

Conflict and Cooperation over Water Sources



Dr Caner Sayan, Department of Politics, Philosophy and International Relations,
Swansea University

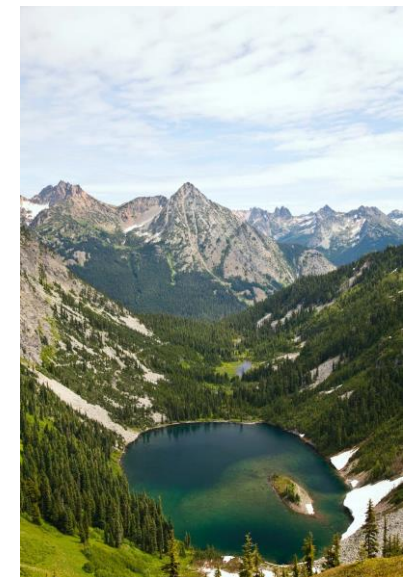
Contact: r.c.sayan@swansea.ac.uk

Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University, Mykolaiv, Ukraine

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Prologue: Introduction to Politics of Water/Water Politics

- **Context: Freshwater (Lake, Rivers, Municipal Water, Groundwater, Drinking Water etc).** We will not be interested in oceans and seas; they are referred to as ocean politics and marine politics.
- Water is vital for life: Ecosystems, economy, energy, urbanisation, cultural and religious practices
- Water is a **contested** resource, and it is **not equally distributed** in the world. **Competition over water control and water access is an important political consideration at multiple levels.**
- Formal definition of “water politics”: “Water politics rests in the complex intersection of institutional, economic, and ideological conditions at national, state, and local levels that have actually made the flow of water possible” (Agnew, 2011:468)



Prologue: Introduction to Politics of Water/Water Politics



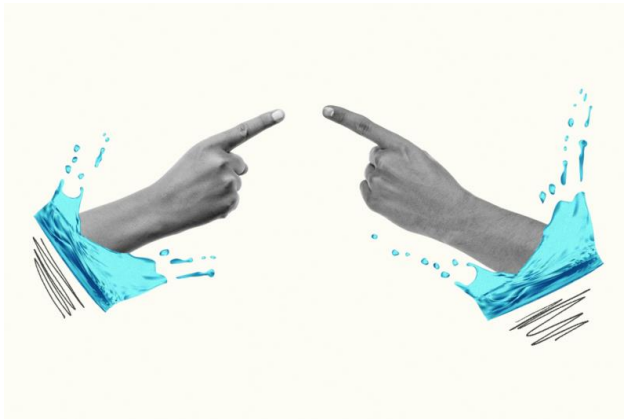
- Water politics is concerned with four domains (Mollinga, 2008):

1- The everyday politics of water resources management: It simply refers to the day-to-day water use and management.

2-The politics of water policy in the context of sovereign states: How nations shape their water use and allocation.

3- Inter-state hydropolitics: Conflicts and negotiations over water between countries, particularly in the context of transboundary waters.

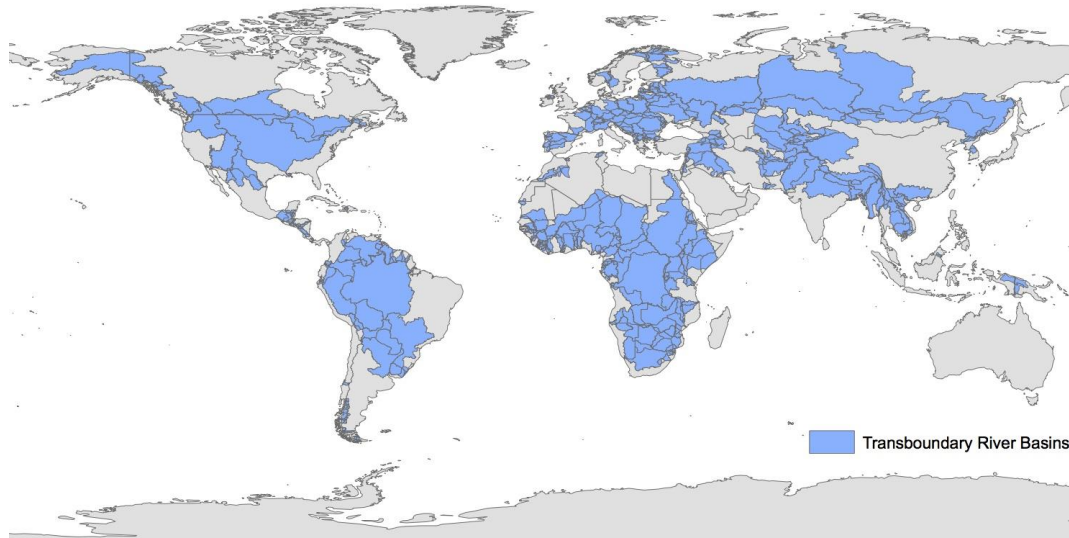
4- The global politics of water: How certain management and governance modes are mainstreamed at global politics.



Lecture Outline

- Inter-state hydrogeopolitics: Politics of Transboundary Waters and “Water Wars” Literature
- Weaponization of Water in Wars and Conflicts
- Cooperation over water: Water Diplomacy

Inter-state Hydropolitics: Politics of Transboundary Waters

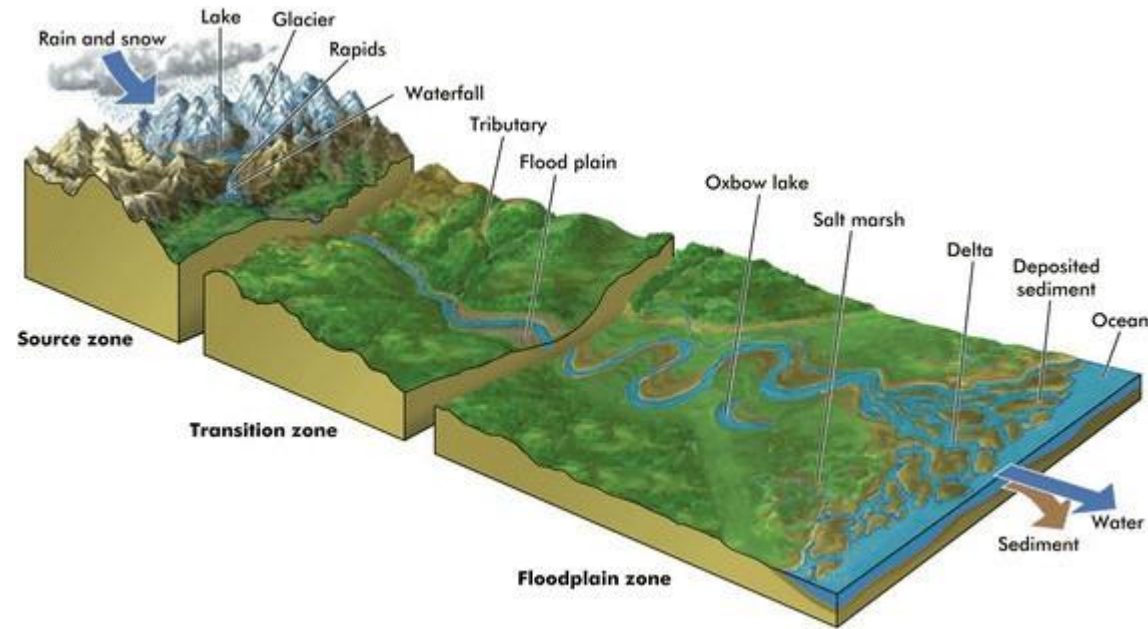


- Hydropolitics, as a sub-discipline of IR, is traditionally concerned with studying conflict and cooperation between states over water sources transcending their borders what we generally refer to **as transboundary waters**.
- What is the problem with transboundary waters?

Inter-state Hydropolitics: Politics of Transboundary Waters

- **Transboundary Waters:** Groundwater aquifers, rivers and lakes shared by two or more countries (Danube, Mekong, Lake Chad, Guarani Aquifer, Nile etc)
- **UN Records:** 286 transboundary river and lake basins and 592 transboundary groundwater aquifers shared by 153 countries
- Collaboration over transboundary waters and water sharing agreements (e.g. Senegal River, Rhine River and Guarani Aquifer)
- Yet, generally, lack of cooperation and water sharing agreements leads to political tensions (Nile, Euphrates-Tigris, Jordan, Mekong and so on).

Inter-state Hydropolitics: Politics of Transboundary Waters



- Upstream vs downstream: Traditionally, upstream users/countries have more advantageous water share (with the notable exception of Nile River Basin, where Egypt gets the majority of water)
- “National” source, “national” development, “national” pride

Inter-state Hydropolitics: Politics of Transboundary Waters

- **1990s:** IR scholars perceived transboundary water politics as black or white.
- Scholars such as Starr, Kaplan, Homer-Dixon attempted to show how countries were/are/will fight over water, as they will always seek for maximising their power and hold the control of their “national” resources. (Realist approach) (Usual suspects: Jordan River, Nile River, and Euphrates-Tigris River)
- Scholars such as Aaron Wolf perceived “water” as a matter of “low politics” on which countries were/are/will be collaborating over and such collaboration may spill over other political domains (Liberal approach) (Usual suspects: Rhine River, Senegal River and Danube River)
- These are the backbone of the contemporary literature investigating “hydro-hegemony” (with more focus on “power” rather than “conflict”; see works of Mark Zeitoun, Jeroen Warner, Naho Mirumachi, Ana Cascao, Filippo Menga etc) and environmental peacebuilding (Tobias Ide, Adrian Detges)

Inter-state Hydropolitics: “Water Wars” literature

- The next big thing in security studies: Increasing attention to environmental issues, emerging global agenda on sustainable development, extreme droughts in Sub-Saharan Africa and Middle East
- Highly influenced by “environmental determinism” (i.e. how physical environment shapes the society) and (neo-)Malthusianism (ever-growing population puts stress on the natural environment)
- They (Homer-Dixon, Starr, Dalby) started to show how environment and water featured as major causes of inter-state conflicts by revisiting political tensions and armed conflicts in Middle East and North Africa.

Example 1: The Six-Day War (1967)



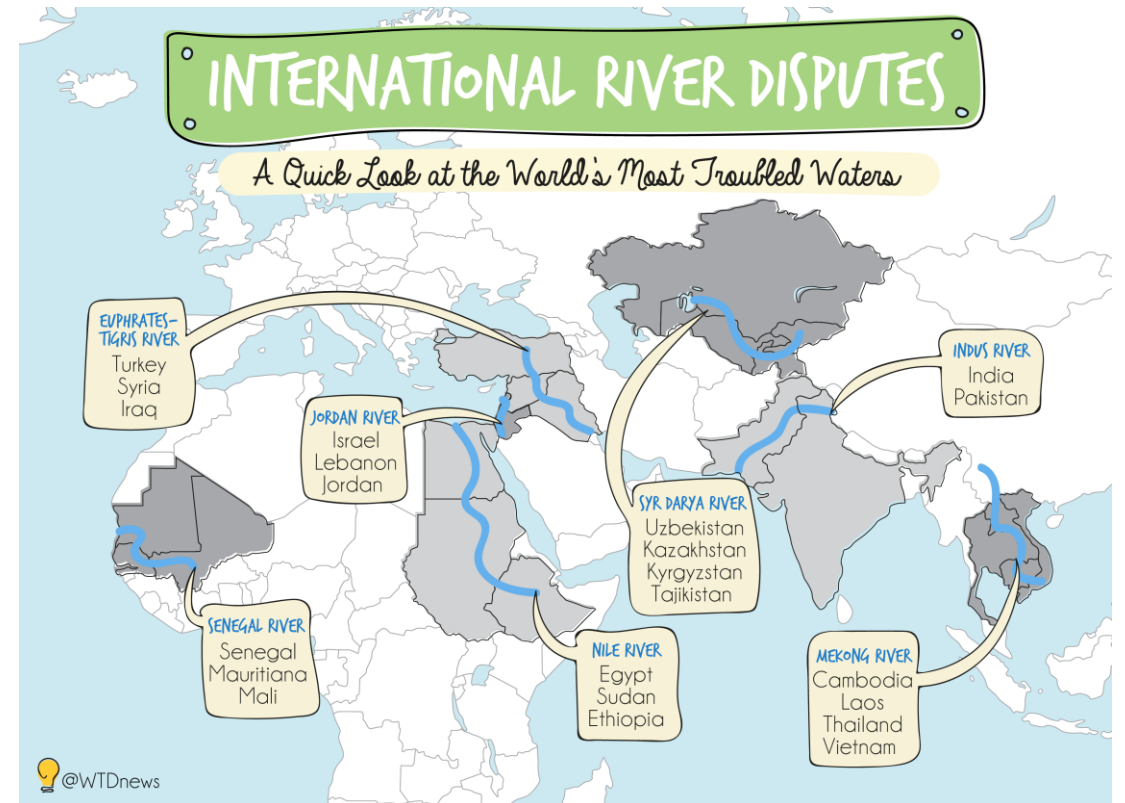
Example 2: Euphrates-Tigris River Basin



Source: Institute for the Study of War, Bloomberg Research

Inter-state Hydropolitics: Critique of “Water Wars” literature

- Oversimplification of conflicts: Is water the only reason of Arab-Israeli wars? Or the political tensions between Syria and Turkey?
- Negligence of social, cultural, religious (and sectarian), and political complexities between countries.
- In modern history, there is **NOT** a single inter-state war/conflict, solely based on water.
- However, “the absence of war does not mean the absence of conflict” (Zeitoun and Warner, 2006: 437).



Weaponization of Water



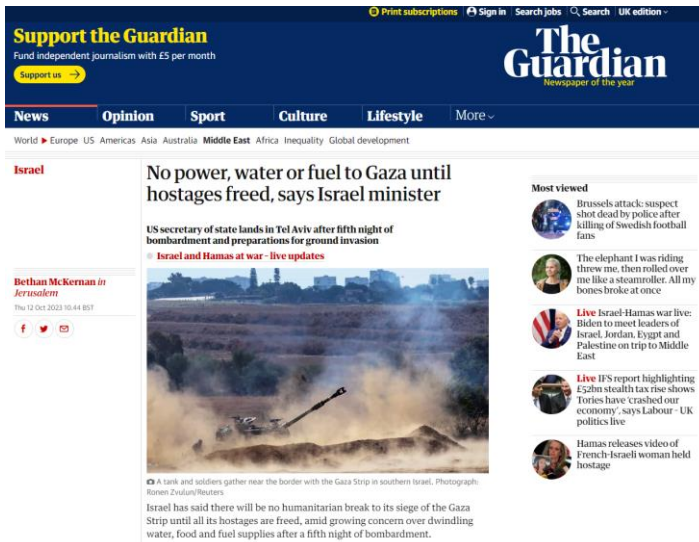
- In modern history, there is NOT a single inter-state war/conflict, solely based on water.
- **However**, water has been historically used as a weapon during armed conflicts.
- **Historical Examples:** Roman Empire vs Sasanians where Sasanian beat Julius Ceasar by flooding the Roman Army; the Dutch opened their dykes to stop the French Army's advancement into the Netherlands (Third Franc-Dutch War); European colonialism in the New World through inland watercourses.

Weaponization of Water: Definitions

- **Weapon:** “a means of gaining advantage or defending oneself in a conflict or contest” and it is an item helping one to gain a strategic, material, or mental advantage (DuBois King, 2014)
- **Using water as a weapon:** “water resources directly (ab)used as an instrument of war, as a tool, in order to achieve strategic political and tactical military goals by targeting the population, addressing the opponent’s political leadership and confronting the opposing military” (von Lossow, 2016: 84).
- Von Lossow (2016) described three different use of water as a weapon: **Strategic-Political, Tactical-Military** and **Psychological**



Water as a Strategic-Political Weapon



The screenshot shows the top of The Guardian website. At the top left, it says "Support the Guardian" and "Fund independent journalism with £5 per month". The main navigation bar includes "News", "Opinion", "Sport", "Culture", "Lifestyle", and "More". Below this, there are regional links: "World", "Europe", "US", "Americas", "Asia", "Australia", "Middle East", "Africa", "Inequality", and "Global development". The main headline is "No power, water or fuel to Gaza until hostages freed, says Israel minister". Below the headline is a sub-headline: "US secretary of state lands in Tel Aviv after fifth night of bombardment and preparations for ground invasion". There is a "Live" update link: "Israel and Hamas at war - live updates". A photo shows a tank and soldiers near the border with the Gaza Strip. The caption reads: "A tank and soldiers gather near the border with the Gaza Strip in southern Israel. Photograph: Ronen Ziv/Reuters". Below the photo, the text says: "Israel has said there will be no humanitarian break to its siege of the Gaza Strip until all its hostages are freed, amid growing concern over dwindling water, food and fuel supplies after a fifth night of bombardment." To the right of the main article is a "Most viewed" section with several articles, including "Brussels attack suspect shot dead by police after killing of Swedish football fans", "The elephant I was riding threw me, then rolled over me like a steamroller. All my bones broke at once", "Live: Israel-Hamas war live: Biden to meet leaders of Israel, Jordan, Egypt and Palestine on trip to Middle East", "Live: IFS report highlighting £20bn stealth tax rise - shows Tories have 'crashed our economy', says Labour - UK politics live", and "Hamas releases video of French-Israeli woman held hostage".



- Parties can intervene in water and electricity supplies to break a population's resistance during a war or civil war and help one to consolidate their power in a settlement. **Generally, civilians are targeted.**
- **Example 1:** Israeli government's decision to cut off Gaza Strip's electricity and water last week.
- **Example 2:** Saddam Hussein's diversion of water to the Marshes to break Shia resistance during the first Gulf War (draining)
- **Example 3:** The Islamic State's (IS) deliberate poisoning of water in Shia, Kurdish and Christian settlements in Syria and Iraq

Water as a Tactical-Military Weapon

- Tactical military use of water as a weapon refers to use of water immediately at a battlefield.
- **Examples:** Targeting dams and reservoirs during armed conflicts and wars to prevent an army's advancement or break resistance. (Kakhovka Dam targeted by Russia to prevent resistance in Dnipro; China flooded an area to prevent the Japanese army from advancing during the Second Sino-Japanese War)



Water as a Psychological Weapon



- Create fear among non-combatants by threatening them of accessing to water or contaminating water. Here we talk about a potential use.
- **Example:** One terrorist organisation in Syria threatened to cut Damascus' water if the Syrian army did not stop military operations towards them in 2015.

Cooperation over Water

- Water is not always associated with conflicts and wars.
- Aaron Wolf argues that there are more instances of cooperation over water than conflicts.
- **Environmental peacebuilding** literature: Demonstration of how water can be catalyst of peace in traditionally hostile settings.
- **Water Diplomacy**: “Water diplomacy is defined as the art or practice of using water as a tool for conducting international relations” (Blue Peace Initiative, 2023)



Cooperation over Water: Examples

- **Israel-Palestine-Jordan:** Good Water Neighbours project in which 27 communities from Gaza Strip, West Bank, Israel and Jordan cooperated over water share at local level. Cooperation also involved mayors. It is a local level initiative supported by the Friends of Earth Middle East; it has NOT extended to a broader water sharing framework.
- **Turkey-Syria Orontes Friendship Dam:** Benefit sharing between Syria and Turkey amid political tensions and hostile environment in the region.
- **EU Water Framework Directive:** Governing transboundary waters peacefully with the expansion of the EU membership
- River Basin Organisations
- Agreements over water share (Israel-Jordan, Guarani Aquifer, Senegal River)

Conclusions

- Water is a contested source, and it is associated with conflicts and wars (although there is not a single war on “water” in the modern history).
- Water is actively used as a weapon by conflicting parties.
- There are as many cooperation examples over water as conflicts.
- Climate change will increase stress on water and it is likely that we will see more tensions over water. However, there are global agendas over water diplomacy (like Blue Peace Initiative) and conventions (like UN Watercourses Convention) aiming to facilitate peace. So, it is a “grey” story.

Thank you!

