

Security Council Committee

*“Tensions Caused by Mismanagement
of the Tigris and Euphrates Water
Basin”*

Forum: Security Council
Issue: Tensions Caused by Mismanagement of the Tigris and Euphrates Water Basin
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Context & Historical Background

In the ambition of resolving armed conflicts in the middle east, the international community, as well as international organizations and media publications, have focused on trying to find the cause to certain issues. While it is certain that many conflicts in the Middle East such as the Syrian Civil War (2012-present) and the Yemeni Civil War (2015-present) were catalysed after the Arab Spring of 2011, experts suggest that governmental mismanagement of water access (mainly being a side effect to lack of diplomacy and interdependence in the region) have led to these issues. With this, the Tigris and Euphrates Water Basin remains as one of the largest water reserves for the likes of the Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, especially to non-coastal cities in each country. With this, it is said that rural populations moved to coastal and urban city centers, setting the stage of a number of conflicts.



Figure 1
Map of the Tigris and Euphrates Water Basin

As part of three case studies, we will first investigate the Syrian Arab Republic’s issues with water. With a small coast with the Mediterranean Sea, Syria sees the Euphrates River as it’s primary source for fresh water for all citizens. With restrictions predominantly coming from Turkey in the North, a significant drought has been seen in the last ten years. According to an article by the *Smithsonian Magazine*, “[I]n Syria, a devastating drought beginning in 2006 forced many farmers to abandon their fields and migrate to urban centers. There’s some evidence that the migration fueled the civil war there, in which 80,000 people have died”. While this may seem like an overtly environmental issue, it has led to one of the most pressing armed conflicts of the 21st Century, which still sees no end in sight. Finally, by addressing this issue in this session of the Security Council, it helps the currently stale diplomacy in the region.

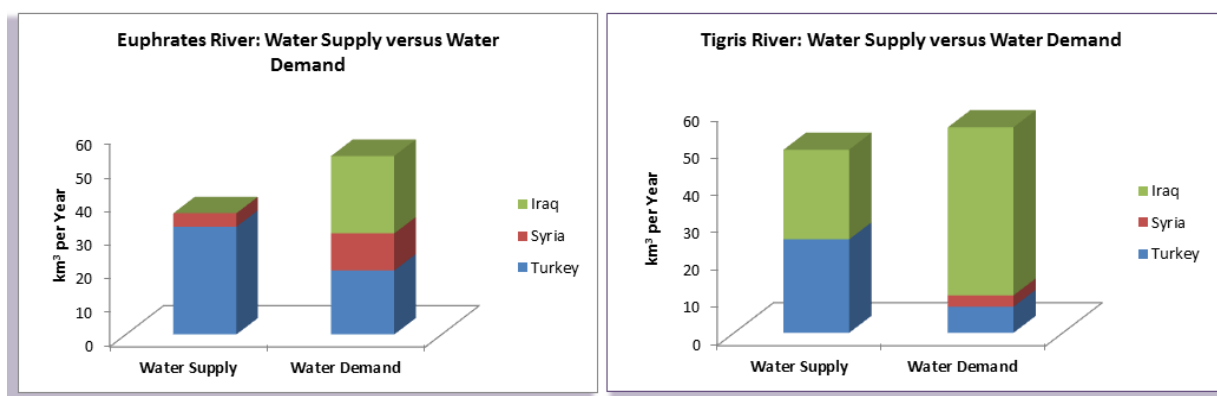


Figure 2
Supply and Demand Graph for the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers

To look at Iraq, having a very small coast with the Persian (or Arabian) Gulf, it does not accommodate enough for the population. Therefore, the Republic of Iraq is solely reliant on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers for both fresh water provisions and maritime purposes. This puts Iraq at many disadvantages, seeing that other countries have already—as previously mentioned—cut access of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. In addition, climate change has led to increased droughts, drying up the water reserve as a whole. These factors can very much be responsible for

the current situation, and NGOs invested in the country's development should focus on this as opposed to the results of foreign intervention.

Finally, Turkey has been a key player in this conflict. Having access to both the Black and the Mediterranean, the country doesn't need the rivers for purposes other than fresh water provision. Being the source of river, this gives the country the power to control the water. Although illegal, it has been determined that water shortages in Iran, Iraq, and Syria have not only been a result of climate change, but direct—perhaps intentional—mismanagement of water distribution. Doing this only isolates Turkey from not only its Middle Eastern neighbors, but questions the reliability of country in international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) itself or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Our goal in this session of the Security Council is to investigate this issue from a modern standpoint, how both parties can favor from a solution, and in what ways governments—despite differing political agendas—can have their needs and wants satisfied.

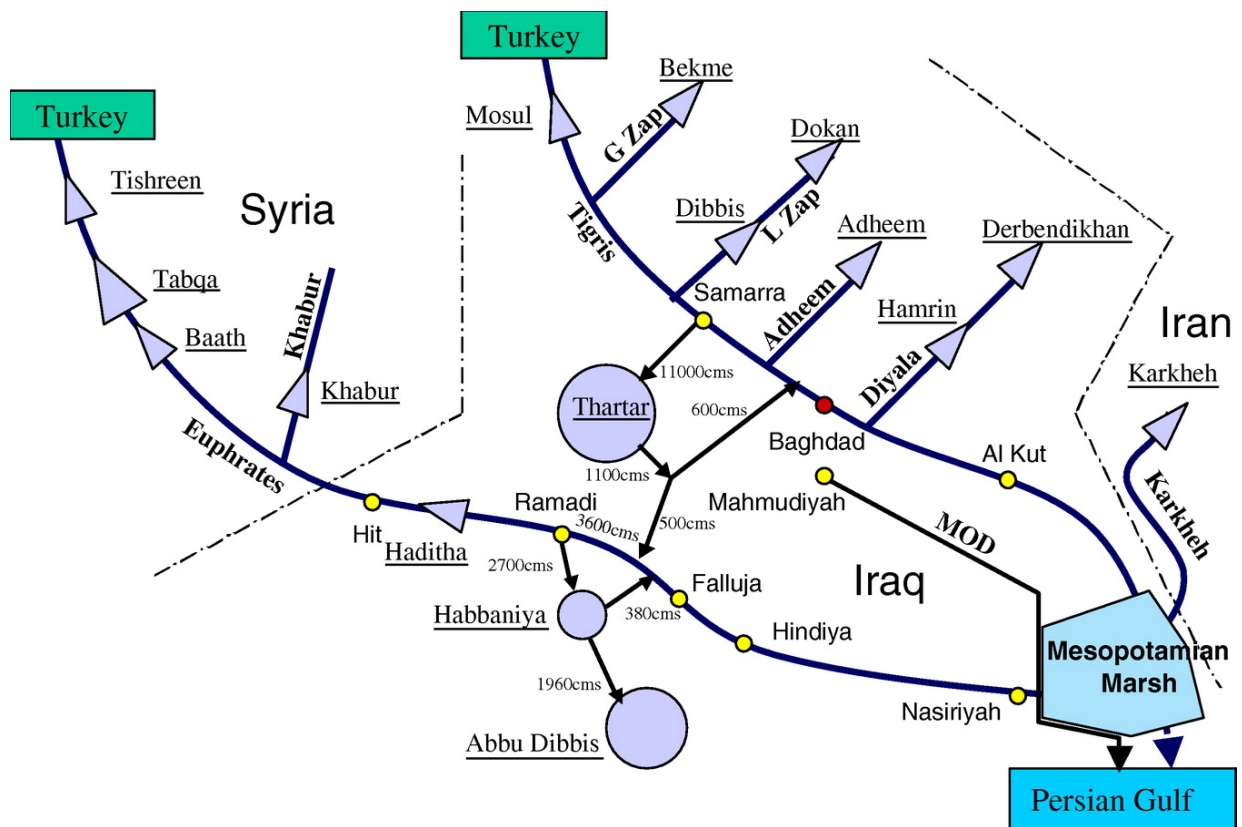


Figure 3
Tigris-Euphrates Water Distribution Map

While the goal of this session of the Security Council is to resolve this issue, it is paramount to be cognizant of how it connects to the conference: the 8th annual session of the Maroc Model United Nations conference, the theme established is Combatting Climate Change: “It is one the most prominent issues being discussed around the world today and has already begotten considerable action from the international community. [...] The wide variety of perspectives on the issue from members of the international community and the efforts needed to address all aspects of the problem make the question of climate change a debate-worthy one. This year, the MaMUN 2018 conference will look at this issue from a renewed perspective by looking at different facades of it in each of its committees.”

In this session of the Security Council, our aim is to look at how environmental factors serve to catalyse armed conflicts. With this mind, lack of water in the Tigris and Euphrates Water Basin is leading to conflict in the Middle East. With this in mind, water is mismanaged explicitly with the favoring and cutting of access, as well as implicitly and more alarmingly due to climate change. Stronger climate policies and measures must be taken by the international community at once, mainly on the country-specific scale, rather than the thematic one.

United Nations Involvement

The United Nations has implicitly taken an approach on this issue. What is meant by this is that, as opposed to directly addressing mismanagement of the Tigris and Euphrates Water Basin, the United Nations aims to solve the water crisis as a whole. The most obvious measure the United Nations has taken on the issue (at the thematic level) is its inclusion as the sixth development goal: “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”. This means that it is an obligation for all countries to help achieve this as soon as 2030, before the water crisis significantly heightens.

The second part of this issue focuses on the conflicts resulted from mismanagement of water in the region. The United Nations have taken measures to try and help end the Syrian Civil War under Security Council Resolution 2254 (S/RES/2254), ensuring the end of civilian attacks. In addition to this, the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) has sent humanitarian aid to Yemen in the last two years. A number of peacekeeping missions, such as United Nations Yemen Observation Mission (UNYOM), have been documenting conflicts, as well as protecting civilians. Finally, the United Nations have given a voice to a number of NGOs, who aim to raise awareness on this issue in a more country-specific way.

Perspectives

In this section, the aim is to explore each of the claims and arguments raised by each of the three main parties in the current issue: the Republic of Turkey, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Republic of Iran, and Islamic Republic of Iran.

Turkey

The fact that both the Tigris and Euphrates rivers begin in Turkey before descending into other nations has placed the Republic in quite an advantageous position regarding its use of the river. Specifically, Turkey has steadily increased the constructions of dams on the river, thereby decreasing the access of Syria and Iraq to the river system by a 80% and 60% respectively, by some estimates. Turkey has also constructed a substantial number of hydropower plants on the river, in order to satisfy its energy needs, although this has further reduced the quantity of water reaching the other nations. Moreover, a lack of international negotiations involving Turkey has held back the process of establishing an appropriate agreement.

Syria

In light of the ongoing Civil War in the country, the Syrian Arab Republic has not taken an explicit position. However, based on its claims about how the international community should always respect its sovereignty, it can easily be deduced that the Syrian Arab Republic is in full condemnation of the potential monopoly of water systems, by the likes of the Republic of Turkey. As the border strengthens between the two countries, so does the distribution of water, putting the Syrian Arab Republic yet again at a great disadvantage.

Iraq

In the words of Iraqi MP Tayseer al Mashhadani representing the Iraqi Accord Front political party, "Iraq's water crisis has put us in a precarious position and could even lead us into a war with one of our neighbours. The new war on Iraq is a war of water. There have been agreements with our neighbours about sharing water resources but they have not stuck to them." This highlights that political figures in the country are very much aware of the diplomatic

implications that mismanagement of water has. Finally, the Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Iraq believes that the continued increase in water shortages can spawn yet again another international crisis in the region.

Iran

In recent years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been highly critical of Turkey's unsolicited construction of dams and hydropower plants on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Its position as one of the most water-stressed nations in the region has been exasperated by its decreased access to water from the Tigris-Euphrates river system, primarily resulting in dust and sand storms, which have been accredited, by Hamid Chitchian, the country's Minister of Energy, to the construction of dams by the Turkish government. As a result, most of Iran's diplomacy surrounding the issue of this water basin is centered on preventing the Republic of Turkey's establishment of dams, although very little action has been successfully carried out at this point.

Questions to Consider

- To what extent do water resources affect geopolitical conflict?
- In what ways is this issue addressed between the concerned parties?
- What are the implications for the international community in the event of an international crisis?
- How can improved dialogue be attained between the concerned parties?
- To what end does this thematic issue lead into internal conflict?

Key Terms & Phrases

Water Scarcity

inefficient water to fulfill the needs of a country or countries population(s); this can have severe affects on how the country functions and to what extent people obey the authority in the country.

Drought

a prolonged period of time whereby no rainfall is observed; this has detrimental effects on the agriculture, and sometimes even the rural structure of a country.

Rural

a typically remote area outside of the populous city centres; lack of political representation, unemployment, poverty, and lack of opportunity are only some things people in these areas suffer from.

Urban

a populous city or town; residents in these areas tend to have more job opportunities, access to resources and healthcare, education, and are most often wealthier.

Freshwater

water found in bodies such as lakes and rivers, rather than oceans and seas; this is the water provided to the population, and also used for agricultural jobs.

Water Distribution

how a body of water is distributed either between countries or to a population; wrong distribution or mismanagement of this can lead to internal issues or severe diplomatic tensions.

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