



WATER DIPLOMACY OF UZBEKISTAN AND REGIONAL SECURITY ISSUES

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14870712>

Abstract: The article reviews the foreign policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the field of transboundary water use in recent years. Particular attention is paid to the achievements of Uzbekistan's water diplomacy and its future tasks. In addition, new challenges related to the use of transboundary waters in Central Asia and the issues of the "Koshtepa" canal being built by Afghanistan were also discussed.

Keywords: transboundary waters, water diplomacy, international law, UN, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Central Asia.

Today, the issue of providing the population with water is more important than ever in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Geographically, Uzbekistan is located in Central Asia, one of the water-scarce regions of the world. This region, including Uzbekistan, is characterized by a growing economy, population, and environmental threats. According to analytical data from international organizations such as the UN and the World Bank, the population of Central Asia is expected to exceed 100 million by 2050. Uzbekistan is recognized as the country with the largest population (about 50 million people). The increase in population will also increase the demand for water resources in a proportional way [1].

According to the World Health Organization standards, today one person needs 50-100 liters of water per day for their needs, and according to data from "Uzsuvtaminot" JSC, this indicator in Uzbekistan is an average of 99.2 liters per person per day. The indicator looks like this in the regions of the world: 500 liters in Saudi Arabia; 450 liters in the US; 340 liters in Canada; 320 liters in Japan; 250 liters in the Russian Federation; Due to the high cost of water supply services in Western Europe, it varies from 130 to 180 liters; 10-20 liters in rural areas of Africa [2].

According to the Ministry of Water Resources of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 80 percent of Uzbekistan's water resources come from other countries, and 20





percent are produced domestically. Analyses show that by 2030, Uzbekistan may face a water shortage of 7 billion cubic meters [3].

Current conditions and future challenges related to water resources require the establishment of effective public governance in the field of water use in Uzbekistan. This requires the implementation of organizational and legal measures, the formation of a mass culture of rational water use, and the conduct of mutually beneficial water diplomacy with Uzbekistan's neighboring countries.

In recent years, issues of increasing water use efficiency in Uzbekistan and continuing water diplomacy with neighboring countries have been implemented within the framework of strategic programs for the country's development. In particular, the tasks of ensuring the rational use of water resources, improving the culture of water use, and delivering fresh water reserves to future generations are reflected in the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022-2026, the "Uzbekistan - 2030" strategy, annual state programs, and other documents.

Efficiency indicators of water diplomacy of Uzbekistan

Today, under the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Sh. Mirziyoyev, large-scale reforms are being implemented in every sphere. As a result of the initiatives and political will of our head of state, Uzbekistan's foreign policy has also taken on a new look. The Central Asian region has been identified as the most important region in Uzbekistan's foreign policy. It should be noted that this approach to Uzbek foreign policy has also had a positive impact on the peaceful resolution of transboundary water use issues in the region.

As noted above, Uzbekistan meets 80 percent of its annual water needs through transboundary water resources. Uzbekistan is located in the center of the region, shares borders with all Central Asian countries, and has interactions with all of these countries on the use of transboundary waters. In the future, Uzbekistan will need to conduct effective water diplomacy with regional countries to meet the water needs of its growing economy and population.

At this point, it is appropriate to mention some information about international legal documents in the field of water reserves and use of transboundary water resources in Central Asia:

firstly, more than 60 percent of the region's freshwater reserves are mountain glaciers (one-third of which has melted in the last thirty years), and they are currently rapidly melting due to global climate change. According to scientists' forecasts, the melting of Central Asian glaciers will peak between





2035 and 2055. By 2100, the region's glacier reserves are expected to lose 75 percent of their 2015 volume [4];

Secondly, the Afghan interim government is building the "Koshtepa" canal on the Amu Darya. According to experts, the completion and commissioning of this canal could lead to a 25-30 percent reduction in the water Uzbekistan receives from the Amu Darya. In this regard, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev, during his visit to Surkhandarya region on November 17, 2023, stated that the flow of the Amu Darya and Syrdarya rivers is expected to decrease by 15% in the next twenty years and that the idea that "water is not free" should be deeply instilled in the population [5];

Thirdly, in accordance with international law, Uzbekistan has undertaken a number of obligations to ensure the rational use of water. In particular, the Republic of Uzbekistan has ratified the 1992 UN Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (entered into force in Uzbekistan in 2007) [6] and the 1997 UN Convention on the Right to Use International Watercourses without Navigation (entered into force in Uzbekistan in 2014) [7].

So, how effective is Uzbekistan's modern water diplomacy?

It is no exaggeration to say that Uzbekistan's water diplomacy with regional countries in 2018-2023 has led to historic results. Uzbekistan's policy on transboundary water use with regional countries during this period has helped find diplomatic solutions to many problems in the field. In particular, the following examples of historic agreements can be cited as evidence of the effectiveness of Uzbekistan's water diplomacy:

In 2018, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan reached a mutually beneficial agreement on the Farkhod and Rogun hydroelectric power plants, and in 2022, the heads of state of both countries launched the construction of the Yavon hydroelectric power plant on the Zarafshan River [8].

At the end of 2017, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan established a joint intergovernmental commission on water issues. In 2022, both countries ratified an agreement on the joint management of water resources of the Andijan (Kampirabad) reservoir [9].

An agreement was reached between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan on the use of the Toktagul reservoir in 2021 [10]. In January 2023, these countries approved the project for the construction of the Kambarata-1 HPP, and an investment agreement was signed between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan on the construction of the Kambarata-1 HPP [11].





It should be emphasized that these historic agreements, achieved as a result of Uzbekistan's initiative and political will, are primarily aimed at meeting the water needs of our population, economy, and future generations. Another unique feature of these agreements and treaties is that they take into account the water interests of all bordering and neighboring countries. Because water is not the wealth of one people or nation, and when seeking solutions to problems of transboundary water use, it is necessary to take into account the interests of all parties using it.

To date, we can see the effectiveness of Uzbekistan's water diplomacy through historical agreements reached with neighboring countries and practical results. However, there are still many problems and challenges that our country's water diplomacy will have to solve in the future. One of them is undoubtedly the issue of the "Koshtepa" canal being built on the Amu Darya by the interim Afghan government. It is noteworthy that Uzbekistan was the first Central Asian country to express its opinion on the construction of this canal. In particular, on December 20, 2022, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev, in his address to the Oliy Majlis and the people of Uzbekistan, emphasized the need to conduct practical dialogues on the construction of a new canal in the Amu Darya basin with the interim government of neighboring Afghanistan and the world community, based on international norms and taking into account the interests of all countries in the region. Uzbekistan has been a supporter of the creation of organizational and legal mechanisms based on international law for the construction of the canal and the entry of Afghanistan as a new participant in the relations of transboundary water use in Central Asia. Negotiations in this direction are ongoing between the delegations of Uzbekistan and the interim government of Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan's water diplomacy is also distinguished by its initiative. Uzbekistan is promoting many initiatives aimed at further improving transboundary water relations and adapting them to future developments. In particular, on September 15, 2023, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev, in his speech at the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, put forward a number of initiatives to improve mechanisms for the joint use of transboundary waters [12]:

firstly, to further improve the legal framework and modernize the institutional mechanisms of the International Fund for Saving the Island. It was proposed to review the main documents and agreements, including the revision





of the Foundation's Charter adopted in the 1990s, jointly analyze the activities of the current structure and prepare proposals to coordinate the work of the organizations within the Foundation and increase its effectiveness, and develop "Rules and Procedures" that would clearly regulate its activities and cooperation;

secondly, it was emphasized the need to strengthen the systematic cooperation on attracting investment, technology and technical assistance for the promotion of regional projects. It was mentioned that each of our countries should commit to attract foreign aid to regional projects, setting clear target indicators;

thirdly, proposals were made to pay special attention to the regional organization of work with young people in the areas of forming a culture of economical use of water and other natural resources, adopting a special program, and supporting youth initiatives and startups.

In addition, the head of our state expressed his views on the construction of the "Koshtepa" canal and suggested that its launch could fundamentally change the order and balance of water use in Central Asia, therefore, he suggested to consider the issue of involving Afghanistan's representatives in the regional dialogue on the joint use of water resources.

Based on the above, we can conclude that in recent years Uzbekistan has been systematically approaching the issues of water resources use. The strategic programs adopted in our country and the practical measures being implemented show that water use issues have become a separate, important direction of state policy. Uzbekistan's water diplomacy with neighboring countries has provided an opportunity to achieve a number of historic results. However, there are the following issues that Uzbekistan should pay special attention to in the future in the field of water diplomacy:

first, most of the interstate agreements on transboundary water use in Central Asia were adopted almost 30 years ago, when the situation with water resources in the region was significantly different from today. One of the future tasks of Uzbek water diplomacy is to find a "golden mean" between the national interests of our country and the interests of the region in renewing these interstate agreements;

second, to organize the development of a general approach of the countries of the region regarding the goals and principles of the use of transboundary waters. Every year, water resources in Central Asia are decreasing, and 80 percent of Uzbekistan's water resources are formed in transboundary rivers. In





this situation, our country will need to organize the development of a common policy for the use of transboundary waters by the countries of the region; third, the "Koshtepa" canal being built on the Amu Darya is becoming the most important regional issue that Uzbek water diplomacy needs to resolve, which requires the development of international legal foundations for the construction and commissioning of the canal, as well as continuing negotiations with the interim government of Afghanistan on this issue.

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