Water Diplomacy and Sovereign Rights: Tajikistan's Role in Transboundary Water Governance in Central Asia

Aminjon Nurzoda
London Graduate School

Abstract—**This paper analyses the transboundary water governance in the case of Tajikistan, the hydropower policy, regional politics, and international politics. After the breakdown of Soviet era water management, Tajikistan has been aiming at ascertaining upstream sovereignty and developing cooperative systems to oversee shared river basins. The study is based on the qualitative, documentary method, where the policy documents, treaties, institutional reports, and academic literature are analysed. Results indicate that the new infrastructure of hydropower, such as the Rogun, Nurek, and Sangtuda dams, are the basis of country development and a source of bargaining within the region. Meanwhilst, the participation in UN projects and international water policy strengthens the soft power of Tajikistan, which strengthens its leadership identity. Regional political mistrust, lack of data sharing and variability due to climate are some of the challenges despite these successes. The paper concludes that to have effective governance, sovereignty should be combined with collaborative structures, institutions, transparency as well as multilevel diplomacy should be encouraged. The experience of Tajikistan can serve as the example of achieving the balance between the national interests and the cooperation in the region in terms of transboundary water management.**

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most politically important and strategically disputed resources in Central Asia is water, which determines the course of the regional security, relations between states, and the way the countries evolve (Aamer, 2023). Tajikistan is in a very influential hydrological location: though being the smallest and the most poorly developed state of the region, it hosts some 60% of the fresh water resources of Central Asia, mainly due to its wide glacier networks and river basins on the highlands. This geographic position places Tajikistan as the main upstream state in the Amu Darya and Syr Darya basins, and downstream states, in particular Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan greatly rely on these flows to provide irrigation, cotton production and agricultural livelihoods (Abdullaev et al., 2025). This water imbalance lies at the heart of the water politics of Central Asia and it is what directly predetermines the patterns of conflict and cooperation in the region.

To survive in this strategic imbalance, Tajikistan is resorting to an increasing use of the instruments of water diplomacy, which is an area incorporating the techniques of negotiation, scientific expertise, power politics and institutional structures to oversee shared watercourses. Researchers note that water diplomacy represents formal and informal experiences that assist in lessening conflict and facilitating the joint administration of resources (Ahn and Juraev, 2024). In the same vein, the latest reviews highlight the fact that modern water diplomacy not only incorporates legal, technical, ecological, and political aspects but also is an essential field in areas where water is scarce and there is a geopolitical conflict (Akmatalieva, 2021). Within the Central Asian region, water diplomacy has not only adopted a form of cooperation but a form of strategic tool that states can utilise to pursue the sovereign interests of the state.

Another way in which Tajikistan has used the global platforms is by bringing the issue of water to the international agenda and this has enhanced its diplomatic face. It has managed to introduce three big water initiatives of UN, including the International Year of Freshwater 2003, the International Decade for Action, Water to Life (2005-2015) and the continuing International Decade for Action, Water to Sustainable Development (2018-2028). These efforts make Tajikistan a world leader on sustainable water management and strengthen its credentials to control its own hydropower-based economy (Campins Eritja,

2019). These diplomatic victories are closely linked to the quest by the Tajikistan government to protect its sovereignty, especially over rulings which touch on hydropower development as in the Rogun Dam, which have had a long history of dispute between the downstream neighbours. Therefore, the knowledge about the water diplomacy in Tajikistan offers a decisive point of entry into the analysis of more general processes of transboundary water governance, sovereignty, and regional power politics.

1.1 IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Theoretically, this study fits the body of water diplomacy, hydropolitics, and sovereignty by shedding light on the upstream states trying to negotiate power inequalities in shared river basins. Policy-wise, it deals with urgent problems being influenced by climate change, shrinking glaciers, and energy insecurity and growing hydropower infrastructure influencing factors that increase the stakes of regional cooperation (Chandekar, 2021). On the academic level, there is a gap in terms of applying the Russian sovereignty over the Tajikistan, diplomatisation instruments, and the leadership on the UN level into one analytical system that this paper seeks to fill.

1.2 RESEARCH AIM

To evaluate how Tajikistan balances sovereign rights with regional diplomacy in managing transboundary water resources in Central Asia.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To analyse Tajikistan's position in regional water governance.
- To examine its formal and informal water diplomacy tools.
- To assess hydropower development and implications for sovereignty.
- To evaluate Tajikistan's global water initiatives and diplomatic influence.
- To propose policy recommendations for cooperative, sustainable governance.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does Tajikistan use water diplomacy to protect its sovereign rights?
2. How do regional power dynamics shape transboundary water governance?
3. What role do UN-led initiatives play in Tajikistan's water diplomacy?
4. What policy mechanisms can improve cooperation whilst respecting sovereignty?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO CENTRAL ASIA'S WATER ENVIRONMENT

The water environment in Central Asia is directly affected by the Soviet past that formed a centralised water-energy nexus between upstream and downstream nations (Dadabaev et al., 2023). Under the Soviet control, Kyrgyz and Tajikistan water resources were controlled to satisfy the agricultural needs at the downstream in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, commonly in exchange of energy supplies. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 scattered this integrated system of management, with new independent nations having to govern common water resources on their own, which produced a disjointed and frequently disputed vision of water governance.

The region today is increasing in environmental pressures due to climate change and especially the rapid melting of glaciers in the Tien Shan and Pamir mountains that supply the rivers Amu Darya and Syr Darya (Egemberdieva, 2024). The seasonal variability as well as droughts and deteriorating water quality are becoming commonplace issues that increase the tensions between upstream and downstream states. Other demands are population increase, increasing agricultural activities and the construction of hydropower facilities. These dynamics render Central Asia a pertinent case study of transboundary water governance with the emphasis on the need of integrated, adaptive, and collaborative approaches to the water management to ensure regional stability and ecological sustainability.

2.2 KEY CONCEPTS IN WATER DIPLOMACY

Water diplomacy can be defined as a negotiating and managing shared water resources to avoid any form of conflict and promote co-operation (Garbuzarova, 2021). It covers formal contracts, informal negotiation, and multi-level governance strategies which address a wider geopolitical and development situation. Water diplomacy in transboundary river basins also involves the need to balance between

technical management and political, social and economic points.

A major difference in water governance has been on hard and soft power (Gasparri, 2018). Examples of hard power are coercion like unilateral damming, blocking flow, or disregarding agreements. In contrast, soft power entails rewards, technical and knowledge collaboration to promote cooperation and minimise war. The two methods are usually applied concurrently based on the political environment and the comparative dominance of states.

Informal water diplomacy is very important in cases where institutions are weak. Even in times of political tension, resource-sharing can be achieved by local water committees, cross-border networks, and negotiations through other channels rather than through official channels (Horsman, 2018). The other strategy is benefit-sharing, which emphasises on collaborative infrastructure management, equal distribution of water and coordinated ecosystem services. The benefit-sharing plans are designed to produce win-win, which creates the motivation to continue working together.

Water diplomacy is becoming increasingly significant in climate-variable regions where it would be important to combine water strategies alongside adaptation strategies. The uncertainty in the supply of water, seasonal fluctuation in the water flow, and the occurrence of extreme weather patterns demand the states to adopt fluid and proactive diplomacy (Issakov et al., 2025). A successful water diplomacy is, thus, one that integrates technical knowledge, trust-building and multi-level governance, which connects water security with regional stability, development, and sustainability in the long term.

2.3 GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORKS AND REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The institutions that mediate transboundary water governance in Central Asia are river basin organisations, interstate commissions and regional funds through which coordination of water allocation, monitoring the flows and the resolution of the disagreements can be attained. These institutions offer organised negotiating and cooperative platforms, yet their success is limited due to overlapping mandates, poor enforcement of the law and shortage of resources (Krzymowski, 2021).

The issue of institutional fragmentation is a thorn as well especially due to the difference in priorities between the upstream and downstream countries. Hydropower generation in upstream states would be more favored in order to satisfy energy demand, whereas downstream countries will be more concerned with irrigation and agricultural output. This deviation makes it challenging to make joint decisions and to have the capacity of regional bodies as neutral arbiters.

Scarcity of data exchange and application of agreements will also subtract trust and cooperation. States in most instances fail to provide hydrological data in order to enjoy the strategic advantage and this has created doubts and tension (Mirumachi, 2020). Regional institutions are still important even with such limitations because they are needed to engage in dialogue, technical exchange, and capacity-building. Such organisations are very crucial in reducing transboundary water conflicts and ensuring the sustainable development of resources in Central Asia through the provision of forums where negotiation is possible and coordinated actions to address the problem.

2.4 SOVEREIGNTY, POWER, AND HYDROPOLITICS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Water politics in Central Asia focus on the issue of sovereignty and power relations. Upstream states claim ownership of rivers within their jurisdiction and downstream nations only rely on stable and regular water flows to irrigate their lands, produce power and also to sustain their households (Nagheeby and Amezaga, 2023). Such asymmetry opens space to the upstream states to have strategic leverage by manipulating the downstream politics and security through water infrastructure and seasonal flow regulation.

The politics of water resources is very loaded and the water contentions over the construction of the dams, emptying of the reservoir and watering times are common in the region. Major constructions of hydropower plants and other infrastructures may lead to tensions because the interests of development upstream collide with downstream water demands (Narzullaev and Bekov, 2024). These crises are usually characterised by periods of argument and short-lived collaboration, which shows the necessity

of stable schemes of ensuring that the opposing national interests are brought to reconciliation.

Regional hydropolitics is also affected by outside actors. The investments in infrastructure, trade agreements, and political partnerships bring new power relations, and it offers a chance both to cooperate and to compete strategically (Nori, 2020). The interrelatedness of water, energy, and national security justifies the significance of perceiving water governance as a technical challenge, however, as a strategic, political challenge and economic challenge. Effective management involves a balance between upstream and downstream interests and encouragement of cooperation, trust and shared benefit.

2.5 CASE STUDIES IN TRANSBOUNDARY WATER GOVERNANCE

The basins of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya can be used as an example of the intricacy of transboundary water problems in Central Asia. Ad hoc conflicts between upstream hydropower interests and downstream irrigation interests often involve seasonal water releases, raising tensions that are likely to impact the food security of a region (Prniyazova et al., 2025). Such rivers are especially difficult to manage due to seasonal variations, which are coupled with shortages due to climate.

Rogun Dam project is an illustration of the political, technical, and economic aspects of governance in water. As much as the dam will provide security in terms of energy to the upstream country, downstream neighbors fear that there will be possible decline in water supply during the important times. These conflicting priorities explain why there is a need to develop frameworks of negotiation that are able to balance development aspirations and regional collaboration (Rizwan and Irfan, 2024).

There is further complexity with increasing China participation in the region. Investing in hydropower and irrigation infrastructure provides avenues to economic development at the same time as it creates dependency and geopolitical forces (Schmeier, 2021). Nevertheless, these obstacles do not exclude the fact that under the circumstances of trust and institutional support, benefit-sharing and conflicts mitigation are possible through cooperative mechanisms, including joint monitoring, technical exchange, and shared infrastructure project. Such cases discern the interrelationship between sovereignty, resource governance, and diplomacy and how they influence the results of transboundary water governance.

2.6 BARRIERS TO COOPERATION

There are a number of obstacles to effective cooperation in Central Asia. The upstream hydropower projects are usually opposed by the downstream countries because of the fear of less water supply, and upstream states are interested in energy security. Incomplete data dissemination and transparency increase the level of mistrust, as states conceal hydrological information to gain a strategic benefit. The variability occurring because of climate change such as the melting of glaciers, drought, and variations in seasonal flows heightens the competition and unpredictability thus complicating collaborative management. Divided institutional mandates and ineffective enforcement of the law lower the ability of regional organisations to mediately resolve disputes. These barriers are strengthened by political conflicts, historical resentment, and national agendas. Combined, the environmental, technical and governance barriers present a complex situation where co-operation is hard but necessary to sustainable water management.

2.7 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM LITERATURE

Policy suggestions are aimed at improving legal, institutional and collaborative systems. The legal systems should be enhanced to help clarify the responsibilities, enforce agreements, and effectively solve disputes. Co-ordination between the control states can be enhanced by institutionalising the basin-wide management such as harmonised monitoring systems and decision-making mechanisms (Schmeier and Shubber, 2018). The growth of benefit sharing programs, like, jointly managed hydro, irrigation programs, and the coordinated development of infrastructure, establishes mutual interests to cooperate. Trust, capacity-building and knowledge exchange can be enhanced by engaging third parties such as international organisations, technical professionals and mediators. The inclusion of climate adaptation measures in governance systems guarantees the ability to survive the hydrological fluctuation and long-term sustainability (Sehring et al., 2024). On the whole, these actions are aimed at

balancing the issue of national autonomy and the stability of the region, ensuring fair distribution of resources, and enhancing transboundary water management in Central Asia.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

3.1 WATER DIPLOMACY THEORY

The theory of water diplomacy offers a theoretical perspective of the interplay between the states, regional organisations and epistemic communities in managing the common water resources. It focuses on multi-tier involvement whereby the principle of making decisions is not only guided by the governments of countries but also by the international organisations, professionals, and cross-border networks of cooperation (Soliev and Theesfeld, 2020). In reality, such a strategy emphasises the significance of the negotiating dynamics of shared river basins where upstream and downstream states need to strike a balance between conflicting water allocation, hydropower, and irrigation requests. Water diplomacy encompasses both formal and informal processes such as treaties, joint committees, technical dialogue, and informal negotiation processes all in an effort to prevent war and encourage collaborative management (Vij et al., 2020). It highlights the fact that water resources are closely interconnected with political, economic, and environmental influences, providing an example that good governance is based on communication, building trust, and flexibility as an adaptive style to altering ecological and geopolitical contexts.

3.2 POWER THEORY IN HYDROPOLITICS

The hydropolitics theory of power revolves around how states utilise resources, power, and bargaining to attain their strategic objectives. Hard power entails coercive actions, water flow control or dams without the consent of those downstream. Soft power entails coercion, reputation-formation and influencing regional or global standards to become influential. Bargaining power represents the bargaining power based on the geographical location, economic potential or the availability of other resources (Wang et al., 2021). As an example, soft power can be used when a state tries to be included in the international forums, cooperative projects, or even trying to establish itself as a leader in sustainable water management in the region. These power relations are crucial to the study of hydropolitical interactions because they shape the way of conflicts, the way of making agreements and the methods by which trust and cooperation may exist between states with asymmetric interests.

3.3 SOVEREIGNTY AND TERRITORIAL RESOURCE RIGHTS

The sovereignty theory of water resources observes how far the states possess authority of natural resources in their own territories. Upstream nations usually have claims of their territorial ownership of rivers that run within their territories by focusing on their right to control the flow of water to be used in electricity generation, agricultural activities, and economic growth. On the other hand, downstream states are dependent on foreseeable water supplies, which generates strains about the boundaries of upstream control (Xenarios et al., 2018). The existence of the shared water resources is a challenge to the traditional concept of individual sovereignty where national interests have to be reconciled to suit common needs through cooperation and negotiation. This framework brings out the conflict between the national independence and the regional interdependence to show that sustainable water governance has to manage conflicting claims, provide equitable access and understand cross-border mutual dependencies.

3.4 CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVES

Constructivist approaches towards hydropolitics put an emphasis on identity, norms, and social constructions in the development of water governance. States do not act simply because of material interest; the policies and interactions between them depend on the way they see themselves and the way other states identify them. As an illustration, one nation can develop a global identity as a sound regional citisen by exploring and involving itself in water diplomacy, is involved in collective projects, and advocating a fair distribution of common resources.

IV. METHODOLOGIES

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design used in this study is qualitative research design and it will use documentary and content analysis to investigate transboundary water

governance in Central Asia. The methodology focuses on the systematic review of policy documents, legal treaties, institutional reports, and academic literature to have an idea of the interaction between water diplomacy, sovereignty, and regional power relations (Yalçın and Imagambetova 2022). The research will be able to capture historical, legal, and political viewpoints, as it will examine the existing documents as opposed to the primary field data, which is feasible within the scope of the study. It is a suitable design to examine the intricate governance structures, institutional behaviours, and diplomatic relations, allowing theoretical information to be further elaborated.

4.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

The study is based on an interpretivist philosophy which acknowledges that the meaning and importance of water governance practices are socially constructed. It has given importance to the way states, regional bodies and international actors perceive and bargain on the water resources (Zareie et al., 2021). It is a point of view that permits a deeper examination of policy, treaties, and diplomatic statements predicates in terms of beliefs, priorities, and strategies of the actors involved. Interpretivism makes much of the subjective and situational character of the transboundary water management by accentuating the fact that the outcomes of governance are not only determined by the technical or legal but also by the political, cultural, and identity-based influences.

4.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

The analysis is based on a deductive approach and the theoretical frameworks as per Chapter 3. The concepts of water diplomacy theory, power theory, sovereignty, and constructivist perspectives are tested against empirical evidence in the form of treaties, reviews of law, and institutional reports (Zhang and Zhang 2021). In this way, the research will be able to follow the way these theories are applied in practice and evaluate their explanatory capabilities in the study of cooperation and conflicts over common water resources in Central Asia.

4.4 SOURCES OF DATA

In the paper, the author relies on both scholarly sources and governmental reports and the law of international law. The literature on transboundary water management comprises of academic materials on transboundary water management in form of journal articles, policy analysis, and regional studies. The legal and policy documents contain international water law documents, UN resolutions of 2003, 2005, and 2018, and reports of major regional bodies like the ICWC, IFAS, and the World bank. These sources offer valid and in-depth information about the institutional provisions, governance issues, and diplomatic solutions in the area.

4.5 ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

Three methods are used to analyse data and include discourse analysis to investigate how diplomatic language represents cooperation and conflict, institutional analysis to investigate the structure, mandate, and the operation of water organisations and legal-political analysis to determine how treaties and agreements are interpreted and put into practice. A combination of these approaches offers a multidimensional perspective of the dynamic of governance and policy.

4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The ethical behavior is guaranteed by the use of publicly available documents only and using no confidential or sensitive information. The language used when addressing conflicts between states is neutral, non-politicised, and care is taken to make the analysis as objective and scholarly as possible.

V. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 TAJIKISTAN'S WATER DIPLOMACY ARCHITECTURE

The Tajikistan approach to water diplomacy is based on a mix of domestic policy focus and the regional and global level strategic interactions (Zhao, 2023). The country has been working on the hydropower infrastructure development and expansion within the country where rivers have been identified to play a role in ensuring energy security and economic growth. The major hydropower facilities like Rogun, Nurek, and Sangtuda dams are the foundation of the national energy plan, which creates the possibility to produce domestic consumption and export electricity. The projects are also used as tools towards defining the negotiating stance of Tajikistan in the interaction of

transboundary water, especially to the downstream neighbours.

On the regional level, Tajikistan participates in multilevel water diplomacy, which means that it is including institutional platforms, which should regulate water consumption and promote technical collaboration (Zhiltsov, 2025). Combining domestic infrastructural development and the selective use of diplomacy enables the formation of the water diplomacy architecture in Tajikistan, which embodies technical, political, and normative factors to improve its power over common water sources.

5.2 SOVEREIGNTY AND HYDROPOWER CONFLICTS

The upland status of Tajikistan in Central Asia gives it immense bargaining power over the shared water resources but this has been a source of tensions in the past with the downstream nations. The neighbouring states have expressed concerns about the water availability to irrigate their farms, control their seasonal flows and the long-term environmental effects of large-scale dams, as is reflected through objections (Zhiltsov et al., 2018). Some of the historical tensions with Uzbekistan are examples of the intricacy of upstream downstream relations as the sovereignty issues and developmental needs overlap with views of risk and equity.

These tensions are further compounded by the variability due to climate because, changes in the melt-off of the glaciers and changes in seasons rainfall increase doubts regarding the water availability. Tajikistan claims that being an upstream sovereign state, it can use river systems to produce energy and national develop, which puts its claims into the wider discourse of resource rights to the land. Downstream resistance, though, lays stress on the perennial quandary of balancing upstream sovereignty against downstream dependency, the balancing act of national interests and regional stability being so delicate that a delicate balance is needed.

5.3 ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF WATER

Water is also a natural resource as well as a strategic and key economic factor in Tajikistan. The national economy is based on hydropower, as it is a stable energy resource that promotes the internal growth of the country and industrial progress (Ziganshina and de Schutter 2022). In addition to the domestic consumption, electricity produced through the dams also spurs the regional trade and integration. Several projects like the CASA-1000 project allow exporting the excess to nearby nations and increase the economic strength of Tajikistan and add interdependence to the energy markets. This strategic power is also reflecting in this economic importance. Tajikistan can influence the process in the region, negotiate preferable deals, and become a principal player in the multilateral water management by managing the flows of water and the distribution of energy. The development of hydropower therefore has two purposes: on one hand it does engage in domestic economic activity, on the other hand, it is a tool in the involvement of the design of the regional water politics, increasing the influence the country has to project and to keep the complicated upstream-downstream relations under control.

5.4 UN-LEVEL LEADERSHIP AND DIPLOMATIC SUCCESSES

The international activity of Tajikistan supports its relationships and leadership in terms of the water agenda. The country has been an active speaker at the International Year of Freshwater in 2003, Water for Life Decade of 2005 to 2015, and current Water for Sustainable Development agenda of 2018-2028. The engagement in these programs gives Tajikistan an opportunity to show its readiness to be involved in sustainable water management, advertise its hydropower developments, and influence the discourse on water security at the international level. By way of such interactions, Tajikistan is building a global image of a responsible member of the region and a promoter of fair utilisation of the resources. The two actions are a domestic and international advocacy that shows that water resources may be used not only to achieve the goals of the economy and energy, but also in gaining a more significant diplomatic influence.

5.5 INSTITUTIONAL AND GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES

In spite of its strategic efforts, there are major institutional and governance complexities in Tajikistan to manage transboundary water resources. Regional co-operation is still poor with divided mandates, sporadic implementation of agreements and scanty joint decision-making mechanisms. Countries

share little data and this affects the trust and makes it difficult to coordinate the management of river basins. There still is political mistrust between states, which prevents co-operation in the long-term. Grievance of the past, national interests, resource utilisation conflict continue to create a circle of tension and it takes a fine balance of negotiations and institutional reinforcement to curb conflict. Also, regional institutions are not always in a position to bring about compliance or promote equal distribution of resources and hence their performance in upholding integrated water governance is diminished. These obstacles help to see the fact that although Tajikistan has created an impressive water diplomacy framework and managed to utilise its hydropower resources to the fullest, institutional flaws and political intricacies remain the limiting factors to the potentials of a long-term regional cooperation.

VI. DISCUSSION

The Tajikistan model of transboundary water governance shows a two-sided approach to the problem involving the preservation of national sovereignty and active interaction on the international level. On the domestic level, the building of hydropower facilities, such as the Rogun, Nurek, and Sangtuda dams, demonstrates the upstream territorial claims of the country as well as the guarantee of its energy security. This is in line with the sovereignty and the territorial resource theories which assert the power of states to control resources in their territory. Nevertheless, Tajikistan does not only use the coercive leverage. It is actively involved in international practices and multilateral forums, which allows it to also develop soft power and form opinions about itself as a collaborative and responsible neighbor in the area. Involvement in UN-driven programs, including the International Year of Freshwater and the Water for Life Decade confirms the diplomatic persona of Tajikistan and enhances its bargaining power in water-related talks at the regional level. Constructivist views demonstrate how these international interactions enable Tajikistan to develop a reputation as a valid leader in water governance, which increases its influence without involving the lone domination. The country is able to negotiate sustainable development and equitable use of resources by positioning itself as a supporter of sustainable development and equitable use of resources, this would boost trust between regional and international partners, and may help in the negotiation process, avoiding conflict over common water resources.

Although the development of hydropower is economically and strategically relevant, it makes the politics of the region more complicated. Larger scale dams pose a danger to the availability of water as perceived by downstream neighbours, and this creates a conflict between sovereignty claims and regional interdependence. The theory of hydropolitics explains how this interaction can occur between hard power, by controlling flows, and soft power, by collaborative efforts and by getting involved in diplomacy. The case of Tajikistan shows how such delicate balance between the assertion of the upstream right and the reduction of the downstream issues should be considered when it comes to both coercion and cooperation being the factors that affect the final result.

Climate change is another level of complexity, which brings about uncertainty in seasonal flows and river systems that are fed by glaciers. Although it is a common threat to every state in Central Asia, it also gives a possibility to collaborate in managing it. The water diplomacy theory suggests the necessity of multilevel and anticipatory approaches to these environmental strains, which supports the notion that technical cooperation, data-sharing, and benefit-sharing are critical in resiliency creation and the establishment of regional stability.

VII. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 STRENGTHENING REGIONAL WATER INSTITUTIONS

TBWG must have strong and competent regional institutions. The Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC) and the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) need to be reformed to enhance coordination, monitoring compliance and conflict resolution. Increased institutional capacity is capable of making these bodies to facilitate fair decision making, arbitrate and see to it that contracts are adhered to. The institutions that are stronger would also offer a platform where policies would be harmonised, standardised procedures and trust would be established between member states.

7.2 INCREASING TRANSPARENCY AND DATA SHARING

Information sharing and openness are very vital in alleviating tensions between the upstream and downstream states. It can be possible to develop cooperative hydrological monitoring systems and common databases that will allow real-time access to river flows, water use, and climate projections. Greater transparency would decrease the level of mistrust, facilitate evidence-based decision-making, and enable the stakeholders to prepare and respond to fluctuation in water supply. Formalisation of data-sharing would be achieved by having joint technical committees and standardised reporting systems in which all parties would be able to access good information.

7.3 COOPERATIVE HYDROPOWER DEVELOPMENT

The development of hydropower should be done in a direction of maximising the benefits of the region and reducing conflict. The concept of sharing benefits of financial gains, energy supplies, and environmental benefits can be applied to distribute the benefits fairly to the affected states. The national development objectives can be improved to meet the regional stability through the coordinated planning of dam operations and electricity export projects. The combination of joint investment in the field, cost sharing, and coordinated management of the environment would encourage mutual interests and will increase long-term cooperation in water and energy management.

7.4 ENHANCING DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT

Increasing the scope of capacity to manage water diplomacy on the national and regional level can enhance the negotiation results and minimise the risks of conflicts. Policymakers, negotiators, and technical experts can be trained on the skills of negotiation, conflict management, and knowledge of international laws. Moreover, the active use of UN platforms and other international forums will be a strategic step to raise the profile of the water problems of the region, to secure technical and financial aid and to strengthen the role of Tajikistan as an active and cooperative participant in the international water management.

VIII. CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

The Tajikistan strategy of transboundary water management presents an advanced model of local sovereignty safeguard and active international policy. The nation can guarantee its upstream rights by investing in hydropower facilities including the Rogun, Nurek, and Sangtuda dams, and provides the country with a chance of exporting electricity to the region and to develop the economy. At the same time, the involvement in UN programs and platforms of international water diplomacy has empowered Tajikistan internationally in the sphere of soft power and made it a responsible and cooperating participant in the water management.

Even with these successes, there is still lingering mistrust of politics between regions that still poses a challenge to cooperation. The downstream issues of water availability, past grievances and the lack of institutional capacity cause obstacles to the realisation of equitable and sustainable water management. The climate change compounds the situation and creates uncertainty in the flow of rivers and exposing all Central Asian states to vulnerability. The existence of such common environmental hazards highlights the need to develop common strategies of adaptation and strong institutional structures that may facilitate resolution of conflicts, management of resources and building of confidence between states.

In the future, Tajikistan has a promising future in the field of water governance as it will integrate sovereignty and collaboration to guide the region in the future. The essence of such strategy is not limited to energy and water management, but it shows how strategic diplomacy, institutional capacity and environmental foresight can be utilised in order to generate sustainable governance in resource-deprived areas.

REFERENCES

[1] Aamer, F. (2023) Water security: diplomacy, global cooperation, and effective management of shared rivers. Berlin/Washington, DC: Konrad-Adenauer Foundation & Stimson Center.

[2] Abdullaev, I., Assubayeva, A., Bobojonov, I., Djanibekov, N., Dombrowsky, I., Gafurov, A., Hamidov, A. et al. (2025) ‘Current challenges in Central Asian water governance and their

implications for research, higher education, and science–policy interaction', Central Asian Journal of Water Research, 11(1), pp. 47–58.

[3] Ahn, Y.-J. and Juraev, Z. (2024) 'Examination of regional water governance and water insecurity issues in Central Asia', Sustainable Water Resources Management, 10(3), p. 118.

[4] Akmatalieva, A.M. (2021) 'Foreign policy tools for water management in Central Asia', Post-Soviet Issues, 8(3), pp. 361–368.

[5] Campins Eritja, M. (2019) 'Transboundary water resources management in Central Asia and its role in the emergence of conflicts affecting regional stability', Paix et Sécurité Internationales, 7, p. 13.

[6] Chandekar, S.M.P. (2021) 'Importance of water diplomacy in the current era: With special reference to South Asian countries', International Journal of Law Management & Humanities, 4(3), pp. 825–832.

[7] Dadabaev, T., Sehring, J. and Djalilova, N. (2023) 'Central Asian water neighbourhood: A constructivist reconceptualisation of hydropolitics in Central Asia', Water Alternatives, 16(3), pp. 930–948.

[8] Egemberdieva, A. (2024) Transboundary River governance in Central Asia: Managing water conflicts, cooperation, and involvement of third parties. [Thesis/report].

[9] Garbuzarova, E.G. (2021) 'Regulatory initiatives of Central Asian countries in addressing transboundary water issues', Post-Soviet Issues, 8(2), pp. 219–228.

[10] Gasparri, G. (2018) 'Water and climate in Central Asia: From conflict to cooperation', Management, 63(5), pp. 752–762.

[11] Horsman, S. (2018) 'Transboundary water management and security in Central Asia', in Limiting Institutions? Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 86–104.

[12] Issakov, Y., Sarkytkan, K., Gajić, T., Akhmetova, A., Berdygulova, G., Zhoya, K., Razia, T. and Matigulla, B. (2025) 'Climate-induced transboundary water insecurity in Central Asia: Institutional challenges, adaptation responses, and future research directions', Water, 17(12), p. 1795.

[13] Krzymowski, A. (2021) 'Water diplomacy and its strategic significance for sustainable development goals and global security architecture', Sustainability, 13(24), p. 13898.

[14] Mirumachi, N. (2020) 'Informal water diplomacy and power: A case of seeking water security in the Mekong River Basin', Environmental Science & Policy, 114, pp. 86–95.

[15] Nagheeby, M. and Amezaga, J. (2023) 'Decolonising water diplomacy and conflict transformation: From security–peace to equity–identity', Water Policy, 25(8), pp. 835–850.

[16] Narzullaev, O. and Bekov, I. (2024) 'Contemporary analysis of the use of transboundary waters in Central Asia', in IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science, 1420(1), p. 012035. Bristol: IOP Publishing.

[17] Nori, S.M. (2020) 'Challenges of transboundary water governance in Afghanistan', Central Asian Journal of Water Research, 6(1), pp. 18–38.

[18] Prniyazova, A., Turaeva, S., Turgunov, D. and Jarihani, B. (2025) 'Sustainable transboundary water governance in Central Asia: Challenges, conflicts, and regional cooperation', Sustainability, 17(11), p. 4968.

[19] Rizwan, S. and Irfan, M. (2024) Water diplomacy: Addressing transboundary water conflicts in a resource-scarce world. [Report].

[20] Schmeier, S. (2021) 'International water law principles in negotiations and water diplomacy', in [Edited volume], pp. 173–177.

[21] Schmeier, S. and Shubber, Z. (2018) 'Anchoring water diplomacy: The legal nature of international river basin organisations', Journal of Hydrology, 567, pp. 114–120.

[22] Sehring, J., Sharipova, B. and Assubayeva, A. (2024) 'The politics of water governance in Central Asia: Institutionalising river basin management', in Handbook on the Governance and Politics of Water Resources. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 205–217.

[23] Soliev, I. and Theesfeld, I. (2020) 'Benefit sharing for solving transboundary commons dilemma in Central Asia', International Journal of the Commons, 14(1), pp. 1–16.

[24] Vij, S., Warner, J. and Barua, A. (2020) 'Power in water diplomacy', Water International, 45(4), pp. 249–253.

[25] Wang, X., Chen, Y., Li, Z., Fang, G., Wang, F. and Hao, H. (2021) 'Water resources management

and dynamic changes in water politics in the transboundary river basins of Central Asia', Hydrology and Earth System Sciences, 25(6), pp. 3281–3299.

[26] Xenarios, S., Shenhav, R., Abdullaev, I. and Mastellari, A. (2018) 'Current and future challenges of water security in Central Asia', in Global Water Security: Lessons Learnt and Long-Term Implications. Singapore: Springer, pp. 117–142.

[27] Yalçın, R. and Imagambetova, A. (2022) 'Problems of sharing transboundary water resources in Central Asia', Akademik Yaklaşımlar Dergisi, 13(2), pp. 546–566.

[28] Zareie, S., Bozorg-Haddad, O. and Loáiciga, H.A. (2021) 'A state-of-the-art review of water diplomacy', Environment, Development and Sustainability, 23(2), pp. 2337–2357.

[29] Zhang, L. and Zhang, H. (2021) 'Water diplomacy and China's bid for soft power in the Mekong', The China Review, 21(4), pp. 39–75.

[30] Zhao, N. (2023) Water diplomacy. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Model Congress.

[31] Zhiltsov, S.S. (2025) 'Water politics in Central Asian countries: Political aspects', RUDN Journal of Political Science, 27(1), pp. 66–79.

[32] Zhiltsov, S.S., Zonn, I.S., Grishin, O.E., Egorov, V.G. and Ruban, M.S. (2018) 'Transboundary rivers in Central Asia: Cooperation and conflicts amongst countries', in Water Resources in Central Asia: International Context. Cham: Springer, pp. 61–80.

[33] Ziganshina, D.R. and de Schutter, J.L.G. (2022) 'Paving the way for evidence-driven transboundary water cooperation in Central Asia', JAWRA Journal of the American Water Resources Association, 58(6), pp. 1149–1161.