

Security, Challenges and Solutions of Water Geopolitics in Central Asia

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the study of water resources in Central Asia, and the issues of meeting the needs of the growing population. The purpose of the article is to analyse the need for water resources and political and geopolitical problems that may arise in the future between Uzbekistan and other countries in the region.

1 INTRODUCTION

The water factor is a matter of the future. 96% of the water on the globe is salt water from the oceans and seas, and only 3% is fresh water. In the next ten years, the world's freshwater reserves may be halved again. Currently, 80 countries worldwide have a shortage of fresh water, and two billion people suffer from a lack of fresh water. Central Asia is a geopolitically important region with a rapidly growing population and, at the same time, limited water resources. As long as the water problem is becoming global, there are serious grounds for talking about water geopolitics.

2 DISCUSSION

In order to evaluate the geopolitical position of water, it is necessary to take into account some theories of geopolitics. For example, American Admiral A. Mehen writes in his book "The Influence of Sea Power on History (1660-1783)" that having sea power is the main factor of world domination. It should be noted that A. Mehen's "Sea Power" theory has had an impact on the geopolitics of American and European countries for many years and has become a component of imperialist policy. Another author of water-related geopolitical programs and teachings is N. Spykman. In contrast to H. Mackinder's model, N. Spykman offers his version of the geo-political

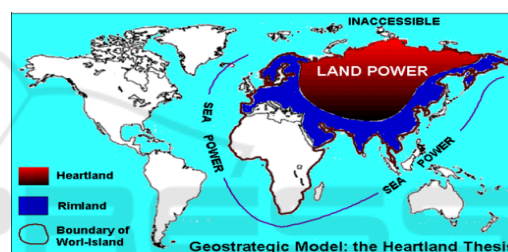


Figure 1. Heartland (land areas) vs Rimland (coastal areas)

scheme. According to his idea, the way to world domination is not the Heartland, but the Rimland (coastal areas).

N. Spykman changes H. Mackinder's formula as follows: "Whoever rules over Rimland will rule over Eurasia, and whoever rules Eurasia will take the fate of the world into his hands." This sentence can be changed a little and it can be said: "Whoever controls the waters of Eurasia, controls the world." Of course, geopolitical ideas on the control of water areas are still very relevant today.

According to a 2012 report by the US Central Intelligence Agency, "The misallocation of water causes many conflicts. Water bodies are widely used for political pressure worldwide, and there is also the possibility of using water as a weapon." According to Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Security Council of Russia, there is no question that wars will start in the world over drinking water. It is known that Russia is one of the countries with low water resources. 20% of fresh water on Earth is stored in Lake Baikal alone.

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According to the Global Water Intelligence magazine, which specializes in water issues and is published in many languages of the world, the annual turnover in the water market is close to the amount spent for military purposes around the world. This is just the beginning of the process.

In 2006, the Ministry of Defense of Great Britain appealed to the state leadership and called to prepare for a war that could occur due to the shortage of drinking water throughout the globe. According to John Reid, the Secretary of Defense at that time, such a war would cover several regions of the world at the same time. The water situation in Central Asia is more worrying than expected. We don't want to talk about the tragedy of the island in detail, but we think it will be enough to take a look at its disastrous appearance.



Figure 2. The drying up of the Aral Sea

There is another danger for Central Asia, which is somewhat neglected. This is also the drying up of the Caspian Sea. On October 8, 2022, the photos of the Caspian Sea taken in 2006 and 2022 were published on the NASA website. In the photos taken 16 years

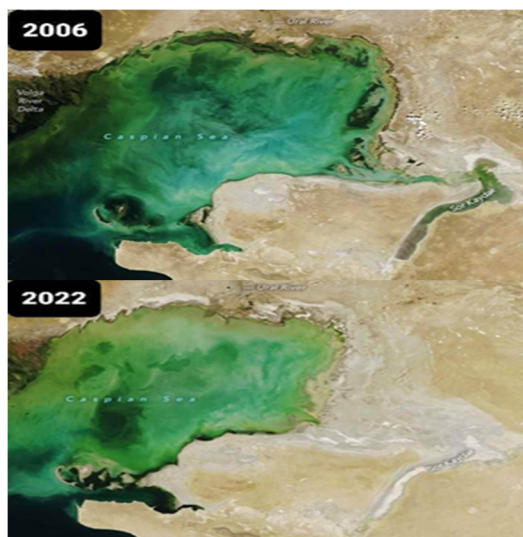


Figure 3. The drying up of the Caspian Sea

apart, it can be seen that the water has decreased significantly in the northern part of the Caspian, which is quite shallow, in the areas adjacent to the territory of the Mangystov region of Kazakhstan.

According to Kazakh ecologists, the decrease in water in the Caspian is caused not only by climate changes but also by the blocking of the rivers flowing into it and the construction of many hydroelectric power plants. Since the water of the Caspian Sea began to decrease, the situation is being monitored by the scientists of the interested countries. According to their reports, seawater is decreasing by 7-10 centimeters every year.

As the water of the Caspian Sea decreases, a very large area in its shallow northern and northeastern parts opens up and turns into a desert. As a result, the sands on the dry bottom of the sea become a great danger not only for Central Asia but also for the ecology of Iran and the Caucasus. Taking into account that a part of the air currents coming from the Arctic passes over the Caspian Sea and the wind currents that form mainly blow from north to south and from west to east, the sand storms that arise from the desert instead of the sea mainly affect Iran and Central Asia. moves towards

Four actors and the politics of the countries upstream and downstream of the transboundary rivers of Central Asia play an important role in the possibility of water becoming a weapon of geopolitics in Central Asia:

2.1 Russia

Russia has its own "contribution" to the origin of water problems in Central Asia. According to the "absolutely confidential" letter sent by the Governor-General of Turkestan von Kaufman from Tashkent to Emperor Alexander II on November 14, 1872, the issue of the Aral Sea was already on the agenda as a serious problem at that time. In particular, it was written in that letter: "...we must take such a course that the water of Amudarya and Syrdarya never reaches the sea. Water from these rivers should be used to irrigate cotton fields until the last drop. As soon as the water soaks into the cotton fields, the island will dry up completely. Then we divert Siberian rivers to fill the sea. Only then can we preserve Turkestan's dependence on Russia forever." In this regard, no one can guarantee that the current Russia, which is constantly promoting its old imperialist ambitions, will not turn the water factor into a weapon of geopolitics in Central Asia.

2.2 China

China's geopolitical plans for Central Asia are very abstract and therefore potentially dangerous. This aspect is also reflected in the issue of water. However, the natural dam of Lake Sarez, which is located in Tajikistan and holds 19 million tons of water, poses a serious threat to Central Asia. Most importantly, according to some information, this lake was sent to China as a "gift" for use in exchange for loans. The statement that the Chinese use this lake for the purposes of "scientific investigation" seemed to confirm these rumors. If we consider now, if China poses a geopolitical threat to Central Asia through this lake in the future, the question of how the downstream countries will behave may cause another problem.

2.3 The USA

In this process, the "Greater Central Asia" project of the American politicians, as well as the plans to direct the Amudarya water courses to Afghanistan, attracted attention. In particular, the Koshtepa Canal project, which is being built by the Provisional Government of Afghanistan under the leadership of the "Taliban" in the Amudarya basin, will not fail to worry the countries located downstream. The Khush Tepa Irrigation and Power Generation Feasibility Study is one of USAID's most significant technical and engineering studies in Afghanistan. The Study is implemented by AACS Consulting under USAID's Strengthening Watershed and Irrigation Management (SWIM) activity managed by AECOM International Development, Inc./DT Global. Experts from the Moscow State University Center for the Study of Socio-Political Processes in the Post-Soviet Space are concerned that Kabul's projects could become a disaster for all of Central Asia. According to specialists, when the "Koshtepa Canal" is put into operation, the situation with the water divide in the region will deteriorate sharply. This is despite the fact that in recent years, all Central Asian countries have been increasingly feeling the effects of water scarcity.

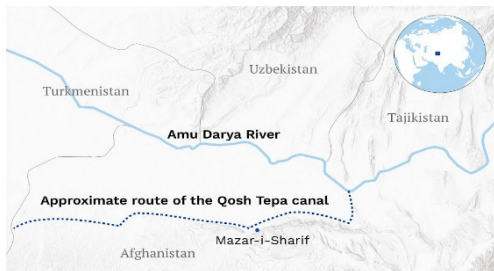


Figure 4. Koshtepa canal project

US funding of TAPI, CASA 1000, and possibly the Trans-Afghan Transport Corridor will allow it to maintain a strong presence in the region after the withdrawal of its military forces from Afghanistan. For this purpose, the fact that Washington, directly and indirectly, offers its "contribution" to large dam projects that have a great impact on regional security, or water projects in Afghanistan, is evidence of attempts to turn water into a tool of geopolitical influence.

2.4 Iran

According to information, 40 percent of the world's oil products pass through the Strait of Hormuz. If Iran threatens to close this strait, the world oil market will take a negative turn. Iran's strategies related to the Caspian may also have an impact on oil export routes in Central Asia. One of the important goals of the "Greater Iran" concept developed by Tehran was the implementation of water projects in the directions of "Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran". However, such potential plans of Iran have not materialized so far. In addition, the disputes between Iran and Afghanistan regarding the use of the Helmand River in recent years had a serious impact on the security situation in the region.

2.5 Central Asia

Unfortunately, the water problems in Central Asia have not yet been solved. Central Asian countries such as Turkmenistan (206m³) and Uzbekistan (625m³) are among the countries that have 1000m³ per capita per year (that is, necessary to meet minimum needs). According to the research of the Institute of World Resources, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Moldova, and Azerbaijan are among the 13 countries in the world with the least water supply. Moreover, the fact that upstream countries are consulted on this issue not with downstream countries, but with "big countries" can make the situation even more complicated.

Water problems in Central Asia should be solved only on the basis of mutual agreement of the countries of the region without external interference. The agreement between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan is a clear example of this. Border problems in Central Asia have a unique aspect, which includes water-related factors. The long-standing border problems between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan were legally resolved on the basis of a mutually signed agreement. The agreement reached on the use of the Kambirabad

reservoir is extremely important for the region's prospects. It is commendable that Uzbek diplomacy is based on the principle of "land for water" and plans to prevent the various prospective problems related to water that we have analyzed above. This is a product of preventive diplomacy.

3 CONCLUSION

According to estimates, a "water war" may begin in Central Asia by 2050 due to various reasons. It cannot be ruled out that this will become a major threat to the region. The construction of the Koshtepa canal, which is being built by the Taliban, may cause Uzbekistan's water problems to become more serious. From this point of view, the states of the region should hold diplomatic negotiations on water-related issues with mutual agreement, in particular involving the Afghan side in these processes, and regulate the problems based on the norms of international law. serves as a preventive measure against turning it into a geopolitical weapon.

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