turkish territory, will also change.

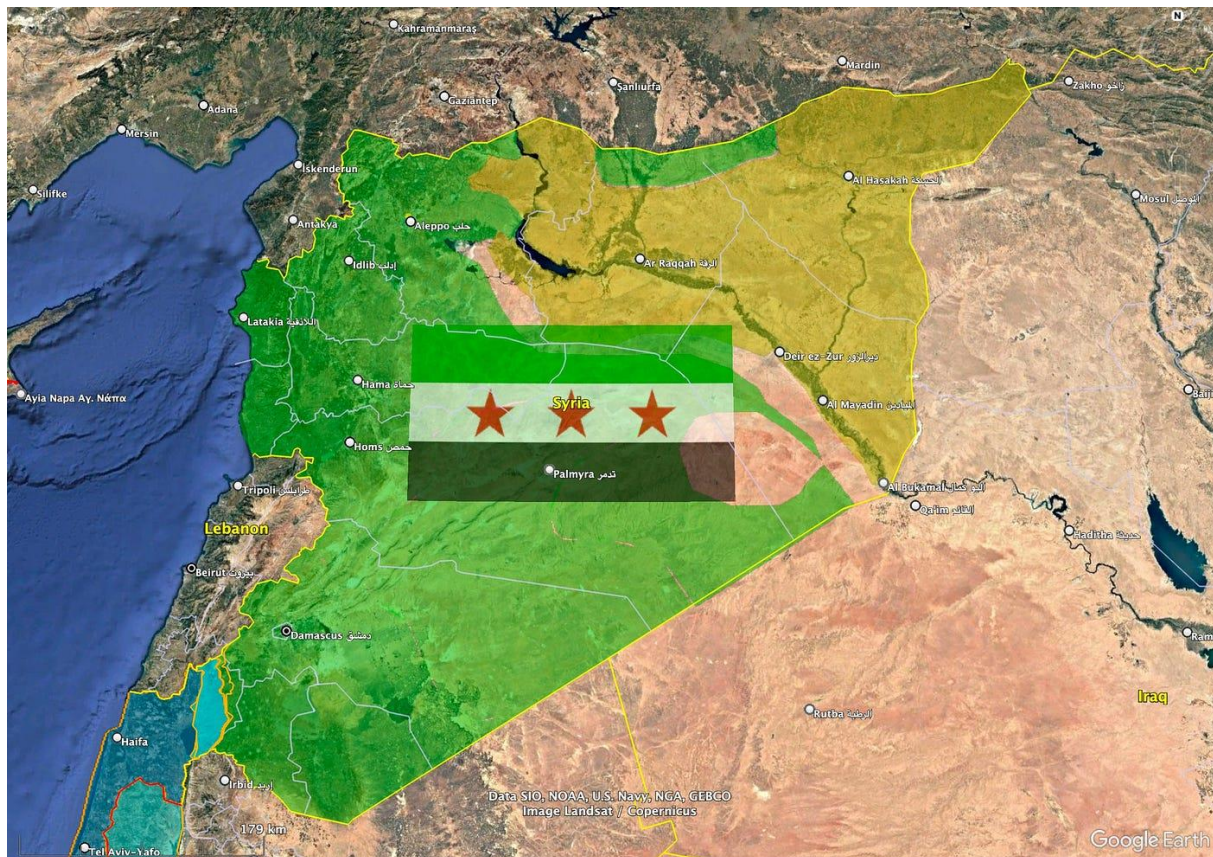
In connection with new developments in the region, water use agreements between the Euphrates-Tigris Basin countries may be discussed again in the future. In this case, Türkiye can gain a more effective position to guide the efficient use of the Euphrates and Tigris waters for the peace and stability of the region. However, this situation will not be easily accepted by the global powers that are influential in the politics of the Middle East. In addition, it should not be ignored that Israel's efforts to reach the waters of the Euphrates may increase in the coming period.



New Syria's Political Future

Control of the Tishrin, Tabqa and Al Baath dams on the Euphrates River has changed hands many times between various state and non-state actors since the Syrian civil war began in 2011. Armed conflicts in this region for control of the Tishrin Dam still continue. Full control of the dams on the Euphrates by the new administration is one of the primary goal for achieving stability in Syria. The Euphrates River has also been considered as a natural border in determining the areas of dominance of the groups within Syria. For this reason, the Euphrates River has the potential to change the water equation by gaining the status of creating a new border according to the future administrative structure of the country. This will create a new hydropolitics situation in the control and use of water.

The dams on the waters of the Euphrates currently provide 70 percent of the country's electrical energy, and most of the irrigation water is drawn from these dams. These dams have the potential to irrigate an area of 400 thousand hectares in the Middle Euphrates basin. The Euphrates River is the backbone of Syria's agricultural activities. Agricultural production in the new Syria will contribute greatly to both employment and food security. In summary, the Euphrates River will once again become the keystone of Syria's economic and social structure. For this reason, the issue of who will have control of the Euphrates dams will directly concern and shape the future of Syria.



Key to the Region

While the waters of the Euphrates may be the key to unitary integrity in a new Syria, they may be the cause of tension and conflict both within the country and between riparian states in the case of a fragmented Syria. An example of this situation is the problems that the Northern Iraq Regional Kurdish administration has with the Baghdad government regarding the development of water resources.

The change in Syria has changed the hydropolitics of the Euphrates River. The results of this change will be seen within a few years. Israel, which tends to expand in the region, may want to be involved in this new hydropolitics. For these reasons, the fact that the water of the Euphrates serves the peace and stability of the region seems to depend primarily on the stability, and unitary integrity of Syria and the relations between the riparian countries. If this unitary integrity is disrupted, the separation and use of Euphrates water between riparian countries and within the country may become an important source of problems under the influence of powers outside the region and Israel. Climate change in the region will also accelerate the increase of these problems.

The region's new water security architecture cannot be created without taking into account the changing balance of power, the strategic plans and interests of non-regional global powers, and Syria's political future. Therefore, uncertainties and risks regarding the water security of the region will continue. Türkiye can be seen as having gained a position in determining the new hydropolitics due to its being the source country of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and its increasing importance in the region. Some people may even say that Turkey has seized the key to Syria. However, this situation does not yet provide a direct advantage to Turkey. On the contrary, Turkey is required to follow the developments in the region very carefully and to make preparations according to alternative scenarios.

Biography



Dursun Yıldız C.E. (MSc.) is a hydropolitics specialist and Director of the Hydropolitics Academy Association located in Ankara-Türkiye. He is a civil engineer and used to be Deputy Director at State Hydraulic Works in Türkiye; completed a hydroinformatics post graduate course at the IHE in Delft, a Technical training program in USBR-USA, and a master's degree in Hydropolitics at the Hacettepe University-Türkiye. He has over 5 years of teaching experience in some Turkish Universities and now works as head of his own Hydro Energy & Strategy consulting company located in Ankara. He has published several international articles and 15 books. He received the Most Successful Researcher Award on International Water Issues from Turkish Agricultural Association in 2008 and from the Central Union of Irrigation Cooperatives in 2016. He received the Professional Services Award of Excellence from İstanbul Çekmeköy Rotary Club in 2021.

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January. 2 2025