Conflict Factsheet

Rogun Dam Conflict between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of conflict</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1991 – ongoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Locality</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conflicts Summary

The construction of the Rogun Dam situated on the Vakhsh River, a tributary of the Amu Darya River, is a major source of contention between Tajikistan, located upstream, and Uzbekistan, located downstream. This geopolitical conflict is part of wider international strains between Central Asian states due to the overuse and mismanagement of scarce water resources in the region, a factor intensified by global climate change. The conflict remains unresolved.
Gradual Change in Temperature and/or Precipitation

Increased Water Scarcity

Infrastructure Development

Environmental Change

Intermediary Mechanisms

Fragility and Conflict Risks

Social and Economic Drivers

Context Factors

Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water

Gradual Change in Temperature and/or Precipitation

Increased Water Scarcity

Infrastructure Development

Environmental Change

Intermediary Mechanisms

Fragility and Conflict Risks

Social and Economic Drivers

Context Factors

Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water
Conflict History

The conflict between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan is characterised by interdependent economic, environmental and social factors. It has been suggested that tensions over the Rogun Dam project have the potential to induce a full state-on-state war within the context of international water conflicts (Central Eurasia Standard, 2013). In 2012, President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan referred to the prospect of war should the construction of the Rogun Dam proceed (Garcés de los Fayos, 2014).

Currently, differing opinions exist of the impacts that the Rogun Dam will have. Uzbekistan contends that the dam would severely harm their agricultural system, whilst Tajikistan believes hydroelectric production is essential for regional and international growth (Weil, 2012). Against this backdrop, climate change will exacerbate these tensions further by reducing the overall water supply in the region.

The Economic Situation

In economic terms, the primary export of Uzbekistan is cotton, accounting for 60% of all foreign trade and 45% of employment. Cotton production is a water intensive industry requiring frequent irrigation in a region already experiencing increasing demands for water, intensified by the pressures of climate change (Garcés de los Fayos, 2014). Uzbekistan fears the completion of the dam will threaten this primary export and pose dangerous socio-economic and environmental risks pertaining to the ecological imbalance of water within the area. Although public opinion is difficult to assess, there have been numerous demonstrations against the project and vociferous debates online via social media (Sodiqov, 2012). At the same time, there are concerns relating to water management in Uzbekistan, due to inefficient irrigation systems and poor drainage. Additionally, renewable water resources in Uzbekistan are extremely limited and only 10% of the nation’s total river run-off, meaning water entering the hydrological network, is formed within the country (Strickman & Porkka, 2008).

In energy-poor Tajikistan, important social consequences are also to be considered. During the cold Central Asian winter of 2007-2008 there was a significant loss of life and livestock due, primarily, to energy shortages (Libert, Orolbaev, Steklov 2008). The electricity generated by the Rogun Dam would provide a secure and sustainable flow of cheap energy aiding this chronic energy shortage, thus assisting Tajikistan’s economy which is currently one of Central Asia’s weakest.

The economic trade-offs relate in considerable parts to the Rogun dam’s operation, and specifically the season when (most of) the water is released. Whereas Tajikistan has clear incentives to release the water during winter months when its energy needs are greatest, Uzbekistan needs the water released during the hot summer months, so as to enable irrigation.

The Political Situation

On a political level, the root cause of the conflict is complex. The region was previously managed as part of the Soviet Union. The Soviets established a system of dams on the two principle rivers, Amu Darya and Syr Darya, designed to allow states upstream to store water before releasing their reserves during times of irrigation. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, analysts feared these arrangements would collapse. In February of 1992, this belief was dispelled, as five Central Asian republics, including Tajikistan and
Uzbekistan, signed an agreement to continue Soviet water sharing practices, thus creating the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC). This agreement only allowed the ICWC to coordinate water allocations and did not require provisions of energy supplies to the states upstream. A separate agreement was reached in 1998 by the Central Asian states, in which Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan paid for irrigation and electricity, while Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan used the revenues to pay for energy during the winter season when needs are highest. This agreement broke down in 2002, as Kyrgyzstan demanded higher electricity prices in order to cover the rising costs of oil and gas (Weil, 2012). Against this backdrop, disagreements over the Rogun Dam have emerged.

Resolution Efforts

The World Bank has assisted two studies assessing the viability of the Rogun Dam project, in response to a request from the government of Tajikistan. The Techno-Economic Assessment Study (TEAS) and the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) were overseen by international consultant firms and financed through an International Development Association (IDA) project in collaboration with experts from the World Bank (World Bank, 2014).

In draft terms, the panel of experts agreed to the feasibility to build and operate a dam at the proposed site, albeit with the incorporation of modifications to the original design and the establishment of a monitoring system throughout the dam's lifetime (World Bank, 2014). These draft documents were released by the World Bank and the government of Tajikistan on the 17th June 2014.

Uzbek officials have expressed strong dissatisfaction with this assessment and Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Azimov has personally stated that the World Bank’s reports do not meet internationally recognized standards of transparency, objectivity and impartiality. Although Uzbekistan accepted the World Bank’s undertaking of the TEAS and ESIA assessments, President Karimov has united popular opinion in Uzbekistan against the project (Central Eurasia Standard, 2013). The conflict and President Karimov’s reaction to it have further reinforced his retention of power.

Potential Next Steps

In terms of political resolution to the conflict, the first step consists in the necessity to diffuse and depoliticize the debate between the leaders of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The Rogun Dam has become an important political symbol linked directly to the legitimacy of the political regimes in both countries.

In terms of external input, 2013 was the UN’s International Year of Water Cooperation. The aim of this was to direct international attention towards the opportunities for water cooperation to solve the challenges of water management. Although officials from Tajikistan attended, the delegation to Uzbekistan did not attend this international conference, due to the on-going conflict over the Rogun Dam (Water Politics, 2013).

The conflict is currently unresolved and the Rogun Dam remains in the preliminary stages of construction. The previous water sharing agreements of the Soviet Union still exist as a model for understanding how Tajikistan and Uzbekistan could arrive at a solution which is mutually beneficial, although a scenario similar to this remains a distant prospect (Weil, 2012).
### Intensities & Influences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTENSITIES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International / Geopolitical Intensity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Suffering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INFLUENCES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Influences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal Influences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Resolution Success

- **Reduction in geographical scope**
  - There has been no reduction in geographical scope.

- **Increased capacity to address grievance in the future**
  - There is no increased capacity to address grievances in the future.

- **Grievance Resolution**
  - Grievances have been completely ignored.

- **Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity**
  - There has been no reduction in intensity
Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Cooperation

Water cooperation between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan is crucial in order to solve the challenges of water management and arrive at a solution which is mutually beneficial.

Improving actionable information

In response to a request from the government of Tajikistan, the World Bank conducted a Techno-Economic Assessment Study (TEAS) and an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) assessing the viability of the Rogun Dam project. However, the results of the assessments were not accepted as valid by Uzbekistan.

Resources and Materials

References with URL


Further information

https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/rogun-dam-tajikistan