

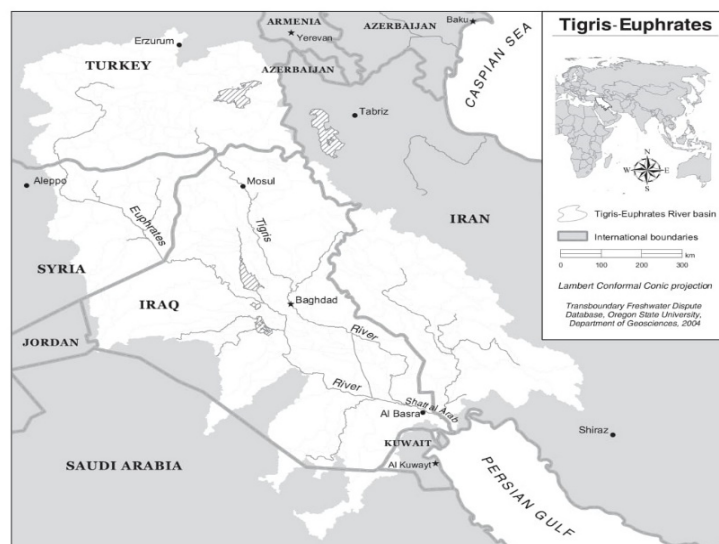
## Hydro-Hegemony: The weaponization of water

Our introduction to water is as old as our existence. The human civilization started its journey in full swing once our ancestors settled along the riverside for the sake of agriculture. Since then, it was a long course of actions centering around water which redefined our economy, politics, culture, and society. Along with all its boon, water is also a powerful weapon for those who believe in hegemony irrespective of justice, logic, and humanity. Transboundary rivers are burning examples of the powerful tussle among the nations and often the problem tends to shape the regional geopolitics. Noted examples can be drawn from the middle east countries around the Tigris-Euphrates river basin, and South east Asian countries around Mekong river basin.

The Tigris-Euphrates basin spans across six countries including Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Turkey, Syria and Saudi Arabia. The river water is the backbone of the flourishing human settlement in the region. Along prosperity, water acted as key player to establish political supremacy in the region from historical past. It has both the use of weapon and target as and when required.

Water related infrastructures like, pipelines, reservoir, pumping and distribution systems, sanitation are strategic targets for conflicting parties to suppress the opponents. Attacks on the Kuwait's water supply and wastewater infrastructure (early 1990, first Persian Gulf war), capture of the Tishrin Dam on Euphrates river (November-December 2012, Syrian civil war), air attack on Raqqa city water plant and water supply system (November – December 2014) or destruction of desalination plant near Mocha, Yemen (January 2016) are few instances of targeting water for casualty. Similarly, intentional flood, disruption in agricultural and hydropower production and interruption in drinking water availability are few of the common war strategies rival groups follow to gain control over the area of interest.

The scenario is different in Mekong river basin in south-east Asia. Mekong, the 12th largest river on earth is originated from the Tibetan plateau of China and passes through Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam before reaching to the South China Sea. It is one of the richest



biologically diverse river basins and life support for ~60 million people at the downstream countries. The conflict on sharing Mekong's water started when China as an upstream country initiated mega dam projects on Mekong River for hydroelectricity generation, water storage and navigation. A total of 11 mega dams proposed on the Chinese side of the river already created a noticeable change in the availability of water in the downstream region during dry season. Apart from water, excessive dredging for navigation at the upstream region deprives the downstream areas of nutrient rich sediments essential for aquatic life and agriculture. These moves are alarming for the downstream countries as the hydro-hegemony over the Mekong seems to affect greatly the riverine ecosystem as well as livelihood of the people.

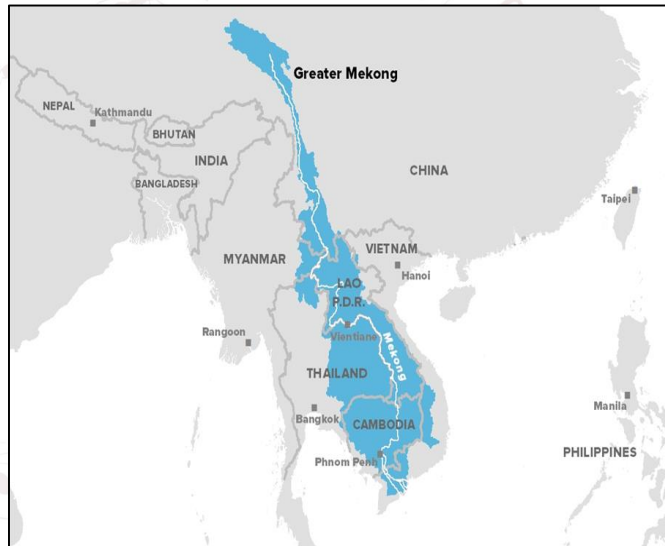


Image: <https://transboundarywaters.science.oregonstate.edu/content/tigris-euphrates-river-basin> (Tigris-Euphrates river basin), <https://www.conservation.org/places/greater-mekong> (Mekong river basin)

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