

A Study on International River Conflict: Turkey and the Harmon Doctrine

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Water is a special resource. There is no complete substitute for water. Water is essential for very wide purposes, ranging from human existence, environmental conservation, economic development to national security and so on. Because water is such a vital resource, it can become an international issue. In many parts of the world, there are many countries facing severe water scarcity, sometimes leading to conflict over international rivers. This problem has been so widely recognized that a high-rank officer of the World Bank made a comment in 1995, "War of the next century will be over water."

Fear of such a conflict is getting larger as the major ways of using river have changed from navigational use to non-navigational ones (ex. dam, water diversion for a large irrigation system, etc.). With high probability, the latter can do more harm than the former to the water quantity and water quality in the downstream countries. Especially, when an upstream country develops river on the notion called the Harmon doctrine, conflict of interests between riparian countries tends to be acute.

The Harmon doctrine means that each riparian country has exclusive sovereignty over the part of the international river which exists within its territory. This notion implies that an upstream country has the right to do whatever it chooses with the water within its territory regardless of the effect on other riparian countries. So it is often called "the logic of upper riparian countries."

But there are controversies over whether there have been any practices of the doctrine. Such a controversy appears over the management of the Euphrates-river. This presentation focuses on Turkey's management policy of the Euphrates-river and shows that the policy is based on the Harmon doctrine.