Research Report

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Forum: *Special Conference on Water*
Issue: *Water conflicts in Central Asia*

Position: *Deputy Chair*

Introduction

The geography of Central Asia consists of mountains, river valleys and dry climates. In such circumstances, the need for water increases. The rivers that flow through this region supported trade on the Silk Road. Until today, the populations of Central Asia still require this water. The rivers supply drinking water, and also support the agricultural industries in these nations. The five neighbouring countries in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan, are dependent highly on the agricultural sectors of their economy. Due to a significant lack of industrial development, agriculture employs more than 40% of the region's people. Because of the shortage of arable land, agricultural is compressed near the rivers where irrigation is possible. The most popular crops in the region are wheat and cotton, and these require high amounts of water. The control and management of the rivers continue to be controversial issues as different countries along the rivers have different priorities, thus different ideas for operation and distribution on the sources. The problem is how one country's actions affect others because of the single source of such a precious resource, as demands rise while supplies decrease.

Definition of Key Terms

Hydroelectricity/Hydropower
Hydropower is the production of electrical power through the use of the force of falling or flowing water. This is traditionally done using dams, which restricts flow of the water going downstream.

Irrigation
Irrigation is the artificial application of water to land to assist in the growing of crops, which is extremely important in dry areas like Central Asia. Some estimates suggest irrigation accounts for 70% of global water withdrawals. Irrigation in excess may reduce the size of rivers by using too much water. Other issues with irrigation include pollution of water. As water goes back into the river, it may take pollutants like fertilizers and pesticides with it.

General Overview

As the involved countries were together before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, they were connected by the infrastructure of that era and had to work together. The previous system was developed for growing cotton along the river, and any change would cause disruption for all the populations dependent on the rivers. It was also necessary to avoid previous local violent conflicts over water resources, as ethnic differences already lead to tensions. For example, Tajiks and Kyrgyz citizens fought over water rights in the Isfara-Batken districts.
The nations of Central Asia are relatively new and fragile, politically and economically. Water is a major issue and domestic and foreign policy. Water is money for the nations, whether it is to grow the cash crop, cotton, in Uzbekistan or generating energy for domestic use and export in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. If the governments are unable to provide necessities like water or electricity, they may easily lose control. Given the socio-economic climate of the region, the countries are trying to gain as much as they can from the few, available resources.

Major Parties Involved

Uzbekistan
Uzbekistan is one of the five nations in Central Asia. It is downstream most of the rivers and affected the most by the management of the rivers. Due to its history and geography, growing cotton continues to be an important product. Uzbekistan is less industrialized compared to the neighboring nations. So, it has increased focus on more agricultural output. This requires more water. Inefficient use and weak infrastructure means Uzbekistan needs more water than it uses. It relies on negotiations to get needed water, and is against most hydropower projects on rivers that flow into Uzbekistan.

Kyrgyzstan
Kyrgyzstan lies in the northwest of Central Asia. It is a dominant power in the area as it is upstream many of the rivers. It generates a significant amount of hydroelectricity, but hopes to increase that. Kyrgyzstan has claimed it has a right to profit from its water resources originating its territorial boundaries.

Tajikistan
Tajikistan is in the eastern part of Central Asia. It has a substantial agricultural sector, but aims to increase its hydropower production. Tajikistan already generates large amounts of hydroelectricity, but is still in deficit domestically. It built the world's largest dam. Plans to build the bigger Rogun dam have been hindered by other nations concerned of its effects.

Timeline of Events

1991	Dissolution of the Soviet Union; Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan become independent nations in Central Asia.
1992	Agreement between the five nations of Central Asia on Cooperation in Joint Management of Use and Protection of Water Resources of Interstate Sources; Creation of the Interstate Coordinating Water Commission.
1993	The nations create Interstate Council for Addressing the Aral Sea Crisis (ICAS). Later dissolved.
1998	The agreement on Use of Water and Energy Resources of the Syr Darya Basin between the 5 countries.
2007	United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia opens. It aims to prevent conflicts and encourage regional cooperation.

Previous Attempts to solve the issue

In 1992, the five countries signed an agreement on “Cooperation in the Management, Utilization, and Protection of Water Resources of Interstate Sources." This also established Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia, which was authorized to determine water consumption limits (broken down by growing and non-growing periods) for each of the individual states and for region as a whole. Several subsequent bilateral and multi-lateral agreements followed, with the same basis of sharing and compromising.

The Central Asian states reached the Bishkek Agreement in 1998, in which Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan paid for electricity and irrigation, while Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan used those revenues to pay for energy during the winter. This was based on Soviet-era arrangements. But as tensions and competition grew, agreements became harder to work with and adhere to.

Nations required more energy and wanted more compensation as prices of energy increased. Nations also wanted more compensation for rising energy prices, while other countries needed to grow their agricultural industries. The nations had different, conflicting priorities, which were further complicated by national issues such as

nationalism, corruption, suspicion and poverty.

Possible Solutions

Cooperation over transboundary water resources is unlikely as the advantages are unequally distributed to the participating nations. Any nation that compromises gives up part of its profit. To prevent violence and instability of economy, more binding, fair, enforceable and specific bilateral and multilateral agreements are required. Historically, most water related disputes are solved through diplomacy. Partnerships for improving Soviet-era infrastructure would improve relations in the area, allowing more efficient and possibly a cleaner water supply. An institution is helpful for this process, but the ICWC already exists. The neighbouring nations have various agreements too and may be beneficial in the negotiations. The affected countries are part of the Commonwealth of Independent States. This organization could assist in initiating or mediating peace talks among its members.

Useful documents

http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/weinthal_erika.pdf

http://centralasia.iwlearn.org/publications/projectdocuments/regional/water-agreements-in-central-asia-2011

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTUZBEKISTAN/Resources/Water_Energy_Nexus_final.pdf

Appendix/Appendices

http://www.icwc-aral.uz/

http://csis.org/blog/tit-tat-evolution-non-cooperation-over-rogun-dam

http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/transboundary_waters.shtml

http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/034-central-asia-water-and-conflict.aspx

http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/233-water-pressures-in-central-asia.aspx

http://unrcca.unmissions.org/