

THE WATER ISSUE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS: THE ROLE OF THE EUPHRATES AND TIGRIS IN TÜRKİYE-İRAK RELATIONS

ORTADOĞU'DA SU SORUNU VE SINIRAŞAN SULAR: TÜRKİYE-İRAK İLİŞKİLERİNDE FIRAT VE DİCLE'NİN ROLÜ

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ABSTRACT

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Sınıraşan Sular,
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Water issues in the Middle East significantly influence the region's geopolitical, economic, and environmental balance. Türkiye aims to promote regional development, energy production, and sustainable water management through projects on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. However, these initiatives have raised concerns in Iraq over water access and agricultural productivity. Committed to fair and optimal use of transboundary waters, Türkiye has occasionally postponed its projects to address neighboring countries' concerns. Nevertheless, Iraq's infrastructural deficiencies, inefficient water use, and climate change effects exacerbate its water crisis. Political tensions and historical disputes further complicate the situation. Effective management of the Euphrates and Tigris through cooperative mechanisms is crucial for sustaining peace between Türkiye and Iraq, and ensuring regional stability. Mutual trust and transparent dialogue are necessary to overcome challenges. The study explores the need to view water as a means of cooperation rather than conflict, analyzing the issue from historical and contemporary perspectives.

ÖZ

Ortadoğu'da su sorunu, bölgenin jeopolitik, ekonomik ve çevresel dengelerini belirleyen kritik bir meseledir. Türkiye, Fırat ve Dicle nehirleri üzerindeki projeleri aracılığıyla bölgesel kalkınmayı, enerji üretimini ve sürdürülebilir su yönetimini hedeflerken, bu uygulamalar Irak'ta su erişimi ve tarımsal üretim açısından ciddi endişeler uyandırmaktadır. Türkiye, sınıraşan suların adil ve optimum kullanımını esas alan politikaları doğrultusunda, zaman zaman projelerini komşu ülkelerin talepleri doğrultusunda ertelerek uzlaşma arayışına girmiştir. Buna karşın, Irak'ın mevcut altyapı eksiklikleri, suyun verimli kullanımındaki yetersizlikler ve iklim değişikliğinin etkileri, su krizinin derinleşmesine neden olmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Fırat ve Dicle nehirlerinin etkin yönetimi için iki ülke arasında yapıcı bir işbirliği mekanizması geliştirilmesi, hem Türkiye-İrak ilişkilerinde kalıcı barışın sağlanması hem de bölgesel istikrarın temini açısından elzemdir. Bu durum, iki ülkenin politikaları, ekonomik çıkarları ve çevresel stratejileri arasındaki uyumsuzlukları gözler önüne sererken, bölgesel istikrarın sağlanması için kapsamlı ve çok boyutlu çözümlerin geliştirilmesini gerektirmektedir. Çalışmada, suyun çatışma yerine işbirliği aracı olarak değerlendirilmesinin gerekliliği tarihsel ve güncel boyutlarıyla ele alınmaktadır.

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Introduction

Türkiye has historically played a significant role in managing and utilizing the water resources of the Euphrates and Tigris basins. However, this role has also brought along various disputes with Iraq regarding the sharing of water. In this context, there has been a long-standing difference of opinion between the two countries, especially on how the dam and irrigation activities under the Southeastern Anatolia Project affect the amount of water reaching Iraq.

Türkiye has adopted the principles of “equitable, reasonable, and optimal utilization” in the management of water resources and has chosen to use water as a tool for developing cooperation and peaceful solutions in its relations with neighboring countries rather than as a source of conflict. However, these policies have not always produced the expected impact. The issue of fair and sustainable water sharing is one of the main points of contention between the two countries. While the Euphrates and Tigris rivers are used by Türkiye as part of its regional development goals for economic growth, energy production, and agricultural irrigation, for Iraq, these rivers play a vital role in meeting agricultural production and drinking water needs. Therefore, disputes over water sharing have gone beyond being merely an environmental issue and have turned into a factor directly affecting the socio-economic and political stability of the region.

Given the issue of transboundary waters, Iraq asserts that it possesses historical rights over these rivers by referring to past irrigation practices and existing infrastructure investments. Among the arguments emphasized by the country are the claims that the Euphrates and the Tigris are not transboundary but international rivers, that Türkiye’s dam and hydroelectric power plant projects cause harm to Iraq, and that these two rivers belong to separate basins. Furthermore, Iraq seeks to gain a diplomatic advantage against Türkiye by bringing the matter before international organizations such as the United Nations and argues that Türkiye should conclude an agreement with Iraq on this matter (Akbaş & Mutlu 2012, pp. 221-225). Such situations occasionally lead to tensions between the two countries.

Water scarcity in the Middle East is not only due to the physical insufficiency of water. Structural issues such as inadequate infrastructure for efficient water management, political instability and lack of trust between countries further complicate the situation. Particularly, as transboundary water resources directly affect the interests of different countries, the importance of water in regional political and diplomatic relations is significantly heightened. The lack of a fully established, permanent cooperation mechanism for the fair and effective management of water resources between Türkiye and Iraq deepens the regional water crisis. In this context, developing effective cooperation mechanisms for the management and sharing of transboundary waters is crucial for solving the water crisis in the region and ensuring lasting peace.

This study examines the issues of water sharing and management between Türkiye and Iraq considering both historical and contemporary dimensions, and explores the strategic role of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers in the relations between the two countries. Türkiye’s water management policies, particularly the dams and irrigation projects carried out under the Southeastern Anatolia Project, contribute to regional development goals. However, this has also led to challenges for Iraq in accessing water. The study delves into the strategic importance of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, and the role of water in the relations between regional countries. It focuses on how water can be viewed as a tool for cooperation and peace rather than a source of conflict.

Methodologically, this research adopts a qualitative approach in the form of a policy analysis, aiming to interpret and contextualize the complex dynamics of water-related diplomacy and strategy. The scope of the study is limited to analyzing the role of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers within the framework of water security challenges in the Middle East, specifically in the context of Türkiye-Iraq relations.

Given the critical role of water in ensuring peace and stability in the region, the study concludes that international cooperation mechanisms for the fair, sustainable, and effective management of transboundary waters must be strengthened.

The Water Issue as a Threat in the Middle East

Water is one of the rapidly depleting resources and one of the most challenging elements in meeting humanity’s basic needs. Particularly in the Middle East, the strategic importance of water stands out significantly. When combined with the rapid population growth, the scarcity of water resources and their uneven distribution in the

region, water has become a strategic resource. While the Middle East is primarily seen as an oil source by countries outside the region, water plays a much more critical role for the regional states (Kapan, 2006, pp. 36-37). In this context, discussions on the management and sharing of water bring up an issue that is not only local but also internationally significant. The scarcity of water resources directly affects the political dynamics and relations in the region, increasing the potential for conflict.

The conflict over water resources in the Middle East essentially has two critical dimensions and sources. The first is the difference in the technical and political stances; attitudes between actors regarding the insufficiency of water resources and the measurement of their quantity. The second is the absence of established, agreed-upon international legal rules pertaining to the sharing of water resources and the politicization of the issue by the actors.

Recent research highlights the critical state of water resources in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Studies on managed aquifer recharge indicate that by 2050, water budget deficits could reach approximately 190% in Yemen, 90% in Libya, and 45% in Egypt (Ajjur & Baalousha, 2021). In addition, an assessment of water use across Arab countries shows that more than half of renewable water resources have already been exploited and that average renewable water availability per capita is only about 1,200 m³ per year, far below the global mean (Hindiye et al., 2023). At a country level, extreme scarcity is reported for the Arabian Peninsula, with Kuwait having merely 7 m³ per capita annually and the United Arab Emirates 33 m³ per capita, both well below the 500 m³ absolute scarcity threshold (Odhiambo, 2017).

Beyond these country-level findings, broader regional assessments reveal that the renewable surface water volume in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries is approximately 4.14 billion m³ while the capacity of desalinated water stands at around 26.4 billion m³. Satellite-based analyses further indicate an average annual decline of 1.86 cm in groundwater levels between 2002 and 2015, posing a significant threat to the long-term sustainability of existing resources. Projections for 2050 suggest that annual water demand across the MENA region will reach 393 billion m³ while total water supply will decline by 12%, to result in an estimated deficit of about 199 billion m³. Considerable discrepancies between data sources regarding the volume and availability of water in the region contribute to persistent uncertainty while disputes among states over the allocation of transboundary water resources remain acute (Saltürk, 2006; Droogers et al., 2012; Bozorg-Haddad et al., 2020; Sherif et al., 2023). These combined factors indicate that water scarcity has evolved beyond an environmental problem into a strategic issue in international relations, with water becoming an increasingly sensitive driver of competition among the countries of the region. Water scarcity and water stress have been among the significant issues negatively affecting humanity throughout history. Many conflicts have occurred over water resources since the dawn of civilization, and the likelihood of such conflicts occurring in the future remains high. This strategic resource can be transformed into a cooperation element if countries develop joint water management on the international level. However, the fact that water has the potential to lead to conflicts should not be overlooked. The water issue can sometimes be used as an excuse in the international arena, but it can also directly serve as a cause for war. The dimensions of these problems are more clearly revealed by the current levels of water stress. For example, the increase in countries experiencing water stress further elevates the urgency of this issue on a global scale.

The Middle East is facing a chronic scarcity of water resources. Data from 2020 onward, presented in the Water Conflict Chronology published by the Pacific Institute, demonstrate that limited access to water in countries such as Syria, Israel, Lebanon, Iran, and Iraq has contributed to both internal conflicts and international tensions. Water-related conflicts in the Middle East are emerging as reflections of the region's existing political instability and ecological fragility. The control of water resources manifests itself particularly through cyberattacks and armed confrontations. For instance, in countries like Israel, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen, water resources have been used both as a trigger for conflict and as a direct weapon. In some Middle Eastern countries, cyberattacks targeting water infrastructure reveal that the forms of conflict are diversifying not only physically but also digitally. The primary causes of these conflicts include drought exacerbated by climate change, the destruction of water infrastructure, inadequate local governance, and the strategic use of water as a tool of power. According to the data, there has been an increase not only in incidents where water resources are directly targeted, but also in local tensions arising from limited access to water (Pacific

Institute, 2025). This situation demonstrates that water has become not merely a natural resource but also a strategic instrument of power and a security issue.

Water resource usage in the Middle East is one of the significant factors contributing to increased tension and instability. The insufficiency of water resources in the region has the potential to lead to water-based conflicts in the future. Rivers and groundwater, which cross multiple national borders and are of vital importance for these countries, make regional cooperation in water management essential. This cooperation between countries can significantly contribute to the well-being of the people in the region. Effective water management plays a critical role in ensuring stability in the Middle East. Water scarcity and water stress pose serious threats to the countries in the region. Therefore, cooperation should be established instead of conflict. International incentives and sponsorships should be considered to develop cooperation mechanisms for quick and sustainable solutions (Sınmaz, 2023).

Disagreements over the use and sharing of transboundary waters carry the potential to lead to conflicts in the Middle East. The water issue can not only be a direct cause of war, but can also trigger or further deepen existing problems between states (Akbaş & Cumbul, 2021, pp. 120-121). However, there is no alternative to water. Therefore, countries with water resources gain significant strategic and economic power.

When examining examples of cooperation on the use of transboundary waters in the Middle East, it is evident that agreements have generally remained at the bilateral or trilateral level. A comprehensive agreement that includes riparian countries (Türkiye, Syria, and Iraq) and aims for the integrated management of water resources has not yet been achieved. The reasons for the inability to establish such an agreement include ongoing conflicts in the region, issues of trust between countries, difficulties in data collection and sharing, ineffective water management, a lack of sufficient awareness of the water issue and the reluctance of states to cooperate. These factors have led to the deepening of problems related to water management (Maden, 2015).

The Middle East region is significantly affected by climate change due to global warming. In this context, it is predicted that Türkiye, which is not rich in water resources, may also be among the countries to experience water stress in the future. To address this issue, Türkiye has launched a national water efficiency campaign and regularly releases water from dams to neighboring countries, even during drought periods. This attitude demonstrates Türkiye's humanitarian approach to the water issue and its efforts to avoid harming neighboring countries. Türkiye, taking into account the adverse effects of climate change on water resources, is aware of the importance of developing joint solutions based on cooperation with neighboring countries. Viewing this approach as a bridge to strengthen regional relations, Türkiye highlights the importance of developing integrated basin management strategies for the protection and sustainable use of water resources (Tarhan, 2024). In this regard, Türkiye's efforts to cooperate with other countries in the region on water management are also noteworthy.

Since 1980, Türkiye has taken various steps to cooperate with Iraq and Syria on water resources in the Euphrates and Tigris basins. In this context, cooperation mechanisms such as the Joint Technical Committee and the 1987 Protocol have been established, and Türkiye demonstrated an open policy for cooperation with its three-stage plan presented in 1984. Türkiye has not used water resources as a tool for conflict and has not considered them as a precondition in foreign policy. Türkiye's policy of transboundary waters is based on the principles of equitable, reasonable, and optimal use of water resources (Maden, 2015).

Türkiye's relations with Iraq being examined, the issue of filling the Ilisu Dam came to the forefront during the Maliki era, and this was used by Iraq as a precondition. The memorandum signed in 2009 could not be implemented during this period. After the Maliki era, the resolution of water issues through a cooperative approach was once again put on the agenda. Türkiye has always supported cooperation on water issues and, in this context, has taken significant steps with Iraq. In 2014, Türkiye and Iraq updated the memorandum signed in 2009, but no progress was made in practice (Maden, 2019). In this context, Türkiye's stance that water should be used as a tool for cooperation has brought potential opportunities for resolving water issues in the region.

Water issue has become a serious threat for the countries in the Middle East. This matter now holds an important place in the countries' policies, both as a public issue and in terms of foreign policy. Like many other areas, the countries in the Middle East are also lagging behind in terms of infrastructure, which has the potential to cause significant political and social problems. Water is of vital importance in basic areas such as nutrition

and energy; and therefore, the issue carries both opportunities and threats on national and transboundary levels. The countries in the Middle East should not only take effective measures on political, religious, and social matters, but also address water resources with proper planning (Çetin, 2018). At this point, every step taken toward solving the water problem has the potential to increase the stability and prosperity of the regional countries.

President Erdoğan's visit to Iraq in 2024 heralded the beginning of a new era in terms of cooperation on water issues. This development is extremely important for the region, as the fair and sustainable use of water resources plays a critical role in enhancing stability and prosperity in the Middle East. With Erdoğan's visit, significant steps were taken to strengthen regional cooperation and to manage transboundary water resources more effectively. This new era offers a significant opportunity for developing joint solutions to the water crisis by reinforcing trust between countries (Karaman, 2024). Erdoğan's visit to Iraq in 2024 holds strategic importance in the context of water issues in the Middle East. The Euphrates and Tigris rivers are vital water sources for both Türkiye and Iraq, and the management of these rivers has always played a critical role in regional stability and cooperation. Türkiye, due to its upstream position in the basin, is a key actor affecting the flow of water. This situation represents both a power element and a responsibility. With Erdoğan's visit, water cooperation between the two countries has gained a new dimension, and significant steps have been taken for the sustainable and equitable management of transboundary water resources. Water management not only has environmental but also political and security dimensions; therefore, such cooperation has the capacity to prevent the water crisis in the region from turning into conflicts and to enable the development of joint solutions. This visit also demonstrates Türkiye's commitment to water diplomacy and its determination to strengthen cooperation in support of regional peace and development.

The Strategic Role and Critical Importance of Water in Türkiye-Iraq Relations

The water issue has begun to attract more attention among the countries in the region with the commencement of the Southeastern Anatolia Project. Türkiye's start of water retention for dams has led to reactions from the riparian countries. This project has not yet been completed, and parallel to this, the objections of the riparian states continue (Akbaş, 2015, p. 103).

Iraq opposed to the construction of the Ilisu Dam and Hydroelectric Power Plant within the framework of the Southeastern Anatolia Project during its construction phase. Türkiye had planned to begin water reservation in the Ilisu Dam, which was ready to store water, but upon Iraq's request, this process was postponed. Adopting the principle of not causing harm to its neighbors, Türkiye refrained from retaining water in order not to put Iraq, which was facing a water shortage in the summer of 2018, in a difficult position, and decided to delay the process. In contrast, during the same period, Iran almost completely cut off the water from all the tributaries of the Tigris River and ignored the reactions to this situation. Therefore, the water policies of Türkiye and Iran regarding the water issues faced by Iraq need to be evaluated separately (Kılıç, 2018, p. 10).

Türkiye, while implementing its projects on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, aims to ensure that water resources are used in a sufficient and fair manner for all countries in the region. In this context, Türkiye adopts an approach based on mutual respect and goodwill with neighboring countries regarding water sharing. Türkiye's investments within the scope of the Southeastern Anatolia Project are of strategic importance in terms of regional development and sustainable water management. Furthermore, dams and hydroelectric power plants not only increase energy production, but also mitigate the effects of natural disasters such as floods and droughts. Türkiye's effective management of water resources allows it to take various measures to avoid harming neighboring countries, even during periods of water scarcity. For instance, Türkiye demonstrated its goodwill regarding water management by postponing the start of water retention in the Ilisu Dam at Iraq's request. Such constructive steps pave the way for the development of water cooperation between the two countries and highlight Türkiye's determination to ensure regional stability. These initiatives also demonstrate that Türkiye is a responsible actor in water issues both on the national and regional levels.

International law regarding water issues is still in a developmental phase, and there is no binding water-sharing agreement among the parties (Kılıç, 2018, p. 4). Water relations between Türkiye and Iraq began with the "Treaty of Friendship and Good Neighborliness" dated 29 March 1946 and its attached protocol. This process

continued with Türkiye's commitment to provide support for flood control and the regulation of water flow. The "Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation", signed on 7 February 1976, also contributed to this process. A significant turning point in the sharing of the Euphrates-Tigris waters was the protocol signed between Türkiye and Syria on 17 July 1987, in which Türkiye agreed to release an annual average of 500 m³/s of water to Syria. Following this protocol, Syria and Iraq agreed in 1990 to allocate 58% of this water to Iraq. With the "Memorandum of Understanding on Water", signed in 2009 among Türkiye, Iraq, and Syria, technical cooperation was envisaged on issues such as basin-based water management, water quality, and "the polluter pays" principle. These memoranda of understanding were signed by the relevant water ministries of the parties and aimed to establish cooperation on transboundary waters on an institutional basis (Maden, 2013).

Cooperation between Türkiye and Iraq on the use of transboundary waters has gained a new dimension with the "Framework Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Water," signed in 2024. This agreement, signed in Baghdad on 22 April 2024 and valid for ten years, aims to enhance cooperation and data sharing concerning the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. The agreement includes joint projects in areas such as the modernization of irrigation systems, wastewater treatment, flood control, and combating drought. Within this framework, joint technical committees have been established, and data sharing has commenced. Furthermore, as of 2025, Türkiye has increased the daily volume of water released to Iraq to 420 m³/s (Ina, 2025). However, Iraqi officials argue that the amount of water released is sometimes insufficient and that Türkiye does not fully meet its commitments. The deputy Director of the Mosul Dam Project, Muhammad Khalid, stated to *The New Region*: "According to media reports, we have observed about a 50% improvement in imports from Türkiye over the past two days. This is less than expected." From Iraq's perspective, the dams built by Türkiye on the Tigris and Euphrates are perceived to reduce the flow of water and aggravate shortages. Following the severe drought and historically low water reserves in 2025, Iraq intensified its call for a more binding and equitable agreement. Reflecting these concerns, Prime Minister Muhammad Shia al-Sudani announced in July 2025 that Baghdad had signed a strategic agreement with Ankara to transfer Türkiye's water management model, particularly in dam and water facility projects (*The New Region*, 2025).

Iraq's transboundary water policy is primarily shaped around the "acquired rights" approach. Iraq argues that the Euphrates and Tigris rivers have historically flowed through Mesopotamian lands and that these rivers hold an indispensable role for the country's agricultural infrastructure. Based on this historical priority and geographic dependency, Iraq's extensive past irrigation and water management systems provide a legitimate basis for its claims over these waters (Kırkıcı, 2014, pp. 83-84). Indeed, Iraq contends that Türkiye's dam and water control projects on the Tigris River have significantly reduced the river's natural flow, thereby violating its "legitimate water rights" (Kibaroglu & Scheumann, 2013). Türkiye, on the other hand, argues that these projects serve not only its development goals but also indirectly benefit Iraq by regulating the seasonal flow regime and reducing natural threats such as floods and droughts.

Iraq attributes particular importance to the Tigris River in the water-sharing arrangements within the Euphrates-Tigris Basin. It is argued that these two major rivers should be assessed independently both technically and legally. Iraq's approach is based on two main reasons. First, the average annual flow volume of the Tigris River, approximately 52 billion m³, is higher than that of the Euphrates. Second, the Tigris's water sources are not limited to Türkiye alone; since it is also fed by Iran and other sub-basin regions, Iraq considers its claims over this river to be stronger (Taştekin, 2018). Within Turkish borders, particularly at the Cizre outlet, the average discharge of the Tigris is around 360 m³/s. This value can drop to as low as 55 m³/s in mid-September and rise up to 2,263 m³/s by late February. These fluctuations can be explained by decreases due to droughts at the end of summer and insufficient rainfall at the beginning of autumn, as well as increases caused by precipitation and snowmelt during winter and spring. From Cizre onwards, the Tigris forms the Türkiye-Syria border encapsulating approximately 32 km before entering Iraqi territory (Onüçyıldız et al., 2016).

When looking at Iraq's transboundary water policy, the claim that it has "acquired rights" due to its ancient irrigation systems on the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers stands out. The flow of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers into Mesopotamian lands for thousands of years has made Iraq dependent on these waters for irrigating its approximately 1.9 million hectares of agricultural land. The many irrigation facilities established to irrigate these vast agricultural areas have also led Iraq to viewing the river waters as its own right. Iraq, which opposes to the facilities Türkiye has built on the Tigris River fearing that water flow will decrease and its rights will be

compromised, is exhibiting an incorrect stance in this regard. This is because Türkiye's activities, by regulating the river's water flow, will actually serve Iraq's interests as well (Kırkıcı, 2014, p. 84).

In an interview with Anadolu Agency, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani stated, "The Tigris and Euphrates rivers are the lifeblood of Iraq." This region, known as Mesopotamia, has long been a strategic issue between Türkiye and Iraq in terms of water. Noting that there are difficulties in providing drinking water in southern provinces due to drought and water scarcity, al-Sudani said, "Our Turkish brothers have observations on water consumption methods. We have implemented new technologies in agricultural irrigation, which has positively impacted water usage. Türkiye's experience in water management is successful. Therefore, within the framework of an agreement that will last for about ten years, it is expected that the improvement of water management, new projects, and sharing of irrigation technologies will be part of the agreement. The issues concerning Iraq's share of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers will not serve either Türkiye's or the region's interests. Our shared water source is the foundation of Iraqi civilization" (Alaca, 2024).

Although relations between Türkiye and Iraq have followed a fluctuating course since 2003, positive developments are currently taking place given diplomatic ties. The visit of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Iraq on April 22, 2024, after a 12-year hiatus, is seen as a significant turning point in the strategic relations between the two countries. During the visit, nearly 30 agreements were signed on key issues such as counterterrorism, water management, and economic cooperation as well as in areas like agriculture, health, and education (NTV, 2024). These agreements indicate a strengthening of cooperation based on mutual interests. Indeed, in a statement from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was noted that "The discussions covered topics such as increasing bilateral trade, counterterrorism, and the efficient use of transboundary waters" (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

Türkiye participated in the International Water Conference held in Baghdad on March 6-7, 2023. This event was attended by senior officials from many international organizations including the United Nations and regional actors. The conference was held under various themes such as "Water for People and Nature", "Water Diplomacy and Environmental Protection", "Sustainability and Prosperity of Wetlands" and "Water Management, Information, and Innovation". In his opening speech, Iraq's Minister of Water Resources, Aun Dhiab Abdullah, highlighted that one of the biggest issues at both the regional and national levels is water scarcity, and he stated that the new Iraqi government has prioritized climate change and water issues. (SUEN, 2023). Such international conferences provide significant opportunities to raise awareness about water issues and strengthen regional cooperation. However, it is of critical importance that the decisions made and discussions held lead to tangible results on the ground in order to generate sustainable solutions.

At the Third International Water Conference, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani called for urgent international intervention to protect the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Prime Minister al-Sudani emphasized the importance of raising the low water levels in these rivers and stressed that the water issue has become a critical global matter (Milliyet, 2024). Given the pressure of water scarcity and climate change on the countries of the Middle East, it can be said that this issue can only be addressed through global cooperation. Al-Sudani's call highlights that water problems cannot be addressed solely within national borders and require a global approach. In this context, the international community and regional actors must take on greater responsibility.

In his speech at the Conference, al-Sudani stated that the extinction of this region—the cradle of civilizations and a site recognized as a World Cultural Heritage—would entail the erasure of humanity's collective memory due to water scarcity. He pointed out that Iraq shares a common past and future with the countries in the region and called for cooperation to solve the water issue. Emphasizing that the problems should be resolved through diplomacy, dialogue and cooperation, the Prime Minister expressed that Iraq is committed to taking a firm stance in this process. Iraqi officials, international representatives, and academics who participated in the conference also underscored the importance of regional cooperation and highlighted the ongoing dialogue and collaboration between Türkiye and Iraq (SUEN, 2023). The Prime Minister's call for cooperation once again reminds us of the importance of diplomacy and dialogue in resolving regional water issues. The effective and equitable management of water resources will not only be key to inter-country relations but also to regional peace and prosperity.

Transboundary Water Issues in Türkiye-Iraq Relations: Euphrates and Tigris

The first agreement covering the water issue between Iraq and Türkiye was the Turkish-Iraqi Friendship Agreement, signed in 1946. The first article of the agreement concerns the control of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. The agreement emphasizes the need to regulate the river flow to ensure proper water intake and prevent flooding during annual floods, and highlights the importance of constructing flood protection facilities on the Euphrates and Tigris branches for Iraq. In this context, it was stated that the construction of dams would have positive results for both Türkiye and Iraq. However, when it came to the implementation phase, Iraq unexpectedly adopted a different stance, leading to disputes (Sınmaz, 2017, p. 8). In other words, these agreements became insufficient over time due to changing water needs and projects, creating new tensions. Especially, the process that began with the construction of the Keban Dam led to serious tensions between the countries in the region regarding the control of water resources. During this period, the consideration of water as a strategic element also caused relations to evolve into a different dimension.

In the 1950s, Türkiye and Iraq began developing projects to make greater use of the Euphrates-Tigris basin. In the 1960s, when Türkiye started the construction of the Keban Dam, Iraq, using the profits from its oil revenues, began developing new irrigation projects. During the filling of the dams, there was a decrease in the amount of water flowing to Iraq from the Euphrates River. This marked the first tension in the Euphrates-Tigris basin. Iraq threatened Syria because of the Tabqa Dam, which led to tensions between the two countries. Saudi Arabia facilitated a resolution between the two nations. Water, which had been a technical issue in terms of neighborhood relations between Iraq, Syria and Türkiye, became one of the important factors affecting the relations between the countries. Negotiations on water issues continued irregularly until the establishment of the Joint Technical Committee in the 1980s (Maden, 2019). The Joint Technical Committee work, initiated in the 1980s, aimed to establish constructive cooperation among the three countries, but the political and diplomatic tensions of the period limited the success of these efforts. Türkiye's proposed Three-Stage Plan emerged as an important initiative aiming for the fair use of water resources.

With the commencement of the construction of the Keban Dam, a new era in relations between Türkiye, Syria, and Iraq began. This process led to occasional tensions on the international stage during the stages of the construction and water retention of the Karakaya and Atatürk dams (Kapan, 2007, p. 251). In 1980, Türkiye and Iraq decided to establish a joint committee for regular negotiations, and Syria joined this Joint Technical Committee (JTC) in 1983. However, the 1980s marked a period of increasing political tensions between Türkiye and Syria. The effects of the Cold War in the region, the Hatay issue and terrorism contributed to the escalation of tensions. In this environment, the JTC, composed of diplomats and technocrats representing the hydraulic bureaucracy from Türkiye, Syria, and Iraq, was unable to establish constructive cooperation. While Syria and Iraq focused on the sharing of the Euphrates River, Türkiye advocated for a comprehensive water management approach in line with established practices regarding transboundary waters covering the Euphrates, Tigris, and Orontes rivers (Maden, 2019).

Iraq meets a large portion of its water needs from the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, which originate in Türkiye and are considered transboundary water resources. During periods of drought caused by climate change, Iraq has frequently requested that Türkiye release more water from the Tigris River. Türkiye has not remained indifferent to these requests and has taken steps to meet Iraq's water needs. For instance, the process of water storage at the Ilisu Dam on the Tigris River has been postponed three times at Iraq's request. Türkiye continues to maintain positive water-related relations with Iraq by participating in the International Water Conferences, held in Baghdad, and responding to the country's water demands. However, with the increasing adverse effects of climate change, there is a growing need to make water usage more efficient, especially in countries like Iraq that are facing water shortages. Studies based on the Euphrates and Tigris basin predict that by 2050, water scarcity in the Middle East will have reached serious levels, and water management will have become even more challenging (Yıldız, 2024).

The Euphrates and Tigris rivers have long played a strategic and political role in Türkiye-Iraq relations. The dam and irrigation projects initiated by Türkiye have offered significant opportunities for regulating water flow and supporting development objectives. However, these projects have also raised serious concerns in Iraq, particularly regarding reduced water availability and ecological impacts. Although Türkiye emphasizes the principles of fair and sustainable use in both its diplomatic discourse and implementation, the practical outcomes

of these principles have not always been considered sufficient by Iraq. For example, Türkiye's decision to postpone the filling of the Ilisu Dam in response to Iraq's requests is often presented as a sign of flexibility. Nevertheless, such gestures can also be interpreted within the broader context of the asymmetric power dynamics between upstream and downstream riparian states. Ultimately, the management of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers remains a sensitive issue that requires mutual trust and balanced cooperation between the two countries.

Türkiye generally frames its water policies within the principles of "equitable, reasonable, and optimal utilization", presenting this discourse as a tool for fostering regional cooperation. However, the international literature also highlights the limitations of this approach. Kibaroglu and Scheumann (2013) argued that Türkiye's early water development projects in the Euphrates-Tigris basin prioritized domestic development goals, thereby delaying multilateral cooperation efforts at the regional level. Similarly, Zeitoun and Mirumachi (2008) suggest that Türkiye has used its strategic upstream position to maintain a form of "hydro-hegemony" through technically oriented but non-binding cooperation mechanisms. Zawahri and Mitchell (2011) emphasize that the preference of states like Türkiye for bilateral agreements over multilateral basin-wide governance models hampers the establishment of a holistic and integrated water management regime. While these critiques acknowledge the constructive steps Türkiye has taken in water diplomacy, they also point to persistent structural challenges in building a transparent, trust-based, and sustainable regional water governance framework.

From the perspective of international law, another key critique of Türkiye's transboundary water policy concerns its legal stance regarding watercourses. At the core of this critique is Türkiye's classification of the Euphrates and Tigris as "transboundary" rather than "international" rivers under a sovereignty-based framework. In line with this position, Türkiye has not become a party to the 1997 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (UNWC), thus distancing itself from multilateral water law regimes. Scholars such as McCaffrey (2001) and Salman (2007) argue that Türkiye's interpretation of the equitable utilization principle grounded in its upstream position does not fully align with evolving international norms, which emphasize cooperation, no-significant-harm obligations and data-sharing duties. Meanwhile, Iraq advocates for doctrines such as "acquired rights" and the prioritization of downstream states, which conflict with Türkiye's legal approach. These divergent legal perspectives have hindered the establishment of a binding legal regime in the Euphrates-Tigris basin and continue obstructing efforts to build a comprehensive, sustainable framework for cooperative water governance.

The Euphrates and Tigris rivers have been the lifeblood of Mesopotamia for thousands of years, playing a vital role in the development of civilizations in the region. Today, these rivers have become a critical area of crisis due to increasing water demand, climate change and political tensions between countries. Türkiye, as the source country of the rivers, implements dam and irrigation projects that are closely monitored with concern, particularly by Iraq, the downstream state. Iraq argues that declines in both the quantity and quality of water pose threats not only to its economy but also to its social and environmental security (Al-Ansari, 2013). Therefore, the joint management and equitable sharing of river basins occupy a significant place on Iraq's foreign policy agenda.

On the Iraqi side, there are criticisms that the flow of water in the Euphrates and Tigris rivers has been reduced unilaterally by Türkiye's projects, causing adverse effects on Iraq's water security, agriculture and ecological balance. It is reported that the amount of water reaching Iraq has decreased by 30-40% due to the dams constructed under Türkiye's Southeastern Anatolia Project. Furthermore, this situation is argued to threaten the drying up of vital waterways such as the Shatt al-Arab. Iraq continues demanding a sustainable and cooperative water management system, criticizing Türkiye's lack of data sharing, the absence of joint basin management mechanisms and its refusal to engage in equitable sharing based on international law (Sharqi, 2023). Additionally, Tobias von Lossow from the Clingendael Institute highlights that the time window to address these water challenges is rapidly closing. He warns that without urgent regional cooperation and reforms, critical waterways like the Shatt al-Arab are risked to dry up completely. Von Lossow emphasizes the need for Iraq to improve its internal water management, adopt modern irrigation techniques and reform agricultural practices to adapt to the worsening water scarcity. However, he stresses that such efforts will likely fall short unless supported by effective transboundary water diplomacy and cooperation among all riparian states (Gavlak, 2022).

Despite these developments, the inefficacy and lack of long-term sustainability of platforms such as the Joint Technical Committee, established between Türkiye and Iraq, have raised criticisms regarding institutional inadequacy. Analyses of water management structures in the Euphrates-Tigris basin indicate that Türkiye's cooperation with Iraq has predominantly focused on bilateral, limited technical consultations without demonstrating a commitment to establishing a comprehensive legal framework. Furthermore, the existing protocols are considered insufficiently preventive against long-term threats such as drought, climate change, and water scarcity, reflecting a lack of technical capacity and strategic vision (Kibaroglu & Scheumann, 2013).

In the 21st century, water has emerged as a strategic resource integral to national security and sustainable development. Countries view access to water as vital for protecting national interests, with scarcity influencing security policies and sometimes increasing conflict risks. Unlike replaceable energy resources, water's irreplaceable nature makes a state's ability to secure it essential for its social, economic and political stability (Veli, 2006, pp.14-15). The Euphrates River is one of Türkiye's rivers with the highest water discharge, and it is a key source for irrigation and hydroelectric energy production. With an average discharge of 909 m³/s, the Euphrates forms the main water source of Türkiye's largest regional development project, the Southeastern Anatolia Project. The river is fed by many smaller streams including the Karasu (Western Euphrates) and Murat streams. The primary source of the Euphrates is in Türkiye, and its middle and lower parts extend into Syria and Iraq. The Euphrates joins the Tigris River, forming the Shatt al-Arab, and eventually flows into the Persian Gulf (Akbaş, 2015, p. 100). The roots of the disputes between Türkiye and Iraq go back a long way. In this context, past agreements and treaties on transboundary waters form the foundations of current water policies. Therefore, Türkiye's water policies on this river are of great importance for both national development goals and regional water sharing.

The management of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers requires balancing Türkiye's economic development goals with Iraq's need for access to water. While Türkiye effectively uses water resources for both energy production and agricultural development through large-scale projects, it also aims to ensure that these resources reach downstream countries like Iraq in a sustainable manner. Türkiye's policy, which considers this balance, makes it possible for water to be viewed as a tool for cooperation rather than conflict for both countries. Technical discussions and joint projects aimed at meeting Iraq's water needs and ensuring regional water security reflect Türkiye's constructive approach on this matter. Such cooperation initiatives offer an opportunity to develop lasting solutions that will ensure the Euphrates and Tigris rivers serve the development goals of both countries.

The disputes that occasionally arose between Türkiye and Iraq gained a new dimension starting from 2003. However, recent diplomatic developments indicate that the relations between the two countries have progressed in a positive and stable direction. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to Iraq on April 22, 2024 is considered a turning point in Türkiye-Iraq relations. During this visit, 26 agreements were signed covering key issues such as counter-terrorism, water management and economic cooperation as well as agriculture, health and education. These agreements demonstrate that Türkiye and Iraq have strengthened their cooperation based on mutual interests in the new period (Duman, 2024).

Türkiye contributes to the development of various actions aimed at the efficient use of water and minimizing water losses in Iraq. It is also known that the private sector is ready to support Iraq with irrigation systems and equipment that save water. Additionally, training and practical programs for Iraqi irrigation engineers and technicians are being organized. Türkiye's assistance in water management and the continued technical project and implementation support have led to positive developments in the relations between the two countries (Yıldız, 2024). In the Middle East region, the positive trend of water cooperation, which avoids conflict, will benefit not only these two actors but all the stakeholders in the region.

Conclusion

The Middle East has long been grappling with a deep water crisis due to the scarcity of water resources and persistent disputes over their management. In addition to physical scarcity, the region's water crisis is also driven by governance deficiencies, technological inadequacies, and political distrust. As a result, water-related issues have become strategic concerns that extend beyond bilateral relations and directly impact regional security. The transboundary nature of water resources and the differing approaches of states have transformed water from a

technical matter into a geopolitical issue. One of the most significant examples of this transformation is the ongoing water-sharing debates between Türkiye and Iraq over the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. Therefore, every step taken in the management of water resources bears the potential to produce consequences with both environmental and security dimensions.

The water regime centered around the Euphrates and Tigris rivers possesses the capacity to play a decisive role in shaping the future of the Middle East. Unless mechanisms are established to manage the crisis, water will become a factor that deepens the prevailing climate of mistrust. However, the transformation of water into a security threat is not inevitable. As long as political will, institutional harmony, technical capacity and diplomatic stability can be ensured, water may turn into a tool for cooperation. In this context, water should be regarded as both a challenge and a strategic opportunity within Türkiye-Iraq relations.

Türkiye's water policy functions as a strategic instrument of foreign policy at the regional level. Relations shaped around the Euphrates and Tigris rivers encompass both historical continuity and institutional fragility. In Türkiye-Iraq relations, the water issue has evolved beyond a technical problem and become a field of political negotiation. The legal approaches of the parties clash based on international norms and bilateral agreements. Türkiye adopts a sovereignty-oriented stance while Iraq constructs a rights-based discourse grounded in historical usage and its status as a downstream state.

Türkiye does not perceive water as a source of conflict. Acting as a responsible regional actor, Türkiye regards water as a means of cooperation. The decision to postpone water retention in the Ilisu Dam is a concrete indication of this understanding. Türkiye's investments in dams and irrigation are not solely aimed at its own development goals. These investments also contribute to Iraq by helping to regulate the regional water regime. However, Iraq's institutional weaknesses of water management, infrastructure deficiencies and agricultural inefficiencies limit the impact of Türkiye's efforts.

Since the 2000s, it can be said that the water issue has been addressed within a more stable diplomatic framework in Türkiye-Iraq relations. Türkiye has shown increased flexibility in recent years. Iraq's expectations, on the other hand, have leaned toward greater institutionalization and a binding framework. The agreements signed in 2024 can be considered a significant step toward institutionalizing technical cooperation between Türkiye and Iraq. The enhancement of technical capacity related to water resource management supports collaboration. Increases in Türkiye's water releases and initiatives for joint projects have the potential to foster mutual trust. However, Iraq needs to actively participate in this process and adopt a responsibility-based approach rather than relying solely on a rights-based discourse.

Iraq's dependency on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers is considerable in terms of both agricultural production and access to drinking water. Water management in Iraq is hindered not only by infrastructural shortcomings but also by a fragmented governance structure. Ongoing political instability and administrative weaknesses obstruct effective water management. Inefficient water use in agriculture, unauthorized water distribution and the lack of coordination among local actors further aggravate Iraq's water crisis. Increasing the quantity of water supplied from Türkiye cannot, on its own, resolve these structural issues. This situation demonstrates that water management is as crucial as water availability. Consequently, it becomes increasingly difficult to achieve sustainable outcomes from the water diplomacy conducted between the two countries. Therefore, it is imperative for both countries to establish joint technical mechanisms aimed at ensuring the sustainable and efficient use of water.

In the Middle East, access to water is not merely a matter of inter-state distribution. It also shapes transboundary security dynamics, social vulnerabilities and power projections among states. The multi-layered nature of water issues necessitates an approach that transcends conventional security paradigms. Accordingly, water management requires not only technical expertise but also diplomatic capacity, legal frameworks and the development of common norms within a holistic strategy. In this respect, Türkiye's model based on the principle of "equitable, reasonable and optimal use" holds transformative potential at the regional level owing to its infrastructure capacity, technical know-how and peaceful foreign policy orientation. The institutionalization of this model is only possible through the deepening of mutual trust, the establishment of a regional water regime, and the guidance of international law. In the long term, the success of this endeavor will depend not only on Türkiye's determination but also on Iraq's reform capacity and the level of engagement from other regional actors.

To ensure regional peace and stability, water must be managed as a strategic resource, and the goal must shift from zero-sum conflict to mutual benefit. In other words, regional countries should regard water not as an instrument of control but as a factor that reinforces interdependence. A water diplomacy approach grounded in international legal norms, open data sharing and a focus on technical capacity would strengthen the constructive basis of Türkiye-Iraq relations. A cooperation model established on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers possesses the capacity to positively influence both bilateral ties and regional balances. Ultimately, a lasting solution requires a basin-based and multilateral governance structure. International law, environmental sustainability and technical cooperation constitute the fundamental components of this structure. Otherwise, the ongoing climate crisis and demographic pressures will further exacerbate existing problems.

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The study was conducted and reported with equal collaboration among the researchers.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Türkiye ile Irak arasındaki Fırat ve Dicle havzası, bölgenin ekonomik, çevresel ve jeopolitik dinamiklerini şekillendiren stratejik su kaynaklarını barındırmaktadır. Bu su havzası, yüzyıllardır bölgedeki medeniyetler için hayati önem taşımıştır. Ancak Türkiye'nin Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi (GAP) kapsamında gerçekleştirdiği baraj ve sulama projeleriyle birlikte, iki ülke arasında suyun paylaşımı hususunda ciddi anlaşmazlıkların ortaya çıkmasına neden olmuştur. Irak, Türkiye'nin bu projeleriyle su akışını kontrol ettiğini ve bu durumun özellikle kurak dönemlerde tarımsal üretim ve içme suyu temininde ciddi sıkıntılara yol açtığını ileri sürmektedir. Buna karşın Türkiye, su kaynaklarının yönetiminde "hakça, makul ve optimum kullanım" ilkelerini esas alarak hareket ettiğini savunmakta, suyun bir çatışma unsuru olmaktan ziyade işbirliğini destekleyen bir araç olması gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır.

Her iki ülkenin su yönetimine yönelik farklı yaklaşım ve öncelikleri, Fırat ve Dicle nehirlerinin sınıraşan yapısını daha da hassas bir mesele haline getirmektedir. Türkiye, havzada yer alan suyun ekonomik kalkınma, enerji üretimi ve tarımsal sulama gibi alanlarda kullanılması gerektiğine inanmaktadır. Irak ise suyun ülke içinde tarımsal üretimin sürdürülebilirliği ve içme suyu temini açısından kritik bir kaynak olduğunu kabul etmektedir. Bu durum, suyun yalnızca doğal bir kaynak olmanın ötesine geçerek, ulusal güvenlik, ekonomik büyüme ve bölgesel istikrar açısından da hayati bir unsur haline gelmesine yol açmıştır. Her iki ülkenin de farklı su yönetim anlayışları, teknik ve politik yaklaşımları arasındaki uyumsuzluk, su paylaşımında sürekli bir gerilim kaynağı oluşturmıştır.

Bölgedeki su kıtlığı; sadece suyun doğal miktarının yetersizliğinden değil, aynı zamanda altyapı eksiklikleri, teknik yetersizlikler, siyasi istikrarsızlık ve karşılıklı güvensizlik gibi yapısal sorunlardan kaynaklanmaktadır. Su havzasının sınır ötesi özelliği, ülkelerin kendi ulusal çıkarları doğrultusunda suyun ölçümü, dağıtımı ve kullanımı hususundaki farklı tutumlarını ortaya koymaktadır. Irak, Türkiye'nin inşa ettiği barajlar nedeniyle suyun akışında meydana gelen azalmayı, kuraklık dönemlerinde ülke genelinde yaşanan su sıkıntısının temel nedenlerinden biri olarak değerlendirmektedir. Türkiye ise suyun yönetiminde uluslararası hukuk çerçevesinde hareket ettiğini ve kaynakların adil paylaşımını sağlamak amacıyla çaba gösterdiğini savunmaktadır.

Fırat ve Dicle havzasında yaşanan su krizinin boyutlarını daha da derinleştiren önemli bir faktör olarak iklim değişikliği de öne çıkmaktadır. Artan sıcaklıklar, değişen yağış rejimleri ve artan buharlaşma oranları, suyun doğal yenilenme kapasitesini olumsuz etkilemekte, su kaynaklarının uzun vadeli sürdürülebilirliğini tehlikeye atmaktadır. Bu durum, hem Türkiye hem de Irak için yeni ve zorlu stratejik planlama gerekliliklerini doğurmaktadır, mevcut su paylaşım anlaşmazlıklarını daha karmaşık bir hale getirmektedir. İklim değişikliğinin etkileri, tarım, enerji üretimi ve halk sağlığı gibi alanlarda ciddi sorunlara yol açarken, bu durum iki ülkenin uzun vadeli planlamalarında da öncelikli bir yer tutmaktadır.

Türkiye'nin GAP projeleri kapsamında gerçekleştirdiği baraj ve sulama çalışmaları, ülkenin bölgesel kalkınma hedefleriyle uyumlu bir politika olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Bu projeler, Türkiye'nin su kaynaklarını ekonomik kalkınma, enerji üretimi ve tarımsal sulama gibi alanlarda kullanma stratejisinin bir parçası olarak değerlendirilirken, aynı zamanda bölgedeki suyun yönetiminde işbirliği ve barışçıl çözüm arayışlarını da yansıtmaktadır. Örneğin, bazı barajların işletme süreçlerinde Irak'ın taleplerine belirli ölçüde yanıt verildiği, suyun paylaşımında esneklik sağlanmaya çalışıldığı gözlemlenmektedir.

Irak'ın yaşadığı su krizi sadece dış etkenlerden kaynaklanmamakta, iç dinamiklerin de önemli rol oynadığı bir meseledir. Ülkedeki siyasi istikrarsızlık, yetersiz altyapı ve eskiyen sulama teknikleri, suyun verimli kullanılmasını engelleyerek boşa harcanmasına yol açmaktadır. Modern sulama teknolojilerine yatırım yapılmaması, tarımsal üretimde verim kaybına neden olmaktadır. Ayrıca, içme suyu temini ve kamu sağlığı konularında yaşanan aksaklıklar, suyun yönetiminde acil reform gereksinimini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Irak'ın su krizinin çözümünde sadece dış kaynaklı anlaşmazlıkların giderilmesi yeterli olmayacak, ülke içindeki yapısal sorunların da ele alınması gerekmektedir.

Her iki ülkenin de su yönetimi ve paylaşımında izledikleri politikaların etkinliği, karşılıklı güvenin tesis edilememesine bağlıdır. Su kaynaklarının adil dağıtımında yaşanan anlaşmazlıkların temelinde, teknik ölçüm farkları, uluslararası hukuk normlarının eksikliği ve iki ülkenin su kullanım önceliklerinin farklılığı yatmaktadır. Özellikle, suyun sınıraşan yapısı göz önüne alındığında, her iki ülkenin de kendi ulusal çıkarlarını koruma çabaları, suyun ortak yönetimi konusunda uzun vadeli ve yapılandırılmış bir işbirliği mekanizmasının oluşturulmasını zorlaştırmaktadır.

Bölgedeki su krizinin çözümünde, taraflar arasında kapsamlı bir diyalog ve ortak stratejik planlama gerekmektedir. Türkiye ile Irak arasında oluşturulacak kalıcı işbirliği mekanizması, yalnızca mevcut sorunların çözümüne değil, aynı zamanda gelecekte yaşanabilecek su kıtlığı risklerine karşı da önleyici nitelikte olmalıdır. Bu bağlamda, ortak teknik çalışmalar, bilimsel araştırmalar ve yenilikçi teknolojilerin devreye alınması, suyun verimli kullanımını artıracak adımlar arasında yer almalıdır. İki ülkenin su kaynaklarını yöneten ilgili kurumlar arasında kurulacak düzenli istişare platformları, sorunların erken teşhisi ve çözüm önerilerinin geliştirilmesi açısından önemli bir rol oynayabilir.

Sonuç olarak, Fırat ve Dicle havzası üzerindeki su paylaşımı meselesi, iki ülkenin ulusal çıkarlarının ötesinde, bölgesel istikrar ve barış açısından kritik bir öneme sahiptir. Türkiye'nin GAP projeleri ve su yönetimi politikaları, ekonomik kalkınma ve enerji üretimi açısından önemli fırsatlar sunarken, aynı zamanda Irak'ın su güvenliği ve tarımsal üretim hedefleriyle çelişen dinamikler oluşturmaktadır. İki ülke arasında yaşanan anlaşmazlıklar, suyun yalnızca çevresel bir kaynak olmaktan çıkarak, ulusal güvenlik, ekonomik kalkınma ve halk sağlığı gibi çok boyutlu etkileri olan stratejik bir unsur haline gelmesine yol açmıştır.

Bu bağlamda, hem Türkiye'nin hem de Irak'ın, suyun sürdürülebilir ve adil kullanımını sağlamak amacıyla uzun vadeli, teknik ve diplomatik temelli işbirliği mekanizmaları geliştirmeleri kaçınılmazdır. Modern sulama tekniklerine, yenilikçi teknolojilere ve bilimsel araştırmalara dayalı stratejik planlamanın yanı sıra, kamuoyu farkındalığının artırılması ve uluslararası işbirliğinin desteklenmesi, su krizinin çözümünde temel rol oynayacaktır. Her iki ülkenin de karşılıklı güveni tesis edip, ortak çıkarlar doğrultusunda hareket etmesi; suyun bir çatışma kaynağı olmaktan çıkarılarak, bölgesel barış ve istikrarın destekleyicisi haline gelmesini sağlayabilir.

Fırat ve Dicle havzasında gerçekleştirilecek yapısal reformlar, altyapı yatırımları ve ortak yönetim projeleri, sadece mevcut krizlerin çözümüne değil, aynı zamanda gelecekte yaşanabilecek su kıtlığı risklerine karşı da dirençli bir sistemin kurulmasına katkıda bulunacaktır. Uzun vadede, suyun ortak bir kaynak olarak değerlendirilmesi, bölgedeki ekonomik, çevresel ve sosyal kalkınmanın sürdürülebilirliği açısından büyük önem arz etmektedir. Sonuç olarak, Türkiye ile Irak arasındaki su paylaşımı meselesi, kapsamlı, disiplinlerarası ve uluslararası boyutları olan bir problem olarak ele alınmalı, bu alanda geliştirilecek stratejik işbirliği modelleri, bölgesel barış ve ortak kalkınmanın temellerini güçlendirecek temel araçlardan biri olarak değerlendirilmelidir.