

Turkey's Water Diplomacy: Analysis of its Foundations, Challenges and Prospects

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Water, essential for human and other living beings, is becoming a scarce resource due to a growing population and the effects of global climate change. This raises the risk of conflicts between states. Water resources that transcend the borders of nation-states can engender tensions among riparian states; consequently, the parties' endeavor to address governance issues and cultivate opportunities for cooperation through mechanisms of water diplomacy. Ayşegül Kibaroglu's book, "Turkey's Water Diplomacy: Analysis of its Foundations, Challenges and Prospects," provides a thorough examination of Turkey's water diplomacy framework through a combination of national processes and institutions, while also exploring how this framework has evolved in response to international water law from an institutionalist approach. According to the institutionalist approach, the resolution of transboundary water disputes may be possible through institutions built based on international legal sources and cooperation arrangements developed by organizations. In this context, international regime theory supports effective water management and allocation through the norms, rules, and decision-making mechanisms it offers (Kibaroglu and Sümer 2006: 37). The study analyzes Turkey's water diplomacy framework using a qualitative and normative methodology, grounded in a thorough review of legal documents and institutional practices.

The book evaluates Turkey's transboundary water management practices and its adherence to international water law principles by examining relevant institutions, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). It analyzes the actors, decision-making processes, and interactions between institutions shaping water diplomacy, providing a comprehensive view of Turkey's stance on international water law, diplomatic tools in bilateral relations, and the level of institutionalization.

The book comprises five principal chapters. The initial chapter explores the administrative framework and bureaucratic coordination mechanisms of Turkey's water diplomacy. Within

this framework, the central role of the MFA, the contributions of institutions such as the State Hydraulic Works (DSİ), the General Directorate of Water Management, the Turkish Water Institute (SUEN) -which are affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry-, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) are detailed. Turkey's water policy adheres to the principles of "equitable and reasonable utilization" and "no significant harm" as outlined in international law. However, these have been occasionally compromised by third-party interventions and political pragmatism (e.g., the 1987 Protocol). Prime Minister Turgut Özal, influenced by security concerns, promised a water flow of up to 500 cubic meters of water to reduce Syria's support for the PKK (p. 14). This activity, undertaken for short-term political gain on water resources, has been described as a deviation from Turkey's water policy. Nevertheless, it is emphasized that an understanding of institutional professionalism shaped the diplomatic processes carried out by technical experts (water technocrats).

In the second part, Turkey's approach to international water law is analyzed. Turkey adopts the principle of "equitable and reasonable utilization" but opposes "co-sovereignty" and defends "limited territorial sovereignty." The legal position of Turkey is articulated through statements, official documents, and the discourses of institutions, such as the MFA and the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs (MFWA).¹ Accordingly, Turkey is committed to equal sharing of international rivers and equitable sharing of transboundary waters. In this context, Turkey has been taking a multifaceted diplomatic approach through bilateral agreements, joint dam projects, technical cooperation, and training programs. The principle of "benefit sharing" also plays a crucial role in Turkey's water diplomacy practices.

The third section examines Turkey's reasons for not becoming a party to international and regional water conventions, as well as criticisms of this position. In particular, the concerns regarding sovereignty and reservations about binding procedures that underlie Turkey's opposition to the 1997 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (UNWC) are elucidated. Turkey has adopted the principles of "equitable and reasonable utilization" and "no significant harm," but has not joined the UNWC due to concerns such as notification obligations,² the lack of distinction between water types, and compulsory dispute resolution mechanisms (pp. 55-56). Turkey, although not a party to the convention, adheres to customary law principles and advocates for a flexible, tailored approach, as each transboundary water system has unique conditions. Likewise, although Turkey is not a

1 The institutional structure of water policies in Turkey has evolved over time under different ministerial arrangements. The Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, established in 2011, was incorporated into the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in 2018. Previously, water-related authorities and responsibilities were distributed among different institutions at different times, such as the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, and the Ministry of Public Works. Therefore, the names of institutions encountered in the literature or official documents may vary depending on the period.

2 Turkey did not agree with linking the principle of prior notification to general timeframes and procedures, as this did not take into account the specific conditions of each basin. Therefore, Turkey avoided committing to fixed procedural regulations and preferred to continue information sharing through technical meetings and ad hoc mechanisms.

party to the European Union (EU) Water Framework Directive (WFD), it is noted that Turkey incorporates many principles compatible with this document into its domestic law.

Chapter four discusses Turkey's water diplomacy in its major transboundary river basins (Euphrates-Tigris, Orontes, Meriç, Kura-Aras, Çoruh), comparing different diplomatic approaches and tools like "flood diplomacy," "sediment diplomacy," and "joint dam diplomacy" (p. 122). It is emphasized that Turkey's geographical location and historical context significantly influence various forms of diplomacy; however, a permanent and inclusive negotiation platform is notably absent across numerous basins. Furthermore, the chapter concludes that Turkey has diverged from EU water policies, while still maintaining a "hydraulic mission" approach focused on quantity and supply (p. 119). However, with the increase in environmental impacts, approaches prioritized by the EU, such as environmental protection, demand management, and impact assessment, have also been gradually adopted; thus, while continuing to develop infrastructure within the framework of the hydraulic mission, a limited basis for alignment with the EU has been achieved.

The fifth chapter presents theoretical models, including the Water Diplomacy Framework (Islam and Susskind 2012) and the Multi-Track Water Diplomacy Framework (Huntjens et al., 2016), while evaluating their applicability within the Turkish context. The significance of non-state actors, including epistemic communities, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and think tanks, as well as interdisciplinary interaction, is underscored in Turkey's water diplomacy. Furthermore, the contributions of Track II diplomacy initiatives are examined with illustrative examples, such as the Euphrates-Tigris Initiative for Cooperation. Good practices, such as SUEN's role in regional initiatives and cooperation between DSI and MFA, are noted. While Turkey's institutional capacity is strong, weaknesses include a lack of multilateral cooperation, flexible regulation, and adherence to international norms. The chapter concludes with recommendations for trust-building, promoting holistic governance, and fostering inclusive participation.

The principal finding of the book indicates that Turkey's framework for water diplomacy is implemented through clearly defined and institutionalized state structures. It is contended that Turkey's transboundary water diplomacy practices are influenced by the specific dynamics of each river basin, particularly in the Euphrates-Tigris basin, where water diplomacy is intricately linked with non-riparian security concerns. Turkey's non-party status in international conventions limits the generalization of bilateral experiences and their contributions to the normative framework. The book seeks to unify Turkey's complex issues within the WDF by employing both technical observational "what is" and value-based "what should be" approaches. Additionally, external actors, particularly bilateral development and credit agencies,³ play crucial roles in Turkey's water diplomacy system.

3 It is reported that Turkey has formulated a strategy to liberate its water policy from the influences of third-party entities following the interference caused by foreign loans and donations throughout the construction of the Keban and Karakaya dams. Turkey's participation in initiatives like Peace in the Middle East with the Swedish and Swiss Development Agencies shows a shift in strategy. However, the book does not thoroughly analyze Turkey's changing stance and the impact of external actors on water diplomacy.

Turkey's Water Diplomacy constitutes a significant contribution that comprehensively evaluates Turkey's approach to transboundary waters, encompassing its institutional, legal, and diplomatic dimensions. However, it is essential to note that specific criticisms exist. First, the story of diplomatic successes is primarily based on government documents and official statements, leaving out the viewpoints of local communities, environmental groups, and water rights advocates. This narrows the narrative of the work to a top-down, elite-focused perspective.

Additionally, while the first part of the book discusses the roles of TİKA and AFAD in humanitarian water diplomacy, it does not explain why Turkey requires them or how they are connected to foreign policy. Although the administrative units' activities are detailed, their positioning within national water diplomacy, their strategic motives, and the underlying norms remain unclear.

While the book thoroughly addresses water diplomacy in its technical and institutional dimensions, it engages with contemporary perspectives such as environmental justice, social inequalities, and ecological sustainability in a comparatively limited manner. In this context, future research could further enhance this foundation by incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives to enrich the field. Kibaroglu's book serves as a valuable resource for researchers, as well as for graduate students engaged in disciplines such as water politics, environmental law, foreign policy, and regional governance. It also serves as a significant reference point for studies analyzing Turkey's water diplomacy, encompassing its institutional, legal, and historical dimensions. In this regard, the book not only enhances the existing body of literature but also establishes a robust foundation for research that cultivates critical and holistic perspectives on water governance.

References

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