

ISSN: 3093-9305

VOLUME - 2

JOURNAL OF GLOBAL SCIENTIFIC INNOVATIONS



worldjournal.uz





WATER DIPLOMACY – A STRATEGIC INSTRUMENT FOR ENSURING UZBEKISTAN'S REGIONAL WATER SECURITY

Abduhakimov Anvar

“TIAME” National Research University, Faculty of Law (Jurisprudence), 2nd-year student

Ergashaliyev Mukhammadaziz

“TIAME” National Research University, Water Management and Land Reclamation, 2nd-year student

Abstract: This article provides an in-depth analysis of the water diplomacy of the Republic of Uzbekistan as a strategic instrument amid the challenges of transboundary water resource use in the Central Asian region. It examines the interrelated legal (international water law, the treaty framework, institutional mechanisms) and water-management (hyrotechnical infrastructure, irrigation systems, rational resource management, technological solutions) dimensions of the concept of water security. Particular attention is given to Uzbekistan's constructive approach since 2017, based on good-neighborliness and mutually beneficial cooperation, to bilateral and multilateral agreements, the newly revised Water Code (2025), the wide-scale introduction of water-saving technologies, the digitalization of water resource management, and the initiative to declare 2026–2036 the “Decade of Practical Action for Rational Water Use in Central Asia.” The article scientifically substantiates the role of water diplomacy in ensuring regional stability, balancing national interests, and securing long-term water security. The research findings show that water diplomacy is not merely a foreign-policy tool but a strategic mechanism inextricably linked to domestic water-sector reforms.

Keywords: water diplomacy, regional water security, transboundary water resources, Uzbekistan, Amu Darya, Syr Darya, international water law, Water Code, water-sector reforms, ICWC, IFAS, Kambar-Ata HPP, Qoshtepa Canal.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, water resources have become one of the key factors not only of economic development and food security but also of national and regional security. Global climate change, rapid population growth, industrialization, and the intensification of agriculture are sharply increasing the demand for water resources. According to the United Nations, by 2050 nearly half of the world's population could be living under conditions of water scarcity. This problem is of vital importance especially for regions located in arid and semi-arid climate zones.

The Central Asian region has distinctive characteristics in terms of water resources. The region's main water sources – the Amu Darya and Syr Darya – are transboundary in nature, with their flow forming mainly in the territory of the



upstream states (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). The downstream states – Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan – are, in turn, heavily dependent on these rivers for agriculture and the needs of their populations. Uzbekistan obtains approximately 80 percent of its water resources from neighboring states. This makes the country sensitive to the water-energy policies of the upstream states and turns the provision of water security into a strategic priority of foreign policy.

Water diplomacy is a complex process of negotiations, agreements, institutional mechanisms, and the building of an environment of trust among states aimed at ensuring fair, rational, and sustainable use of transboundary water resources. It requires the close interconnection of jurisprudence (international water law, the treaty framework, peaceful settlement of disputes) and water management (hydraulic engineering, irrigation, resource management, monitoring, and technological solutions). For this reason, the present article was written from two perspectives – legal and water-management.

The purpose of the article is to examine Uzbekistan's water diplomacy as a strategic instrument for ensuring regional water security, and to conduct an in-depth analysis of its legal foundations, practical achievements, connection with domestic water-sector reforms, and prospects. Particular attention is paid in the study to the period after 2017, since it was precisely during this period that a constructive turn occurred in Uzbekistan's foreign policy and regional water cooperation rose to a new stage.

THE CONCEPT OF WATER DIPLOMACY AND ITS THEORETICAL AND LEGAL FOUNDATIONS

The essence of the concepts of water diplomacy and water security

Water diplomacy is closely linked to the concept of “water security.” Water security is the sustainable provision of water of the necessary quantity and quality for people, sectors of the economy, and ecosystems, as well as the prevention and mitigation of water-related risks (drought, flooding, pollution). International experts consider water security along four main dimensions: availability, quality, accessibility, and stability.

Water diplomacy, in turn, is the foreign-policy instrument for ensuring water security. It encompasses not only negotiations between states but also the creation of an environment of trust, the development of mutually beneficial mechanisms, the establishment of information-exchange systems, and the strengthening of common institutional foundations. In the modern understanding, water diplomacy is also regarded as a “soft power” instrument – it reduces the likelihood of conflict and strengthens regional cooperation.



Basic principles of international water law

In international law, the basic principles relating to transboundary water resources are established in the 1997 UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses. This document affirms the following key principles:

1. The principle of equitable and reasonable utilization – every state has an equitable and reasonable share of a transboundary watercourse.
2. The principle of not causing significant harm – one state's use of water must not cause significant harm to another state.
3. Mutual consultation and exchange of information – the obligation to give prior notification of planned measures and to hold consultations.
4. Cooperation and good faith – constructive dialogue and mutual assistance between states.

In Central Asia, the main legal foundation is the Agreement on Cooperation in the Joint Management, Use, and Protection of Interstate Water Resources, signed in Almaty on 18 February 1992. On this basis, the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC) and the “Amu Darya” and “Syr Darya” river-basin water associations were established. In 1993, the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) was created. These institutions play an important role in the region in allocating water resources, monitoring, and coordinating environmental issues.

THE STATE OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATER RESOURCES IN CENTRAL ASIA AND KEY CHALLENGES

Distribution of water resources and quantitative indicators

The average long-term annual flow of the Aral Sea basin is approximately 115–116 billion cubic meters. Of this, 67–68 percent falls to the Amu Darya basin and 32–33 percent to the Syr Darya basin. Total groundwater reserves exceed 31 billion cubic meters. However, due to climate change, glacier melt, population growth, and outdated irrigation infrastructure, the actual usable volume of water has decreased significantly.

For Uzbekistan, the average long-term water-intake limit has historically been set at around 64 billion cubic meters. However, in recent decades, due to global climate change and problems in transboundary water use, actual annual water consumption has stood at around 51–53 billion cubic meters. This represents a reduction of nearly 20 percent relative to the limit. For 2025–2026, within the ICWC framework, the overall limit for the Amu Darya has been agreed at approximately 55.4 billion cubic meters (22 billion cubic meters each for Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan), with corresponding allocations agreed for the Syr Darya as well.



Key challenges and risks

The main factors threatening water security in Central Asia are as follows:

- Conflict of interests between upstream and downstream states. The upstream states (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) accumulate water in winter based on hydropower interests, while the downstream states need water during the summer growing season.
- The Qoshtepa Canal in Afghanistan. This 285-km canal could draw a significant amount of water from the Amu Darya (an estimated 15–30 percent). Afghanistan is not a party to the 1992 Almaty Agreement, which creates legal uncertainty.
- Climate change. The melting of glaciers and changes in precipitation patterns are leading to a decline in water reserves. According to some forecasts, water resources in the region could shrink by 15–20 percent by 2050.
- Aging irrigation systems. In some areas, water losses reach as much as 40 percent, which requires improving internal efficiency.
- Population growth and expansion of irrigated land. Tajikistan's plans to irrigate an additional 50,000 hectares by 2040 will create additional pressure.

UZBEKISTAN'S WATER DIPLOMACY: THE STRATEGIC SHIFT SINCE 2017

A new foreign-policy approach

Since 2017, the principles of a constructive, open, and good-neighborly foreign policy have taken priority in Uzbekistan. The fact that President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has consistently placed the water issue on the agenda at consultative meetings of Central Asian heads of state, and has put forward initiatives at the UN General Assembly, is a key marker of this direction. In 2017, at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly, the head of state expressed support for the draft convention on “the use of water resources of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya basins,” developed by the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia.

The essence of the new approach is a shift away from the logic of a “zero-sum game” toward a model of mutually beneficial cooperation. Uzbekistan's constructive position toward the upstream states' hydropower projects (including the Rogun HPP), its agreement to participate in the Kambar-Ata HPP-1 project, and the restoration of relations with Tajikistan are all practical expressions of this approach.

Key bilateral and multilateral agreements

In recent years, Uzbekistan has reached a number of important agreements with neighboring states:

- With Kyrgyzstan: joint use of the Kasansay reservoir (2017), an agreement on the Andijan reservoir (2022).



- With Tajikistan: trilateral (Uzbekistan–Kazakhstan–Tajikistan) protocols on the operating regime of the “Bakhri Tojik” reservoir, and constructive dialogue on the Rogun and Yovon HPP issues.
- Between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan: trilateral agreements on the Toktogul reservoir and the Kambar-Ata HPP-1 project (shares: Kyrgyzstan 34%, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan 33% each).
- With Kazakhstan: an intergovernmental agreement on the joint management of transboundary water facilities and the establishment of a new intergovernmental commission.

Renewal of the legal framework: the new Water Code

In 2025, the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted a newly revised Water Code. The Code consists of 6 sections, 29 chapters, and 165 articles, and has systematized the earlier Law “On Water and Water Use” along with a number of decrees and resolutions. The new Code recognizes water as national wealth, clearly regulates water-use rights, introduces public-private partnership mechanisms, strengthens the protection of water ecosystems, and provides for the interconnected management of surface and ground water. This serves to harmonize the national legal framework with international obligations and strengthens the domestic legal foundation of water diplomacy.

THE INTERCONNECTION BETWEEN WATER-SECTOR REFORMS AND DIPLOMACY

Water diplomacy is not confined to foreign policy alone. Domestic reforms create the foundation of its credibility. A state that has “put its own house in order” also appears more credible in fulfilling its external obligations. Uzbekistan is carrying out wide-ranging reforms within the framework of the Concept for the Development of the Water Sector for 2020–2030, the Water Strategy 2030, and the national concept for 2027–2050.

Water-saving technologies and efficiency

Water-saving technologies (drip irrigation, laser leveling, sprinkler irrigation, and others) are being introduced on more than 60 percent of irrigated land. More than 10 billion cubic meters of water are being saved every year. This figure is planned to reach 15 billion cubic meters by 2030. This not only eases the domestic water shortage but also strengthens Uzbekistan's position in regional negotiations – as it shows that the country has chosen the path of “efficient use of available water” rather than “demanding more water.”

Digitalization and monitoring

The digitalization of water resource management, automated accounting systems, satellite monitoring, and real-time data-exchange platforms are being introduced. This increases transparency and strengthens trust with neighboring



states. The opening of a master's program in international water diplomacy and the establishment of a competency center at the Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers (TIAME) mark a new stage in personnel training.

PROBLEMS, RISKS, AND PROSPECTS

Among the main risks, the Qoshtepa Canal, climate change, population growth, and the plans of some states to expand irrigated land occupy a special place. At the same time, Uzbekistan's initiative to declare 2026–2036 the “Decade of Practical Action for Rational Water Use in Central Asia,” proposals to develop a regional strategy, and increased activity within IFAS represent promising directions.

Going forward, the following directions will be of key importance: engaging Afghanistan in constructive dialogue (joint monitoring, information exchange, engineering assistance); strengthening energy-water exchange mechanisms; expanding joint projects with the participation of international organizations (the World Bank, UNDP, the Asian Development Bank); further improving the legal framework – strengthening binding dispute-resolution mechanisms; and developing regional water-energy consortia.

CONCLUSION

For Uzbekistan, water diplomacy is not merely a foreign-policy instrument but the strategic foundation for ensuring regional water security. It requires, on the legal side, robust treaties and institutions, and on the water-management side, effective governance, technological solutions, and coherence with domestic reforms. Experience in recent years shows that an approach based on trust, mutual benefit, and constructive dialogue serves to strengthen stability in the region.

Uzbekistan's active position is aimed not only at protecting its national interests but also at creating a model of shared prosperity for the whole of Central Asia. The success of this model depends on the states' joint political will, the fulfillment of legal obligations, and the formation of a culture of rational use of water resources. Water should not be an object of rivalry but a vehicle for cooperation. It is precisely this approach that can guarantee the region's long-term stability and security.



REFERENCES

1. Water Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan (new edition, 2025). <https://www.gazeta.uz/oz/2025/08/20/water-code--translation-2025-08-20-09-52-07/>
2. Decree No. PF-6024 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Approval of the Concept for the Development of the Water Sector of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2020–2030.” <https://lex.uz/uz/docs/-4892953>
3. The Almaty Agreement of 18 February 1992 (“On Cooperation in the Joint Management, Use, and Protection of Interstate Water Resources”).
4. UNDP and Uzbekistan cooperation on water security and climate resilience. <https://www.undp.org/uz/uzbekistan/news/undp-va-ozbekiston-suv-xavfsizligi-hamda-iqlim-barqarorligi-boyicha-hamkorlikni-mustahkamlamoqda>
5. Water security in Central Asia: Uzbekistan's initiatives. <https://zamon.uz/uz/2025/11/20/markaziy-osiyoda-suv-xavfsizligi-ozbekistonning-tashabbuslari-va-dunyo-etirofi-40298>
6. Tashkent’s Water Diplomacy: From National Reforms to Regional Synergy. <https://theasiatoday.org/essays/tashkents-water-diplomacy-from-national-reforms-to-regional-synergy-in-central-asia/>
7. Central Asian states agreed on the water allocation for 2026. <https://kapital.uz/uz/2026-yilda-suv-taqdimoti/>
8. “The reform must be understandable to the water user.” <https://www.gazeta.uz/oz/2026/07/10/water/>
9. World Bank Approves \$20 Million Project to Boost Cross-Border Water Cooperation. <https://timesca.com/world-bank-approves-20-million-project-to-boost-cross-border-water-cooperation-in-central-asia/>
10. Uzbekistan's water diplomacy (PhD dissertation abstract). <https://api.ziynet.uz/uploads/books/10001253/c815Cew76UnDaSO.pdf>
11. Water diplomacy in Central Asia: on the path to sustainable development... (conference). <https://gov.uz/oz/suvchi/news/view/44970>
12. Uzbekistan's policy on ensuring water security at the present stage. <https://www.uzbekistan.org.ua/uz/yangiliklar.html?catid=6859&id=6859:zamonaviy-bosqichda-o-zbekistonning-suv-xavfsizligini-ta-minlash-bo-yicha-siyosati>
13. The Politics of Water Diplomacy in Central Asia: Uzbekistan’s Role. <https://inlibrary.uz/index.php/ijpse/article/view/114137>
14. Central Asia’s complex water-security diplomacy with the Taliban. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/central-asias-complex-water-security-diplomacy-with-the-taliban/>
15. Official materials and news of the Ministry of Water Resources of Uzbekistan. <https://gov.uz/oz/suvchi>