

Water Diplomacy As A Key Instrument Of Tajikistan's Foreign Policy

Mirzoev Habibjon¹, Khojaev Mehrovar Pardalievich², Jamshed Temurovich Abdulloev³,
Sunatullo Ismatullo⁴

¹ PhD, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, Tajik National University.

Email: diplomat.tj@mail.ru

² PhD, Associate Professor, Department of History of the Ancient World, Middle Ages and Archaeology, Tajik National University.

Email: Mehrovar_kh@mail.ru

³ Associate Professor, Tajik National University.

Email: ajam-44444@mail.ru

⁴ Associate Professor, Tajik National University.

Email: ismatullo5000@mail.ru

Abstract

Water has become one of the most important global challenges due to growing water scarcity, climate change, population growth, environmental degradation, and increasing competition over shared water resources. In this context, water diplomacy is gaining importance as an instrument for promoting international cooperation, preventing conflicts, and ensuring sustainable water management. This article examines water diplomacy as a key instrument of the foreign policy of the Republic of Tajikistan. Particular attention is paid to Tajikistan's international initiatives in the water sector, its role in promoting cooperation on transboundary water resources, and the diplomatic, cultural and humanitarian, economic, environmental, and sustainable development dimensions of its water policy. The study demonstrates that Tajikistan has consistently promoted water-related issues within regional and international organizations, particularly the United Nations, and has contributed to placing water security on the global political agenda. The analysis shows that Tajikistan's approach is based on international cooperation, good-neighborly relations, rational water use, and the peaceful resolution of water-related challenges. Water diplomacy has consequently become an important component of Tajikistan's foreign policy and an instrument for strengthening the country's international role and promoting sustainable development....

Keywords: water diplomacy, Tajikistan, foreign policy, water resources, Central Asia, water security, transboundary cooperation, sustainable development...

INTRODUCTION

Clean water is essential for sustaining life and supporting economic, social, and environmental development. Freshwater resources are indispensable for agriculture, fisheries, industry, energy generation, transportation, human livelihoods, and the functioning of ecosystems. However, freshwater resources are becoming increasingly scarce. Only 3% of the planet's water is fresh, while more than two-thirds of this amount is stored in ice and snow. Groundwater accounts for approximately 31% of global freshwater reserves, whereas lakes, rivers, and reservoirs constitute less than 0.3% [8].

Water scarcity already affects a significant proportion of the world's population. More than 50% of the global population lives in regions experiencing water scarcity for at least one month annually. Approximately 2.1 billion people lack access to drinking water, while 4.5 billion people do not have access to piped water or adequate sanitation systems. If current trends continue, global water demand could exceed available resources by 40% by 2030. The economic consequences are also substantial, with the global economy losing approximately USD 260 billion annually because of inadequate water supply and sanitation services.

Population growth, economic development, climate change, pollution, and increasing competition among different sectors and communities require a fundamental reconsideration of approaches to water management. Water should therefore be viewed not only as a natural resource but also as a strategic transboundary and cross-sectoral resource essential for sustainable development and global security [14].

These challenges are particularly significant for Tajikistan, a country endowed with considerable water resources. Tajikistan has 947 rivers, approximately 1,300 lakes, and 8,492 glaciers, which account for about 6% of the country's territory [3]. The country also possesses substantial hydropower potential, estimated at 525–527 billion kWh [13, p. 75]. Consequently, water occupies a central position in Tajikistan's domestic development and foreign policy.

The Republic of Tajikistan has increasingly incorporated water-related issues into its foreign-policy agenda and has promoted international initiatives aimed at strengthening cooperation in the water sector. Its approach emphasizes dialogue, cooperation, rational water use, and the peaceful management of transboundary water resources.

The purpose of this article is to examine the role of water diplomacy as a key instrument of Tajikistan's foreign policy and to identify its principal diplomatic, cultural and humanitarian, economic, environmental, and sustainable development dimensions.

Literature Review

Water diplomacy has become an increasingly important subject in studies of international relations, environmental governance, and regional cooperation. Existing research emphasizes that shared water resources can simultaneously serve as a source of cooperation and a potential factor of political tension, particularly in regions where rivers cross national borders.

Studies of Central Asia demonstrate that water resources are closely interconnected with agriculture, energy, economic development, and regional security. The management of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya river systems has therefore become an important component of interstate relations in the region. The absence of effective cooperation may increase political and economic risks, while coordinated water management can contribute to regional stability and sustainable development [11; 12].

The literature used in this study also highlights the growing importance of water diplomacy in Tajikistan's foreign policy. Tajik scholars emphasize the country's international initiatives related to freshwater, water cooperation, and sustainable development [3; 13]. Particular attention has been given to the role of Tajikistan in advancing water-related initiatives through the United Nations and other international organizations.

International reports and institutional publications further underline the connection between water, poverty, sustainable development, food and energy security, and environmental protection [4; 9; 10; 14]. These studies provide a broader framework for understanding water diplomacy not merely as a technical mechanism for managing water resources but as a multidimensional instrument of international cooperation.

Thus, the existing literature provides a basis for examining Tajikistan's water diplomacy through several interconnected dimensions, including diplomacy, economic development, environmental protection, humanitarian cooperation, and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Research Methodology

The study employs a combination of analytical, comparative, historical, and descriptive methods. The historical method is used to examine the development of water-related cooperation and Tajikistan's international initiatives in the water sector. The comparative method allows the principal characteristics of Tajikistan's approach to water diplomacy to be considered in the broader context of regional and international cooperation.

The study also applies content analysis to official documents, international reports, scholarly publications, and other sources addressing water resources, water diplomacy, sustainable development, and Tajikistan's foreign policy. Particular attention is paid to documents and materials related to the United Nations and Tajikistan's international initiatives.

The analytical approach is used to identify the principal dimensions of Tajikistan's water diplomacy and to assess their significance for international cooperation, regional stability, and sustainable development.

Analysis and Discussion

Diplomatic Aspect

The Republic of Tajikistan actively pursues water diplomacy and seeks to play a proactive role in addressing water-related challenges at the international level. Water diplomacy has increasingly become an important element of the country's international profile and has contributed to strengthening Tajikistan's position on the global water agenda.

Its diplomatic approach can be summarized through three principal objectives: representing the country in the international water agenda, proposing solutions to water-related challenges through dialogue and negotiations, and protecting national interests in the water sector.

Tajikistan's initiatives include the International Year of Freshwater (2003), the International Decade "Water for Life" (2005–2015), the International Year of Water Cooperation (2013), the International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development" (2018–2028), and the International Year of Glacier Preservation (2025). These initiatives have contributed to strengthening international attention to water-related challenges and promoting cooperation through regional and international organizations, particularly the United Nations.

The development of water diplomacy has also demonstrated that strong political will, combined with the principles of good-neighborliness and friendly relations, is essential for preventing interstate and regional tensions related

to shared water resources [12, p. 48]. The principal objective of these initiatives is to create platforms for dialogue, information exchange, and the development of agreements concerning the joint management of water resources.

Cultural and Humanitarian Aspect

Water diplomacy also has an important cultural and humanitarian dimension. Water and the natural environment occupy a significant place in the historical and cultural heritage of the Tajik people. In this context, Navruz represents an important cultural symbol of renewal, harmony with nature, peace, and human solidarity.

The connection between water, nature, and Navruz contributes to the promotion of values such as peace, unity, intercultural dialogue, and goodwill. By incorporating cultural and humanitarian dimensions into its water diplomacy, Tajikistan presents its historical and cultural heritage as a source of cooperation and mutual understanding.

This approach contributes to strengthening Tajikistan's international image as a country committed to humanism, good-neighborliness, and constructive international cooperation.

Rational Use of Water Resources

The rational use of water resources represents an important dimension of Tajikistan's domestic and international water policy. As a sovereign state, Tajikistan places particular emphasis on providing its population with clean drinking water and modernizing water infrastructure.

Water resources constitute an important element of national wealth and economic development. Their sustainable management is closely connected with the country's long-term development and competitiveness. At the regional level, numerous meetings and interstate agreements have been aimed at ensuring the rational use and equitable allocation of water resources.

Among the important regional agreements are the Almaty Agreement on the Water Resources of Central Asia (1992) and the Naryn-Syr-Darya Water Resources Agreement (1994). According to the sources used in this study, Tajikistan annually transfers up to 2.5 km³ of water exceeding its allocated share to neighboring states [13, p. 76]. Although Tajikistan possesses substantial water resources, technical and infrastructural challenges remain in ensuring their effective distribution throughout the country. Providing full access to drinking water for the population would require more than USD 1 billion [1].

Information and Scientific Dimension

An important achievement of international cooperation in the water sector has been the development and dissemination of knowledge concerning water-related challenges and their possible solutions. Various mechanisms and institutions have been established at the global, regional, and national levels, including the Dushanbe Water Process, the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, the World Water Forum, and other specialized platforms.

Scientific research and technological innovation are also increasingly important for rational water management. Research centers, laboratories, and specialized institutions focus on glacier preservation, efficient water use, joint water management, and innovative approaches to water utilization.

Particular importance is attached to modern irrigation technologies, including drip irrigation, which can contribute to more efficient use of water resources. At the same time, national and international institutions continue to develop strategic documents and legal frameworks for effective water governance.

Access to Clean Water

Access to safe and clean drinking water is a fundamental prerequisite for human development and social well-being. Water scarcity can directly affect living conditions, health, economic opportunities, and human security. Addressing this challenge requires broad international cooperation and mutual support [4, p. 24].

The projected growth of the world population makes the responsible management of freshwater resources increasingly important. The unequal geographical distribution of water resources further intensifies this challenge. While some countries possess up to 30,000 m³ of water per capita annually, availability in others is below 300 m³ [5].

Therefore, ensuring equitable access to water requires not only effective domestic policies but also sustained international and regional cooperation.

Economic Aspect

Water resources are fundamental to economic development. Their importance extends across agriculture, industry, mining, energy production, human settlements, and environmental management. Water should therefore be recognized as a strategic resource whose long-term value is comparable to that of other major natural resources.

In Tajikistan, water and energy are particularly interconnected. More than 97% of the country's electricity is generated by hydropower plants, while more than 80% of agricultural production depends on irrigated farming

[10]. Water is consequently indispensable for economic development, poverty reduction, and the promotion of green economy and green energy initiatives.

At the regional level, effective transboundary water cooperation also offers economic benefits by supporting efficient resource management, reducing water scarcity, and creating opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation among Central Asian states [11].

Water and the Sustainable Development Goals

Water is directly or indirectly connected with all dimensions of sustainable development. Sustainable Development Goal 6, which focuses on ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, is particularly relevant.

Effective implementation of water-related objectives requires the participation of governments, international organizations, development partners, the private sector, the scientific community, and civil society [10]. The World Bank and other international partners support Tajikistan and other Central Asian countries in addressing water-related challenges and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals [9].

Despite considerable progress, challenges remain in ensuring equal access to drinking water. According to the sources used in the article, approximately 65% of Tajikistan's territory currently has access to drinking water, compared with 42% previously. Nevertheless, significant disparities continue to exist at local and subnational levels.

Environmental Aspect: Climate Change and Natural Disasters

Climate change is a global challenge whose consequences extend beyond national borders. Its impacts on water resources, the hydrological cycle, surface water, groundwater, glaciers, floods, and droughts require coordinated international action.

Water-related disasters represent one of the most serious consequences of environmental change. Between 2000 and 2016, floods and inundations claimed more than 107,000 lives, while the value of assets at risk from flooding could reach USD 45 trillion by 2050 [10]. Such disasters can cause extensive damage to infrastructure and undermine economic and social development.

The drying of the Aral Sea represents another major example of the consequences of unsustainable environmental management. Addressing this challenge requires the participation of the United Nations, regional states, and international organizations. Tajikistan has played an active role in the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea [1]. Consequently, climate change and water management require coordinated action at national, regional, and global levels.

Water Diplomacy as an Instrument of Peace and Sustainable Development

Increasing water scarcity may become a source of tension and instability in the future. In this context, peaceful approaches to water-related challenges are particularly important. Water diplomacy provides a framework for strengthening transboundary cooperation, preventing conflicts, and developing joint solutions for the management of shared water resources. Water can therefore serve not only as a potential source of competition but also as an instrument for cooperation and peace. Water diplomacy contributes to balancing national interests, promoting equitable resource management, and strengthening regional cooperation among states sharing common river systems.

For Central Asia, where transboundary water resources are closely connected with energy, agriculture, and economic development, such cooperation is of particular significance.

Tajikistan's Role in the Global Water Agenda

One of the priorities of Tajikistan's foreign policy is to ensure the country's constructive role in shaping the regional and international water agenda. Tajikistan seeks to align its national interests with the broader interests of the international community through international cooperation.

The country's international water initiatives have contributed to increasing global attention to water-related challenges. Through cooperation with the United Nations and other international organizations, Tajikistan has promoted dialogue on freshwater resources, water cooperation, sustainable development, and glacier preservation. The central objective of these initiatives is to emphasize the importance of constructive international cooperation in addressing water challenges, protecting human life, and promoting sustainable development. In this sense, water diplomacy has become an important instrument of Tajikistan's foreign policy and an important channel for strengthening the country's international engagement.

Conclusion

Water has become one of the most important strategic resources of the twenty-first century. Growing water scarcity, climate change, population growth, environmental degradation, and increasing competition over transboundary water resources demonstrate the necessity of strengthening international cooperation.

The analysis shows that water diplomacy occupies an important place in the foreign policy of the Republic of Tajikistan. Its principal characteristics include the promotion of international dialogue, the peaceful management of transboundary water resources, the protection of national interests, the advancement of sustainable development, and the strengthening of regional and international cooperation.

Tajikistan's international initiatives in the water sector have contributed to placing water-related issues more prominently on the global agenda. The country's approach combines diplomatic, economic, environmental, cultural, humanitarian, and scientific dimensions. This multidimensional character allows water diplomacy to function not only as a mechanism for addressing water challenges but also as an instrument of international cooperation and peace.

The experience of Tajikistan demonstrates that water can serve as a platform for dialogue and partnership rather than solely as a source of competition. The principles of good-neighborliness, mutual respect, rational water use, and constructive cooperation are essential for addressing shared water challenges in Central Asia.

Consequently, water diplomacy has become a significant instrument of Tajikistan's foreign policy and an important component of its international engagement. Its further development can contribute to strengthening regional cooperation, improving water security, supporting the Sustainable Development Goals, and promoting peace and sustainable development.

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