

Why we need to move forward right now for the Middle East Water Issues



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Introduction

The Tigris and Euphrates, with their tributaries, form a major river system in Turkey, Syria and Iraq. Originating in eastern Turkey, they flow through Syria and Iraq into the Persian Gulf.

Tigris and Euphrates Rivers play very important role for future of the Iraq and about 70 percent of Tigris and Euphrates Rivers flow from Turkey. In this sense, water management cooperation is important for Iraq to evaluate its water resources in a sustainable way.

The water equation of the Middle East has highly variable parameters and includes non-regional actors. Therefore, a multilateral water agreement has not been concluded for the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. These agreements have been bilateral agreements between riparian states

The security balance of this region of the Middle East has not allowed multilateral agreements on water in the past. Lack of confidence among countries has been one of the most important obstacles to progress in water management cooperation.

The civil war environment in the region for the last 11 years has caused the destruction of the water infrastructure as well as the relations of the countries. Arid periods, which has been effective to cause the civil war in the region, are highly likely to repeat. There is a risk of a severe water and food crisis in the region in terms of climate change effects and lack of water management. There is an urgent need for measures to prevent the increase of water and food crisis in order to stabilize the region. Uncertainty continues in many areas in the region. However, if the cooperation steps on water and food safety are not taken, this uncertainty will turn into new conflicts.

It is unfortunate that the uncertain political future of the region may result in re-securitization of water in the region. This could eliminate long-term peace and stability in the region. For this reason, riparian states need to shift paradigm and regional water problems should not be provided as a tool to be used outside forces' own interest in the region. Because oil resources

will only provide economic input in the reconstruction of the region. Sustainability in the region will depend directly on the cooperation in water resources.

Even Small Steps are Vital for Water

Turkey and Iraq have potential for cooperation in the region and the two countries can collaborate in many areas. If the step that has been taken will continue in a prescribed plan, may allow the Middle East Water Equation to be rewritten. Under this circumstances, these small steps that have taken should not to be underestimated in the region

Iraqi Water Resources Minister Jamal Adil Agriculture and Water Committee Chairman Selam Eş-Şemri and a delegation chaired by Veysel Eroğlu the Presidential Special Representative for Iraq met in Baghdad in the First of August.

What to be Provided by Turkey

During the meeting, the Turkish side had presented a series of proposals, such as the implementation of projects in the field of land reclamation, drinking water and sanitation, broadening the cooperation framework in the fields of economy and trade, and the establishment of a joint research center on water management in Baghdad.

Veysel Eroğlu, the Special Representative of the Presidency for Iraq, and his team announced at the meetings that they discussed all the activities that could be carried out together with Iraq in order to improve water management in the basin and to complete the infrastructure deficiencies

Priority will be given to the studies that can be carried out in this region, especially considering the water shortages and demands coming from Basra in order to reach Iraqi clean drinking water and prevent diseases caused by water.

In addition, the development of modern irrigation infrastructure and irrigation efficiency will be among the leading issues. Iraq, 90 percent of the water used in irrigation and need to be used more efficiently

For this, especially in Iraq, determining the irrigable economic areas, transition to modern irrigation systems will be given importance. Turkey will share the expertise and knowledge with Iraq. At the same time, Iraqi experts, engineers and technical personnel will be trained in Turkey.

Water and wastewater management, treatment technologies, design of treatment plants, modern irrigation methods, dam operation hydrology and energy issues that can be realized in the training program proposals were prepared by the relevant units.

It is aimed to start these trainings with the participation of expert delegations to be determined in line with the needs of Iraq.

Turkey and Iraq have also agreed to establish a water resources center in Baghdad to study and address water issues in the region.

It is late but a vital step for the region

The meetings and last announcement on water issues from Turkey and Iraqi side can be considered as a late step taken but it is a vital step for the region.

We have experinced that to reach a concrete solutions on transboundary water management conflicts have not been easy in a short period. It requires several internal and external conditions to start. But once it starts we need to consider past experiences and innovative hydro diplomacy to shape it to be sustainable .This sustaniability also requires shared goal ,shared vision and unity of effort between neighbours. The most important key element for the applicable and sutainable cooperation is establishing a mutuualy beneficial approach for regional development project .

It is Time to Put an Innovative Hydrodiplomacy on the Table

We ,Hydropolitics Academy of Turkey recommend that Middle East Water isssue cooperation need to be shifted to cooperate on Food Safety as well as water safety on the base of mutuualy beneficial approach in several sectors.

All these can only be achieved by satisfying public interest with an explained simple road map. In the both countries, civil society can also play very important role to avoid misunderstandings in the progress.

Turkish side "constructive" attitude towards riparian's water issues open some new doors at the right time. It seems that both countries favored a solution and water talks presented a great opportunity to benefit both Turks and Iraqis as well as entire region.

It is right time to put an innovative hydrodiplomacy on the table.

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