Power & Water Diplomacy

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Power in water diplomacy

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Why this special issue?

• Water is understood as an economic good (in the marketplace), as a political good (in bureaucracy) and as a cultural good (in kinship) Donahue (1997)

• Actors involved in transboundary water diplomacy have varying interests and priorities – create conflicts or challenges collective action
  • Actors (state) use their power or resources to meet their interests and priorities

• Most hydro-diplomacy literature is power-blind or at least power-shy – especially towards nuanced power processes and outcomes
Power nuances and related questions

• Multiple hegemons – China and India in Brahmaputra River Basin
  • How the two hegemons interact with each other?

• Domestic conflicts or emotions influence the foreign policy and water diplomacy – Teesta; Ganges and Indus in South Asia
  • How domestic interplay influences the transboundary interactions?

• Rise of nationalism and realism in the world political cycle is influencing the transboundary waters
  • Changing the process of ‘hollowed-out’ state
  • Alpha males leadership style and transactional relationship
Current scholarship has limited focus on how power shapes the interplay between the actors while (re)framing conflicts, achieving positive cooperation.

SI aims to capture different nuances of power and diplomacy through questions such as:

- What is the role of power and its interplay between actors in the transboundary water arena?
- Where do we locate the power element in water diplomacy, where the ‘shadow of hard power’ – coercion and power asymmetry between the conflictive parties – is rarely addressed?
- How do ‘non-decisions’ and ‘ideational and material power’ lead to the status quo in water diplomacy?
- What role can non-diplomats play in altering the power relations in water discussions?
- How do ‘two-level games’ operate, where ‘games’ at one scale influence negotiations at another?
Carte du jour

• Introduction and Non-decision making in Brahmaputra Basin
• Power and water diplomacy – Jeroen Warner
• Non-decision making in Central America – Carmen Maganda
• Informal Water Diplomacy – Anamika Barua
• Water Conflict transformation – Mark Zeitoun

10-12 minutes presentation each
Non-decision making
Brahmaputra River Basin in South Asia
Non-decision making

• Power interplay in hydro-diplomacy suggests two kinds of outcomes: zero-sum and non-zero-sum (Susskind & Islam, 2012)
  • With the use of material and ideational resources, a partial or complete status quo can be maintained by riparian countries

• Bachrach and Baratz (1963) explained the second face of power, relating to non-decision making and keeping conflicts from being discussed in political fora
  • Manipulating the ideas and rules of interaction, power relations and instruments of force during the power interplay (Robertson & Beresford, 1996)
  • Non-decision making as hiding information and tabooing a topic (McCalla-Chen, 2000)
Power interplay framework

Actor 1 uses Material & Ideational resources

Actor 2 uses Material & Ideational resources

Actor 3 uses Material & Ideational resources

Transboundary (Regional)

National (Domestic)
Brahmaputra Basin

• Persistent conflicts between riparian nations for controlling floods and tapping the potential of the River.
  • Different interests and priorities of riparians
  • Historical border rivalries
  • Multiple hegemonic states
  • Domestic conflicts
  • Cycle of conflicts-cooperation-conflicts in foreign relations
  • Strategic autonomy and bilateralism challenges
Brahmaputra Dialogue 2013-2018
Aactors uses resources

- **India uses**
  - Geographic position, economic growth and military strength to make unilateral decisions (MR)
  - Rules of interaction to decide participation in regional BD meetings (IR)
  - Hegemonic vulnerabilities (IR)

- **Bangladesh uses**
  - Past transboundary experience of Ganges and Teesta (MR)
  - India’s bilateralism (IR)
  - Lack of research, data and information (MR)
What can Non-decision making offer?

• India & Bangladesh purposively maintain status-quo for diplomacy in Brahmaputra
• Advances the power analysis in hydro-diplomacy
  • Analysis can help understand conflicts and cooperation in other river basins
• Operationalize non-decision making through material and ideational resources is much simpler