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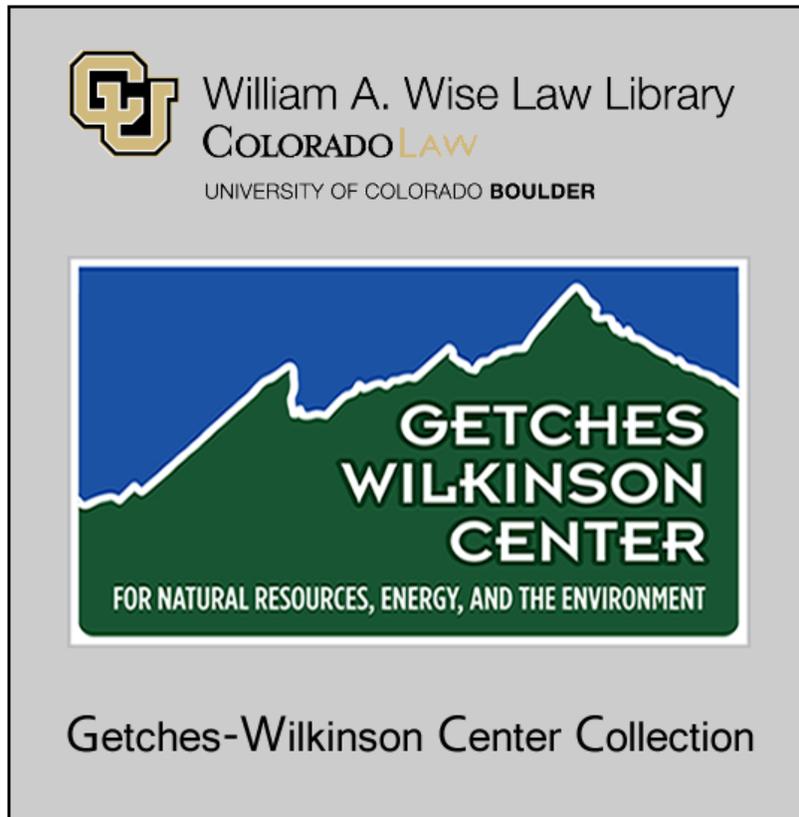
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A Cooperative Model for Effective Management and Allocation of the Water Resources in the Euphrates-Tigris River Basin

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ABSTRACT

Water has become a source of tension among the riparian states of the Euphrates-Tigris river basin - namely Turkey, Syria, and Iraq - mainly due to initiation of major development projects. Searching for the modalities of replacing conflict with cooperation is the underlying goal of this paper.

Water politics in the region between 1920 and 1960 - the period that is characterized by agreeable relations among the riparians - were generally conducted by legal arrangements. There were neither large dams interfering with the natural flow of the rivers, nor irrigation uses at such a level to create competitive water demands. Projects implemented in this period did not result in significant adverse ecological consequences, and the demand for water did not exceed the supply. Hence, neither the absence of integrated planning for the entire basin, nor the failure to reach an agreement on water resource sharing led to serious international conflicts among the riparian states.

Nevertheless, by the end of the 1960s the amicable nature of riparian relations began to change as Turkey and Syria have both initiated development plans including large-scale surface irrigation schemes. The accelerated, albeit uncoordinated development programmes of Turkey and Syria through Turkey's Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) and Syria's Euphrates Valley Project are unquestionably the factors primarily responsible for creating a change in the pace of relations and producing contention regarding the use of the river system. It is not surprising to see that Iraq was the first of the three states to utilize the river system in its flood plains. Upstream areas (both in Turkey and Syria) have been last to be developed. Under the pressure of burgeoning populations and plans to boost economic development, the rivers in latter areas and at later times are often used for agriculture as well as hydroelectricity generation. However, in the absence of adequate consultative mechanisms, the uncoordinated nature of these development projects led to a series of crises in the region. Then, a basin-wide accord was put on the diplomatic agenda as a response to the emerging crises among the riparians over water.

In a series of international conferences convened by the specialized agencies of the United Nations and in the works of the international water law community, serious efforts have long been devoted to furnishing a set of general principles and norms for achieving effective and equitable management and utilization of transboundary water resources worldwide. In this respect, the paper underscores the significance of designing institutions that would be instrumental in promoting cooperation among Turkey, Syria, and Iraq by applying some of these principles and norms as well as rules and decision-making procedures to the Euphrates-Tigris river basin within the context of an international regime. Hence, the paper exhibits the components of a proposed legal regime, which will enable the three riparians of the Euphrates-Tigris river system to reach a fair water distribution agreement.

The paper commences with a description of the physical and hydropolitical setting of the Euphrates-Tigris river basin. Documents, texts and minutes of the bilateral and trilateral meetings between the riparians are reviewed to illustrate the hydropolitical setting of the river basin. These all constitute primary sources to display the objective characteristics of the river basin. That part is followed by an extended analytical discussion on a cooperative model, namely the international regime framework, to manage the waters of the transboundary river system in a peaceful manner. Hence, the legal norms and rules of international water law, namely the Helsinki Rules and UN International Watercourses Convention are scrutinised to derive the principles, norms and rules of the suggested regime framework in the region. Moreover, the guidelines, action plans, declarations as the products of numerous international conferences as well as the works of the leading water NGOs such as the World Water Council and Global Water Partnership are all examined and adopted to draw the institutions of the suggested regime.

By way of conclusion, the paper asserts that a comprehensive institutional framework (an international regime), by defining the respective rights and obligations of the three riparians and by providing regular information about the stage of water development and use in each state, will allow the parties to harmonize their water development and use practices. An international water regime operating as an established negotiated framework will provide an appropriate venue to discuss the issues of contention. Within a regime framework the three riparians will adopt coordinated policies and actions which are capable of adjusting the utilisation of the resources according to variable climatological and hydrological conditions.