

Why innovative hydro-diplomacy¹ ?

Dursun Yıldız

Hydropolitics Association of Turkey

Güfte Sokak No: 8/9 TR 06680 Kavaklıdere Çankaya, Ankara, Turkey

E mail: dyildiz@hidropolitikakademi.org

SUMMARY

Transboundary river basins of the World provide vital resources for nearly half of the world's population. This assessment shows existing and increasing risks in the majority of these basins. But there are still many controversies about ideal policies to balance water allocation or sharing benefit. Therefore, it is still an important issue that transforming potential tensions into partnerships for regional development in potential water conflicted regions.

The UN Security Council recently turned its attention to the relationship between water risks and conflict within and between countries⁴. The pressure on the resource is increasing, many transboundary streams are still left without frameworks for joint management. Climate variability also adds a new, complicating, dimension to these dynamics.

Past experiences showed that there is a significant paradigm shift need in transboundary rivers management from classical hydro diplomacy to an innovative one.

In this article, we aim to clarify that why we need a new strategy with new language to share, new approaches, methods, new mechanisms and innovative tools to apply? To put innovative water diplomacy into action.

Keywords: Water,Diplomacy,Innovation

Introduction

Since the 1960s there have been efforts at ensuring the development of common rules for institutionalizing relations between water riparian. The Watercourses Convention, which took some thirty years to write, another seven years to adopt and yet another 17 years to enter into force is a concrete step in the institutionalization of water relations. It challenges hydro-hegemonic approaches and promotes peaceful resolution of water issues². Although this has

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been a key step forward, we have already seen that it is not enough to solve more complex transboundary water issues.

During this long period, the convention was outdated in content even before it entered into force. The Convention has only been ratified by about one-fifth of the world's countries, not including any hydro-hegemon on a water-scarce basin².

The convention also does not establish any organization and, as such, is not a living framework convention that can be regularly updated in relation to the latest scientific evidence and issues raised by the parties¹. These shortcomings make it difficult for it to influence substantially global policies on water.

New Hydro Diplomacy concept and conventions need to consider changing in security concept, water energy, food nexus, climate change impacts. Therefore, apart from a conceptual change in hydro diplomacy in 21 st Century, the UN water convention also itself needs to be revised. identifying flexible water allocations and water quality standards, considering hydrological events, changing basin dynamics and societal values. This will make the agreements more applicable, sustainable in parallel with a new paradigm shift. approach.

Transboundary Water Agreements

There are more than 3,600 agreements and treaties signed. They are an achievement in themselves, but a closer look at them still reveals significant weaknesses and needs such as workable monitoring provisions, enforcement mechanisms, and specific water allocation provisions that address variations in water flow and changing needs.

Paradigm Shift to Where?

In fact, the transboundary water conflicts between riparian states can't be resolved only through insisting on ratification of the Watercourses Convention when they are reluctant to ratify it. Because, it is not only a matter of either more ratification and strengthening the UN Watercourses Convention itself or making better links between it and other conventions.

There is a need for applying innovative tools, new approaches, methods, new mechanisms and for putting effective hydro diplomacy into action

Such a process firstly needs a radical paradigm shift from table negotiations to develop joint projects on the base of mutually beneficial approach. Such paradigm shift could also focus on building a powerful institutional capacity to plan and manage integrated regional development projects in the shared river basins.

It may also need an international umbrella organization connected to regional basin institution that could be UN Water or the UNECE secretariat⁵.

The Need for New Watercourse Institutions

The conceptual change needs new watercourse institutions .to develop and implement new actions. The basin wide integrated development projects can be developed by the new institutions considering "Benefits for All" and "Win-Win Situation" that can provide the upper riparian states and the lower riparian states with real incentives for realizing constructive co-operation². Thus, the interests and rights of these countries are secured and broader and more comprehensive opportunities for economic co-operation among them are realized.

Existing institutions can't cope with new trends and complexities of water management in the 21st Century. Scott research³ shows that even long-running water conflicts can be ended when

outside groups, including national leaders, research institutions, and NGOs, work together to build institutions at the watershed and river basin level. Scott also emphasizes that “cooperation is definitely key, but in my mind the most important thing is how you try to institutionalize cooperation and design institutions to best promote cooperation” which is true and need to change present institutions structure².

The term institution is used here to mean more than organizations. They exist from the community to the national and international level. They reflect the ethics that are shared at each level.

Conclusion

WRI’s latest publication on water, security and conflict shows that these increasing pressures on water resources are already contributing to conflict and migration in many parts of the World⁴.

It is also becoming clear that transboundary water issues will become more and more complex, with climate change and globalization exacerbating quality and quantity issues along river basins worldwide¹. If we can realize the conceptional change in many areas related with water and transboundary water governance, water can be a force for bringing countries together and turn regional tensions into partnerships for development.

Although there have been efforts at institutionalizing collaboration and cooperation in some of the watercourses around the World, we are still far away from the satisfactory result especially in the multilateral agreement needed river basins.

Therefore, classical hydro diplomacy for conflict resolution like mediation and negotiation tools need to shift to a set of instruments and tools, belonging to science, economy, society, to develop mutually beneficial regional integrated development projects in the shared basins.

In many trans-boundary river basins, political power is asymmetrically distributed. According to the hydro-hegemony framework, where a riparian maintains a dominating position within a basin, it often receives more than an equitable share of the available water resources.

Among riparian, developing high level, mutually beneficial, comprehensive economical interdependency could help lessening the hydro hegemony. This action can be managed by new watercourse institutions that will set up in parallel with paradigm shift to a mutually interest approach in the basin.

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Author's Biography



Dursun Yıldız is a hydropolitics expert and Director of the Hydropolitics Academy Association located in Ankara-Turkey. He is a civil engineer and used to be Deputy Director at State Hydraulic Works in Turkey; completed hydroinformatics post graduate course at the IHE in Delft, Technical training programme in USBR-USA and a master degree in Hydropolitics at the Hacettepe University-Turkey. He has over 5 years of teaching experiences 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 11 Books. He received Most Successful Researcher Award on International Water Issues from Turkish Agricultural Association

in 2008 and from Central Union of Irrigation Cooperatives in 2016.

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