



NATO Science Programme
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Conflict, Cooperation, and the New 'Great Game' in the Kura-Araks Basin of the South Caucasus

Michael E. Campana

*Institute for Water and Watersheds
Oregon State University, USA, and
Universities Partnership for Transboundary Waters*

Berrin Basak Vener

*Water Resources Program
University of New Mexico, USA
Universities Partnership for TB Waters
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Quote Without Comment

***“Handguns are acceptable;
semi-automatic weapons must
be checked at reception.”***

***– sign on the door of the Metechi Palace
Hotel in Tbilisi, Georgia (the sign was
removed when the hotel became a
Sheraton)***

Talk Organization

Great Game: New and Old

South Caucasus

Kura-Araks: Transboundary River Basin

Water Resources

Sources of Conflict

NATO South Caucasus River Monitoring Proj.

Interviews: Most Important Issues/Obstacles

Recommendations

The Future?

Sources

(See extended abstract on CD and pdf of presentation on WaterWired blog: aquadoc.typepad.com/waterwired)

The Great Game

*19th century competition
between Tsarist Russia and
Great Britain for supremacy
in Central Asia & environs*

The New Great Game

(term coined in the early 1990s)

*21st century competition among Russia, USA, Europe, China, India, Iran, Japan, Turkey, Pakistan, et al. and transnational companies for **power and resources** in Central Asia, South Caucasus, & environs.*

*In the South Caucasus, the players are primarily **Russia and the West (Europe, USA)***

New vs. Old

- More players, unequal statures
- **“Fluid” alliances**
- Private industry
- **Central Asian & South Caucasus republics are not passive observers**
- Strong emphasis on energy resources

Central Asia and the South Caucasus



South Caucasus



Kura – Araks River Basin



Kura-Araks Basin: Some Facts

- 16 million people in SC countries
- Total basin area: 188 200 km²
- Basin area in SC countries: 122 200 km²
- Kura: 1 515 km Araks: 1 070 km
- Both streams rise in Turkey, join in Azerbaijan, flow to Caspian Sea
- *No formal agreements among SC riparians regarding water allocation, quality, ecosystem maintenance*

Water Supply and Waste Water - Kura-Araks Basin

Waste Water

Receives storm water discharge and industrial and domestic sewage

- 100% of Armenia's
- 60% of Georgia's
- 50% of Azerbaijan's

Water Supply

- None of Armenia's and Georgia's drinking water, but provides most water for agricultural production and industry
- Provides over 50% Azerbaijan's drinking water and 60% of its water for agricultural production

The Kura-Araks: So What?

- Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Kura-Araks is now a *transboundary, transnational* river basin with respect to the three South Caucasus republics.
- Water-related problems in the Kura-Araks Basin have since been exacerbated.
- It is in the region's and the West's best interests to solve these problems.

Why?

Here's why...

AGO: Altruism, Gas, & Oil



Transboundary River Basin – Water Problems

- Water resource problems could threaten the stability of the region.
- Azerbaijan is especially vulnerable to these problems as it is farthest downstream and relies on the Kura-Araks for over **50%** of its drinking water and about **60%** of its water for agriculture production.
- Azerbaijan has most of the SC region's oil and gas, and is friendly towards the West (USA: building a large new embassy in Baku).

Sources of Conflict

- Autonomous republics – South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Adzharia (Georgia)
- **Nagorno-Karabakh [Ar-Az]**
- Javakheti (Georgia-Armenia)
- **BTC (oil) and BTE (gas) pipelines (terrorist targets?)**
- Russian “meddling” in Georgia

Contributing Factors to Conflict

- Corruption
- Internal strife (distribution of wealth, desire for autonomy, etc.)
- Deteriorating water quality
- Reduction in water supply (whether anthropogenic, climate-induced, etc.)
- Hegemony (Russia, USA, EU)

***South Caucasus River
Monitoring Project***

NATO Science for Peace Programme

(1 November 2002 – 31 December 2008)

Partner Country Project Director (PPD)

Prof. Nodar Kekelidze, Georgia

Partner Country Co-Directors

Dr. Armen Saghatelyan, Armenia

Dr. Bahruz Suleymanov, Azerbaijan

NATO Project Director (NPD)

Prof. Michael E. Campana, USA

NATO Project Co-Directors

Prof. Freddy Adams, Belgium

Prof. Eiliv Steinnes, Norway

Project Overall Objective

To establish the *social* and *technical* infrastructure for a *transboundary, cooperative, and transparent* water resources management agreement among the Republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The agreement will cover *water quantity and quality* and *stream ecosystem maintenance*.

Bottom-up project!

Interviews – July 2005 (Vener 2006)

- 30 water resource professionals – Armenia (11), Azerbaijan (11), Georgia (8)
- 23 male, 7 female, from a variety of organizations (national/international)
- Not a random sample – 56 identified and contacted; interviewed 30 who responded
- 43 questions and follow-up
- Sought to identify mutual issues/concerns, possible obstacles to cooperation

Most Important Issues

Armenia

Need for **Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)** and/or a **transboundary water resources management** mechanism. Also emphasized **public awareness and participation** and **rehabilitation** of existing and construction of new waste-water treatment plants.

Azerbaijan

Most important issue was **water contamination problems** followed by **ecological issues** and the need for an **IWRM mechanism** in their country.

Georgia

Need for **legal and regulatory measures** and an **IWRM mechanism**. The second issue for the Georgians was **funding sources** for the water related projects.

Interviews: Countries' Viewpoints

- An intergovernmental river basin council is needed to coordinate and discuss IWRM-related projects in the Kura-Araks Basin.
- Cooperation can be implemented under the auspices of a donor organization(s) such as OSCE, EU, NATO, UN, etc.
- The three South Caucasus countries are not ready to sign an agreement under the current circumstances. However, they might sign a project agreement under an international/intergovernmental donor organization(s).
- IWRM standards as described in the EU-WFD (Water Framework Directive) can be adopted.

Interviews: Countries' Viewpoints - More

- 35%: other two countries are not ready to cooperate over water.
- 16%: Armenia and Azerbaijan will not cooperate at the official level until Nagorno-Karabakh issue is resolved.
- 97%: Important to have reliable, accurate information about Kura-Araks in other countries.
- 93%: An IWRM agreement among Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia could lead to peace and improved welfare in the region.

Mutual Issues/Concerns

Socio-Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Willingness to cooperate in solving water-related issues.• Support for transboundary water resources mgmt.• Establishment of the ancient "Silk Road"• Current and potential funds for aid, investment opportunities• Implement EU directives
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create bridge between Turkey and the Black Sea, to the Caspian Sea, and Central Asia• Members of the Council of Europe (Georgia since 1999; Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2001).• Regional and global interest• Willing to be a member of the European Union.
Infra-structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Various projects provide socio-economic and political basis for cooperation among the countries.• World Bank and Western institutions are promising a lot of funding, contingent upon peace settlement, to help with economic development.

Main Obstacles

Socio-Economic

- Lack of trust between the countries
- **Socio-economic collapse; poverty**
- Historical hostile feelings
- **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees; immigration**
- Narcotics trafficking/smuggling/black market

Political

- **Unstable political situations**
- Lack of government accountability
- **Bureaucracy and corruption**
- Ethnic conflicts: Nagorno-Karabakh, Javakheti, etc.
- **Nationalism, separatism**
- Regional and global interference
- **Establishment of the rule of law**

Infra-structure

- No transboundary bi- or multi-lateral agreements
- **Lack of cooperation and communication at the national, international, interorganizational levels**
- Many projects and funds, but no unique organization to coordinate the projects
- **No and/or poor communications among the countries, donors, organizations; and programs and projects**

Concluding Remarks

- Form basin commission to provide water resources coordination.
- **Develop “shared vision” model of K-A basin.**
- Update country water codes, allowing for changes in light of new information/changing conditions. Manage water quantity, water quality, and ecosystem health simultaneously.
- **Involve stakeholders – watershed councils**
- SC countries must continue to address “non-water” problems that could lead to conflict.
- **Need for donor organizations to coordinate among themselves and listen to locals**

The South Caucasus Future?
***“The optimist learns English. The
pessimist learns Chinese. The
realist learns Kalashnikov*.”***
-- a South Caucasian colleague

****Kalashnikov: a powerful Russian dialect,
recognized, used, and understood worldwide,
and very difficult to resist.***

Sources

Ewing, Amy, 2003. *Water Quality and Public Health Monitoring of Surface Waters in the Kura-Araks River Basin of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*. Publication No. WRP-8, Water Resources Program, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM [water.oregonstate.edu/projects/caucasus.htm]

Van Harten, M. 2002. Europe's troubled waters. A role for the OSCE: the case of the Kura-Araks. *Helsinki Monitor*, 13(4): 338-349.

Vener, Berrin Basak, 2006. *The Kura-Araks Basin: Common Objectives and Obstacles for an Integrated Water Resources Management Model among Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*. Master's Professional Project, Water Resources Program, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM. [water.oregonstate.edu/projects/caucasus.htm]

Thank you!

More Information

Official SCRUM Project WWW site:

www.kura-araks-natosfp.org

Synopsis of SCRUM Project:

**[water.oregonstate.edu/projects/
caucasus.htm](http://water.oregonstate.edu/projects/caucasus.htm)**

Institute for Water and Watersheds:

water.oregonstate.edu

Universities Partnership for TB Waters:

waterpartners.geo.orst.edu

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Thank You (again)!

(Kura River, Tbilisi)