

ABSTRACT

To the thesis for the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in the specialty

6D020200 - International relations

Environmental security in Central Asia: the tension between national and regional approaches on transboundary rivers issue

Ormysheva Tolganay Altynbekovna

Research rationale. The problem of water resources distribution is an important element of the international relations. According to UN forecasts, a significant shortage of fresh water on the Earth is quite possible in the future, which has replaced the growing shortage of hydrocarbons. Water resources are one of the most important factors for maintaining political stability, as well as the economic development of many countries and individual regions. The problem of water contamination, along with an increase in consumption, limits the access to clean drinking water.

Central Asia is not the richest region with water resources; moreover, this water is extremely unevenly distributed. The main water arteries of the region are transboundary ones, 86% of which are located in upstream countries. The states located in the river head - Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - have large reserves of water, while the main part of the water in the downstream is formed outside the borders.

Ensuring the effective and peaceful management of freshwater resources crossing the borders - mainly the Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya rivers – has become one of the most pressing problems for the states of Central Asia soon after getting independence.

When the states have been a part of the USSR, water resources have been managed through a system of reservoirs and hydropower stations installed along these two rivers. Due to landscape and climatic conditions, the water storage reservoirs have been built in upstream states and used for irrigation in downstream countries. But after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became obvious that, due to geopolitical changes and the transition to a market economy, the basis on which the Soviet governance of the Central Asian rivers has been built, has become irrelevant. As a result, the contradictions between the states upstream (hydropower) and downstream (irrigation) regarding water use have intensified. Food and energy security issues were complicated by the lack of attention to environmental issues inherited from the Soviet period, when the extensive using the natural resources was an indisputable priority over the environmental protection.

With independence, the issue of water resources management has become acute, as the economies of the Central Asia countries are “water-dependent”. Conflicts began in this area. But they did not go into the hot phase between Bishkek and Dushanbe, since in the 1990s the Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have decided to resume construction of hydropower plants on the Syr-Darya and Amu-Darya. But the Uzbekistan, located in the lower reaches of these rivers, has regarded these actions as a direct threat to its security.

In the 2000s, the countries of this region have resumed negotiations on the issue of water resources. On March 15, 2018, a working (consultative) meeting of the heads of Central Asian states was held in Astana, attended by the Presidents of Kazakhstan,

Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and the chairman of the Mejlis of Turkmenistan. During the meeting, the parties have discussed issues relating to the economy, trade, infrastructure, logistics, and the sharing of water resources. The working meeting testifies that the states of this region have taken the vector to soften relations in the water sphere and a new opportunity to resolve the transboundary rivers issues.

In the summer of 2018, a summit conference concerning the international decade of the action “Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028” was held in Dushanbe. During the summit, participants have discussed the problems of access to drinking water, increasing efficiency of water productivity, approaches and methods of integrated and sustainable water use, improving the quality of water and ecosystems, and strengthening international water cooperation.

The list of water related issues includes also disputes over water distribution, irrigation and hydropower, as well as concerns about the deterioration of water quality, environment, loss of biodiversity and climate change.

The quality of water also remains one of the main issues on the agenda, as the environmental policy of states involves the examination of water quality and the degree of its contamination. And to implement an effective regional water pollution control policy, the first step is the due attention and solution of the joint water management problems.

Thus, the issue of water resources management in general and transboundary water in particular is relevant not only from the point of the economy, but also of policy. The issue emerges full blown in connection with the problems of integration, both at the regional and interregional levels.

The study object is the relationship between the national and regional approaches to solving problems of transboundary rivers in the Central Asia.

The focus of research is the transboundary rivers management on the example of relations of Central Asian countries and the general situation in this region concerning the water management problems.

The study purpose follows from the relevance of this dissertation work and is to analyze the problems of the transboundary rivers in Central Asia through the lens of national and regional approaches.

In accordance with the purpose, the following tasks are set:

1. To study the theoretical aspects of water issues in order to identify common approaches to the analysis of the transboundary rivers issue.
2. Based on the analysis of the international water law, to show the reasons for the lack of mechanisms for regulating transboundary water resources in Central Asia.
3. Based on a study of the water and energy policy of the Central Asian countries, to identify the effectiveness of their influence on solving the transboundary rivers problems.
4. Based on the analysis of the existing agreements and activities of regional water resources organizations, to analyze the interaction of the countries concerning the international waterways.
5. To study international experience in solving water problems and consider the possibilities of its application in Central Asia.

6. To study some international projects of water cooperation in order to find a positive experience in solving the problems set forth in the thesis.

The chronological framework of the thesis covers the period from the first half of the 1990s to the present day. There are some references to history in order to properly analyze the relations of Central Asian countries concerning the water issues.

Theoretical and methodological foundations. The problem of regulating the transboundary rivers should be viewed from the point of view of structural realism, which allows analyzing the processes and conditions under which the river basin states could come to an agreement in the river water management. An integrated approach to the study of the issue requires the use of theoretical and methodological approaches proposed by representatives of the Copenhagen School Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver - the theory of regional security complexes.

In the second half of the twentieth century, environmental issues have been taken out of the low politics, and closer to the 1980s they became the subject of a wide range of researchers. After the end of the Cold War, the traditional concept of security has not corresponded to the realities any more.

Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver have made a significant contribution to the theory of security, expanding and incorporating new sectors into it. They propose to consider each region as a complex and reduce the focus on military-political threats by including environmental, economic, social issues for a more specific analysis of the situation.

Buzan and Weaver have introduced a new concept of "securitization" – the process of incorporating any problem into the rank of security issues. The term itself was first used in 1995 by Ole Weaver for analyzing the main elements of securitization and giving examples of its historical use.

According to RSCT, the geographical location is important in solving security problems. For example, environmental problems cover a territory that does not always coincide with the administrative borders of a state / states. If we consider the regulation of the transboundary rivers through the lens of the RSCT, the river basin is also a complex that includes all riparian countries.

The question of the state participation is a central to the system of international relations. This explains the presence of state leaders, both in the regions and globally. Regarding the river basin, this theory of the state participation was developed in the studies of Professor of University of East Anglia Dr. Mark Zeytun. The classical realism determines that one of the key security tools is the threat of the use of force. Today, the river water can also be interpreted as a means to achieve certain goals by the hegemon state, provided it is located upstream. However, a hegemon state may be located downstream, but dictate its interests.

Water hegemony is the hegemony at the level of a river basin achieved through the various methods of water management, such as capture, integration or coercion. The interrelations of states outside the water sector directly affect water political processes within the water basin. As a result, a situation arises when this resource is controlled by the most influential actor within the basin, in other words, the water hegemon.

Thus, the regional security complex theory and the concept of water hegemony make it possible to identify differences in solving the problems of transboundary rivers at the national and regional levels.

This study was based on the principles of unity of historical and logical, specific analysis, multidimensionality, the ratio of the subjective factor and objective conditions, and, most importantly, on the system analysis of the study object, involving both subject-semantic and critical processing of factual material. Therefore, the interdisciplinary approach is widely used in this thesis.

The scientific novelty of the thesis research consists in a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the transboundary rivers problem of Central Asia through the lens of national and regional approaches. The author identified the reasons for absence and inefficiency of mechanisms for regulating water issues in the region, studied the possibility of applying international experience in water resources management in the region.

Analysis of the stated problems allowed the author to obtain new scientific results presented in the research:

- theoretical and methodological approaches are defined (RSCT, water hegemony theory and securitization) to study problems of transboundary rivers in Central Asia;
- contradictions of the national and regional approaches were identified when solving a complex of issues concerning the transboundary rivers, the reasons for the lack of water management mechanisms were investigated;
- international experience in solving water problems and the reasons why its use is difficult in the Central Asian region;
- using international projects as an example, it is proved that the integrated water resources management method is most applicable for solving issues of using transboundary rivers.

Practical implications

The practical implications of the thesis are due to the fact that the materials and conclusions can be used in the preparation of subsequent studies of the water and energy policy in the Central Asia countries. The thesis materials may be of interest to the foreign policy structures of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the formation of a national and regional strategy in the water resources area.

The thesis can be used by employees of analytical centers and RDC, as well as in the process of preparing general and special courses for higher education institutions involving the issues of environmental safety and water and energy issues in the Central Asia region.

Provisions proposed for defense

1. Analysis of the transboundary rivers problems in Central Asia requires an integrated theoretical and methodological approach including the theories of regional security complex, securitization and water hegemony. The lack of a common theoretical and methodological approach impacts negatively not only the theory, but also the practice of solving the transboundary rivers problems.
2. International water legislation is mainly a recommendatory one, which explains the weak legislative and regulatory framework for water resources management

and the lack of an effective mechanism for resolving disputes concerning transboundary rivers at the regional level. However, modern international experience shows the absence of military conflicts regarding water, which indicates that water can play the role of a bonding factor for strengthening relations between states.

3. Analysis of the environmental policy of the Central Asian countries showed the predominance of national interests over regional ones. This has led to the inefficiency of the mechanism for joint management of water resources, despite the existing interstate agreements.
4. Contradictions between the national and regional approaches of the Central Asian states do not allow effective use of international experience, but only apply its certain elements (involvement of the public, non-governmental organizations and private sector, etc.) for effective management of water resources in the region.
5. Analysis of successful transboundary river projects in Central Asia revealed the existence of effective mechanisms for resolving disputable issues. Expanding and sharing the experience of individual projects throughout the region can play a significant role in resource management. However, when using the developed mechanisms at the level of other projects, such as supporting agricultural enterprises, there is no integrated approach, which reduces their effectiveness.

Evaluation of results. The main provisions and conclusions of the thesis are presented in 12 articles published in domestic and foreign scientific journals, tested at the scientific seminar of the dissertation council, discussed at the meeting of the Department of International Relations and World Economy of the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. Many theses of this work are included into presentations at scientific conferences and round tables: "Actual problems of international relations, law and economics and the search for their solutions in the light of the Strategy "Kazakhstan - 2050" (Almaty, 2014), 18th CESS Annual Conference (Seattle 2017), as well as in the work on the project of the MES RK "Evolution of the conceptual foundations and modernization of the Kazakhstan's multi-vector diplomacy practice in the context of global and regional security".

The structure of the thesis is conditioned by the logic of achieving the purpose and objectives of the study and consists in an introduction, three sections, conclusion and a list of references. The volume of the thesis is 142 pages.