The New Great Game: Water, Gas, and Oil in the South Caucasus

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and

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http://waterpartners.geo.orst.edu and

ICiWaRM - Intl. Center for Integrated Water Resources Mgmt.,
UNESCO Category II Water Centre
http://iciwarm.org
Talk Organization

- The ‘Great Game’: Old and New
- Central Asia and the South Caucasus
- Kura-Araks: Transboundary River Basin
- Sources of Conflict
- Kura-Araks: So What, Who Cares?
- South Caucasus River Monitoring Project
- Water Resource Problems; Water Quality
- Recommendations
- Concluding Remarks
- The Region’s Future?
Conference in Almaty, Kazakhstan, June 2006

“So, how does it feel to be a pawn in the new Great Game, my friend?”

--Russian water resources engineer
The Great Game: ‘Old’ vs. ‘New and Improved’

• **Old**

Strategic rivalry and competition between Russia and the British Empire for primacy in Central Asia during the 19th century.

• **New! Improved!**

Competition between the Russian-Chinese axis (SCO, et al.) and the West (USA, EU, NATO) for favor with and influence over Central Asian and South Caucasus countries, especially with respect to energy resources.
Some Differences Between ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Great Games

- Energy and its control/access are at the center of the ‘game’
- Central Asian and South Caucasian countries are not ‘passive observers’ – have ‘clout’ via energy (e.g., Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan) and other factors (terrorism)
- More players
- Individual members of each competing group do not always have aligned interests; shifting coalitions
Central Asia and the South Caucasus
The South Caucasus: A Nice Place to Visit, But...

“Handguns are acceptable; semi-automatic weapons must be checked at reception.”
-- sign on the door of the Metechi Palace Hotel, Tbilisi, Georgia

“He who shoots first, laughs last.”
-- Aleksandr Lebed
Georgian Military Highway
Kura-Araks Basin: Some Facts

- 16 million people in SC countries
- Total basin area: 188 200 km²
- Basin area in SC countries: 122 200 km²
- Kura: 1 360 km  Araks: 1 070 km
- Average Q - Kura: 575 cms  Araks: 210 cms
- Both streams rise in Turkey, join in Azerbaijan, flow to Caspian Sea
- No formal agreements among riparians regarding water allocation, quality, ecosystem maintenance
Water Supply and Wastewater - Kura-Araks

Wastewater

Receives storm water discharge and industrial and domestic sewage
- 100% of Armenia’s
- 60% of Georgia’s
- 50% of Azerbaijan’s (Az often blamed for Caspian Sea pollution—all 3 responsible)

Water Supply

• None of Armenia’s and Georgia’s drinking water, but provides most water for agricultural production and industry
  • Provides over 50% of Azerbaijan’s drinking water and 60% of its water for agricultural production
Sources of Conflict

• ‘Autonomous’ (‘breakaway’) republics – South Ossetia, Abkhazia (Georgia)
• Nagorno-Karabakh [Ar-Az]
• Javakheti (Georgia-Armenia)
• Water resources – quality/quantity
• Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (oil) and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (gas) pipelines (terrorism; Russia)
Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Kura-Araks is now a transboundary, transnational river basin with respect to the three South Caucasus republics.

Water-related problems in the Kura-Araks Basin have since been exacerbated.

It is in the region’s and (presumably) the world’s best interests to solve these problems. Why?
Why Should We Care?

HOG: Harmony, Oil, & Gas
South Caucasus River Monitoring Project
NATO Science for Peace Programme
(1 November 2002 – 31 December 2008)

Partner Country Project Director (PPD)
Prof. Nodar Kekelidze, Georgia

Partner Country Co-Directors
Dr. Armen Saghatelyan, Armenia
Dr. Bahruz Suleymanov, Azerbaijan

NATO Project Director (NPD)
Prof. Michael E. Campana, USA

NATO Project Co-Directors
Prof. Freddy Adams, Belgium
Prof. Eiliv Steinnes, Norway
Project Overall Objectives

• Build trust and establish the social and technical infrastructure for a transboundary, cooperative, and transparent water resources management agreement among the Republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia

• Train young scientists

• Build capacity in surface water quality and quantity monitoring

• Promote transparency (especially data)

http://www.kura-araks-natosfp.org
Project Goal

Have technical cooperation “diffuse upward” to the highest levels of government in each republic, leading to transparency, peace and stability (and uninterrupted flows of gas and oil)
Water Resource Problems

- Water quantity
- Water quality
- Land/ecosystem degradation
- Effects of climate change
- Poor management and regulation
- Infrastructure decrepit or lacking
- Corruption
Water Quality
Types of Pollution

- Sediments from erosion due to deforestation and poor land-use practices
- Heavy metals from mining and industry
- Discharge of untreated sewage and industrial waste
- Nitrogen, phosphorus from agriculture
- Pathogenic organisms
- Radionuclides
- POPs – Persistent Organic Pollutants (pesticides, etc.)
# Metals: Maximum Concentrations ($\mu$g/L)

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Recommendations

• Establish committee to coordinate various projects
• Form basin commission to provide water resources coordination
• Develop “shared vision” model
• Update country water codes, allowing for changes in light of new information/changing conditions
• Manage water quantity, water quality, land use, and ecosystem health simultaneously
• Stakeholder involvement – watershed councils
• Continue to address non-water problems that could lead to conflict (biggest: Nagorno-Karabakh)
Concluding Remarks

- Understand the *geopolitical* context
- Like it or not, you are often viewed through the lens of “nationalism”
- If you are on a project funded by a national government, a regional security organization, an NGO, PVO, etc. you are often seen as a representative of that organization and *its philosophy.*
- Be cognizant of the “Ugly American” syndrome
- Enjoy the New Great Game!
The Region’s Future?

“The optimist learns English.
The pessimist learns Chinese.
The realist learns Kalashnikov.”

-- Dr. Armen Saghatelyan
Thank You!

(Kura River, Tbilisi)
Sources


