



Hydrodiplomacy and Climate Change for Peace in Mesopotamia : Case of the Tigris and Euphrates, 10 December 2018





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Concept note

After the success of the three conferences "Hydrodiplomacy and Climate Change for Peace in the Middle East", on the Orontes in 2015, the Jordan River in 2016 and on the Nile Basin in 2017, the initiative is renewed for its fourth consecutive year. The Luxembourg Palace will host therefore on the 10th of December 2018 the Colloquium on Hydrodiplomacy and Climate Change for Peace in Mesopotamia: case of the basin of the Tigris and the Euphrates.

Similar to the previous editions, this symposium is organized at the initiative of Mr. Olivier Cadic, Senator representing the French Citizens established abroad and Mr. Fadi Georges Comair, President of MEDURABLE and Honorary President of MENBO.

This fourth conference will include a retrospective part to recall the lessons of the editions from 2015 to 2017. Thus the following themes will be addressed:

- *Session 1: retrospective and lessons learned: the Orontes, the Jordan River and the Nile Basin*
- *Session 2: Hydro-political issues in Mesopotamia*
- *Session 3: technico-economical projects on the Tigris and Euphrates*
- *Session 4: hydrodiplomacy and the Nexus Water-Energy-Food: securing water resources for future generations in Mesopotamia*

The Middle-East: a contemporary reality

In the contemporary global context, the Middle East is at the heart of major geostrategic challenges and remains an area of tension and confrontations due to the multiplicity of geopolitical, environmental, and security issues. This confrontational environment contributes to transforming the Middle East into an area characterized by a fragmented economic, social and political factor of crises, regional destabilization and transboundary threats...

Water is now a critical geopolitical issue and water war is raging in the Middle East. This resource that is indispensable for sustainable development, is currently undergoing the effects of global changes and especially the climate change we are witnessing for forty years.

In addition, global warming is at the heart of the debates and the States face security and strategic issues related to the shortage of resources. The temperature raise and political refugees and their displacement as well as the number of climate and political refugees present in various countries in the region cause an economic and environmental shock in the world and especially in the Mediterranean region.

The Middle East is already strongly penalized by the environmental degradation coupled to high population growth with urban concentration in sensitive coastal areas. This current situation of the Middle East engenders a water shortage which becomes an important issue so far as it can be source of violent conflict in a region already affected by the scarcity of rainfall. The Middle East is already suffering from the mismanagement of the basins, accompanied by an inequitable sharing of water and the unreasonable use of the resource. The conflicts intensify more and more amongst users of transboundary basins in the Middle East.

At the level of transboundary basins, there are conflicts due to the unfair sharing of resources, as well as the increasing deterioration of water resources. Given the gravity of the problem of shortage of this resource and its consequences that are likely to be dramatic in the presence of geopolitical issues in the Middle East region, a regional hydrodiplomatic cooperation is necessary to ensure a fair sharing of the resource in order to find a way to ward off this threat.

The Hydrodiplomacy approach could reverse the situation for regional cooperation and thereby consolidate a permanent hydrodiplomacy between riparian countries.

The Hydrodiplomacy in a glance

The hydrodiplomacy is a tool at the service of the construction of integrated national and transnational management of water resources, based on a cooperative model, away from the fragmented, safe or hegemonic logic affecting more and more the socio-economic development of many countries.

The hydrodiplomacy seeks to build a new form of governance that has the ambition of building peace, a process for prevention, mediation and resolution of conflicts on water. This is to exclude any form of domination of one country on the other, to take away the militarization of access to water sources and pushing away the concept of safe or hegemonic resource management.

To achieve its purposes, the hydrodiplomacy is mobilizing both technical expertise and diplomacy. It combines diplomats, scientists, academics, policy makers at the level of the transboundary basins, as a way to achieve a fair and reasonable use of water in order to reach a mutual success based on a 'win-win' situation, between riparian regions and countries.

The water crises: a past that is still present in the Middle East

The Middle East suffers from a depletion of its water resources and water stress. This situation hinders the sustainable development of this region. The total volume of surface water resources in the Arab countries is estimated at 277 billion m³ of water per year, 43% of which comes from the Arab territories, and the rest comes from jurisdictions outside this region. The average annual global resources per person and per year is estimated at 7000 m³, while the average in Arab countries does not exceed 700 m³ per person and per year, which is thought to be the lowest worldwide. In order to deal with this situation of stress, it is necessary to use non-traditional means (industrial) to produce fresh water for drinking and irrigation, in particular: the desalination of sea water that requires consumption of a large amount of energy (1.7 Kw/m³ of water). For this, the Arab States of the Gulf spend about 30% of their energy production on desalination.

Mesopotamia: "land between the rivers"

Mesopotamia refers to the flood plain which extends between the Tigris and the Euphrates (current Iraq). When these rivers were overflowing with life, they overwhelmed the land, depositing fertile silt layers. Barren and uncultivable because of the lack of rainfall, this region had to wait for the invention of irrigation canals around 5500 years before J - C to develop fields and cultures. Regularly watered, they provided an almost sufficient harvest each year. Some thousand years later, the invention of the wooden plow increased the agricultural output. The population grew accordingly, and in 1300 years before J – C, hundreds of town and villages dotted the region.

Mesopotamia was sorely lacking natural resources. For many activities, from construction to jewelry, raw materials like wood, stones and minerals were imported from

neighboring areas in exchange for surplus of crops and handicrafts. Trade, in full expansion, was controlled by rich and powerful sovereigns, who developed collective projects such as networks of irrigation and other defenses against flooding. Indeed, they represented a considerable danger to crops and homes. We thought that they meant the wrath of the Gods, and the biblical episode of the flood probably has its origins in the first Mesopotamian myths.

The geography of Mesopotamia

The Tigris and the Euphrates rivers take their source in Turkish Kurdistan, in Eastern Turkey. The Euphrates penetrates in Syria to Carchemish, near the Turkish town of Birecik, before being joined by its major tributaries, the Balikh and the Khabur. Entering Iraq, it runs through Ramadi, in the heart of Mesopotamia, and joins the Tigris at Qurna (Iraq), sharing the Shott al-Arab with the Karoun (the most important rivers of Iran) until it joins them in turn. Tigris and Euphrates are both the main Turkish, Syrian and Iraqi rivers. Crossing three main countries in the region, they are also occasionally borders; between Turkey and Syria, between Syria and Iraq... The river of the Tigris is 1800 km long and includes four riparian countries: Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. The Euphrates passes through Turkey, Syria and Iraq with a total length of 2785 km.

The two rivers join in the South of Iraq to form the Shatt al-Arab, which flows into the Persian Gulf.

The Tigris and the Euphrates: a safe management of water resources seeking regional stability

The Tigris and the Euphrates are subject to Turkish hydro hegemony for several decades. This domination over the two basins deprives Syria and Iraq from a legitimate share for the development of agricultural strategies of these two countries as well as drinking water to meet the needs of citizens. To date, Turkey considers that these two basins have a national identity due to the presence of their water sources in Turkish territory. The non-recognition of the Convention of the United Nations in 1997 by Turkey leads to difficulties in the negotiations on the sharing of these ponds with riparian countries struggling to manage their demand in all sectors of use. This is compounded with the development of the GAP project which includes the construction of several dams, thereby closing the water flow to the downstream countries.

The Syrian considerations on Mesopotamia

In the face of this tense climate and the presence of several military actions in Mesopotamia, Syria which witnesses since five years a multitude of conflicts, currently has no control over the dams and the flow of the Tigris and the Euphrates in its territory.

This reflects the impact of the presence of ISIS and the Syrian liberation army so far in the adjacent area to Turkey. Syria has always claimed the recognition of the Tigris and Euphrates of the status of an international river.

Should we wait for the stability of Syria in order to apply the previous agreement between the two countries or a renegotiation will be considered?

A Turkish reflection on the Mesopotamian track

Meanwhile, Turkey just like Israel, has not signed the convention of the United Nations of 1997 on the use of international non navigable rivers, depriving Iraq and Syria from any possibility of recourse to legal proceedings of the United Nations. It would be interesting to see if the new Iraqi regime, strengthened by its recent victory over ISIS, will be able to renegotiate its hydraulic agreements with countries located at the upstream of the basin, starting with Turkey that is to this day a loyal ally of the United States of America.

The impact of the Southeast Anatolia Project on the countries in the region should encourage Turkey to launch a management process of the Tigris and the Euphrates as part of a sustainable development strategy based on a spirit of cooperation which is not the case currently. This strategy should help the countries of the basin to move toward the IWRM for more efficient use of water resources. The only recourse of Turkey after the stabilization of Iraq and Syria is the application of a management based on cooperation with its neighboring countries. Still, it will take Turkey to accept a fair sharing of water and accept the application of the UN conventions (UNECE and 1997).

Here too, it is recommended to fill the new Ilisu Dam (within the context of the GAP Turkish Project) progressively, not to deprive Iraq of its drinking water supply. The creation of a common basin agency for these two rivers is a necessity for constructive dialogue between riparian countries. Would Turkey be willing to rely on the UN texts "anti-crisis" as was the case on the basins of the Orontes and the Nahr el Kebir between Lebanon and Syria?

The Iraqi recommendations in Mesopotamia

In this prospect of cooperation, Iraq affirmed that there is a very great difficulty when it comes to negotiating between Iraq, Iran and Turkey on the basin of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers.

This country emphasizes the importance of learning of the case of the Orontes basin to address fair solutions 'win-win' on the basins of the Tigris and the Euphrates and requests the application of an active hydrodiplomacy for the deferred filling of the new Ilisu dam established by Turkey on the Tigris and constitutes a serious problem for Iraq in search of an abundant water resource.

In addition, the Iraqi Government has proposed Turkish officials to strengthen cooperation on the Tigris in order to create a dynamic for economic development, thus allowing the riparian countries to take advantage of the programs fundings for the development of the economic sectors of international watercourses.

The Tigris and the Euphrates: an undeniable hydraulic complexity

The situation in this basin is complex, combining economic difficulties, development and post-war rehabilitation. The recent victory announced by the Iraqi Government against the Islamic State allows to start the reconstruction of the country, but Syria and Iraq remain weak against Turkey which proclaims its willingness to use waters of the two rivers at its discretion, since it is not signatory of the 1997 UN Convention.

Turkey has, since well before the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein, a strengthened power position in the face of Iraq. The country that is more upstream represents an economic and political regional power and still has the ability to 'close the taps' of the Tigris and the Euphrates as it has been proven in the past. But the situation is now distressed and the powers are reversed. Turkey is facing Iraqi people supported by the regional power of Iran and by the international backing from the United States, and in full reformation; and an Iraqi Government weakened by successive wars and international embargo.

As strategic and economic partner, Iraq becomes from the Turkish point of view, if not a potential rival, at least a highly unpredictable and potentially destabilizing neighbor. In the face of this rival, Turkey has however, a "weapon of massive thirst"; the GAP. Guneydogu Anadolu Projesi is a project of 22 dams, 19 hydro-electric stations (designed to be able to satisfy, ultimately at least 20 per cent of national electricity ever-growing demand, due to the development and the supported growth in the country) and irrigation with a cost of 32 billion dollars, launched in 1976 and being completed, and which if its filling was decided unilaterally and suddenly by the Turks, would make the Tigris and the Euphrates purely and simply to dry, for a period up to a full year. This situation has similarities with the problems of the Ethiopian dam of the Great Renaissance, on the Blue Nile, which filling would cause political, social and economic tensions between Ethiopia and Egypt similar to those between Turkey and Iraq.

The effect of climate change on water supply of the tanks on the transboundary basins could also have consequences on water sharing between riparian countries. For this component 'climate change' is essential for the consideration of the scenarios for the future as part of a medium and long term vision related to the riparian countries water balance.

A sudden filling, for essentially political reasons ahead of the general elections in Turkey, of Ilisu dam - a tank of 10 billion cubic meters for an electrical capacity of 1200 MW established on the headwaters of the Tigris, in the Turkish Sirnak province border with Iraq - in June 2018 has set the metropolis of Baghdad to dry and caused hunger riots in several cities and provinces of Iraq.

Once again, the water issue is included in the territorial, political, and security challenges in the region. However, Turkey, which trades with Iraq had suffered sanctions of the United Nations, seems eager to revive the bilateral dynamic.

Starting September 2003, an electrical supply was undertaken, with the idea of extending this exchange to the trade of drinking water and irrigation in Iraq. On the other hand, safe realignment between Turkey and Syria opens up prospects of important cooperation between the other two neighbors, particularly on the issue of water. This new safe data has generated a reorientation of the hydraulic speech from Turkey, in a perspective of profits sharing with the neighboring Syria. Turkey ensures a regional ally for the containment of the upheavals of the new Iraqi order.

In this climate of instability, regional imbalances due to water deficits and high concentrations of national minorities, a just and equitable distribution of available water based on accountability becomes a must and the development of the water-energy-food Nexus concept will be an urgent need.

Today, awareness of the proximity between water, energy and food has led to develop a concept allowing to manipulate, process and reflect on this triptych as a whole.

This definition is passed in common parlance to refer to a set of ideas, linked together and interconnected concepts. This word has naturally been chosen to refer to the water-energy-food triptych, in view of its multiple connections.

The "Nexus water-energy-food is a global approach for a global problem. It allows to treat the problems of each of the three areas of the Nexus by integrating its corollaries in the other two areas, allowing to escape limitations necessarily imposed by the concentration on a single approach, and this at various scales. This approach is based on a simple fact: the water resource is scarce, while intensifying the exploitation of hydrocarbons, the increase of the population and the needs of agriculture impose an escalating pressure on water resources.

Conclusion

Based on all the foregoing, it is clear that the analysis of the basin of the Tigris and the Euphrates in this edition is an interesting contribution to the lighting of the debate as well as recommendations to promote water peace in the region.

The future will tell if the trilateral relations between Turkey, Syria and the new Iraqi regional player after its stabilization, will evolve towards a multidimensional cooperation (water, oil) or will set out the strategies of Turkey to the advantage of Iraq, by the United States.

Will there be a Russian support in the future recovery of water negotiations between Syria and Turkey? A geopolitical situation full of conflicts potentials, especially in the presence of regional power such as Iran and Turkey, but also of cooperation.

It is on these opportunities that will lean the participants in this Colloquium, in order to identify ways for regional cooperation, an integrated management, reasonable and harmonious resources, in the spirit of looking for 'win-win' situations, valued by the hydrodiplomacy in the context of climate change adaptation policies.

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