Water Security as Shared Security Challenges? A Comparison of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan Security Discourse towards the Aral Sea

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the water security problems in Central Asia by comparing Kazakhstan's and Uzbekistan's policy regarding the Aral Sea. As one of the perpetual problem in Central Asia, the condition of freshwater resources in the Aral Sea has been worsening for the last decades. Efforts by governments were isolated and unorganised. Both the Kazakhstan and the Uzbek government, which had their own share of the problem, had been unable to cooperate on this issue. This article tries to elaborate the problem by using the theory on securitisation process, regional security complex, and the patterns of amity-enmity. This research finds that while the amity-enmity patterns was absent, the differing process of securitisation (in Kazakhstan) and de-securitisation (in Uzbekistan) had forced both states to embark on their own strategies and policies regarding the Aral Sea.

Keywords: *water security, securitisation, Aral Sea, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan.*

Tulisan ini menganalisis persoalan keamanan air di Asia Tengah dengan membandingkan kebijakan Kazakhstan dan Uzbekistan terkait Laut Aral. Sebagai salah satu persoalan dasar di Asia Tengah, kondisi ketersediaan sumber air di Laut Aral semakin memburuk dalam beberapa waktu ini. Upaya dari kedua pemerintahan untuk menyelesaikan persoalan selalu berjalan sendiri-sendiri dan tanpa koordinasi. Baik Pemerintahan Kazakhstan maupun Uzbekistan, yang sebenarnya memiliki keterkaitan erat dengan persoalan, justru tidak mampu bekerjasama. Tulisan ini mencoba mengelaborasi persoalan dengan menggunakan teori terkait proses sekuritisasi, kompleks keamanan regional, dan pola persahabatan-permusuhan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa walaupun pola persahabatan-permusuhan (yang diperkirakan akan berpengaruh) justru absen, namun pola sekuritisasi yang berbeda (sekuritisasi di Kazakhstan dan desekuritisasi di Uzbekistan) memaksa kedua negara untuk menyusun strategi dan kebijakan sendiri.

Kata-Kata Kunci: *water security, sekuritisasi, Laut Aral, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan.*

The water problem in Central Asia has been going on for several years, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The latest International Crisis Group (ICG) report (2014) stated that water had generated conflict in Central Asia, and claimed that the conflict had occurred between two groups of states (the one that had the surplus and the one that had the deficiency). The current condition, as argued by Zakhirova (2013), had perplexed most of the IR scholars. Many of them, such as Webber (1996) and Gleason (2003), had predicted that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a new regional subsystem would arise in Central Asia. The new security cooperation should be characterised by the intense mutual interaction (Zakhirova 2013, 1995). Instead, what happened in Central Asia could be characterised as the new international water conflict, where the previously domestic affairs of the Soviet Union had transformed into a potential locus of conflict in one day (Bernauer & Sigfired 2012, 228). Despite the possibility of cooperation, the current condition had demonstrated that all five countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan) had engaged in a non-cooperative solution regarding this issue.

This paper seeks to analyse the reason why the Central Asian states had failed to engage in this shared problem cooperatively. Instead of creating a regional mechanism to counter this problem, the states had engaged individually, if not on the contrary with each other. By discussing this major question, this paper aspires to contribute to the discussion on regional security cooperation in Central Asia. This paper also seeks to explore how the states perceive the water security problem and how are they creating the security discourse to solve the problem. To narrow down the focus of this paper, the opposite official policies and discourse from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan related to the Aral Sea problem will be the main case. This case was chosen because of the current dynamics, in which the Kazakhstan's effort to recover the condition of the Aral Sea since 2005 (with the help from World Bank) has begun to thrive. At the same time, Uzbekistan still refused to do similar attempts and instead chose to blame Tajikistan's policy on Roghun's hydropower plant (Bland 2015).

In the efforts to do those aims, this paper builds on the previous works on the problem of regional security cooperation in Central Asia and elaborates on the previous reasons on how the cooperation had failed. Developing on that, this paper uses the theory of securitisation, regional security complex, and the method of discourse analysis to observe how each group of states perceive the threat and perceive each other. By doing so, this paper seeks to enhance the comprehension of the current regional security situation in Central Asia regarding the issue of water security.

The first part of this paper elaborates the previous literature and theoretical framework used by other scholars to analyse the security cooperation in Central Asia. The second part lays the foundation to the theoretical framework and methods used in this research. The third part analyses the official discourse of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan regarding the Aral Sea, the way they perceive each other in that issue, and if they propose any regional cooperation to solve the problem on the Aral Sea. As the concluding remarks, the impact of the findings will be discussed.

The Failure of Regional Cooperation: A Literature Review

Previous works had been done to explain the failure of regional security cooperation in Central Asia, especially regarding the water security problem. Several themes had emerged from the previous analysis. One of the themes is the main cause of the water security problem itself, without paying much attention towards the regional security problem. The ICG report (2014) had summarised this issue, argued that the disintegration of the resource-sharing system under the Soviet Union had caused the recent water conflict between states. Petersen-Perlman et al. (2012) had argued similarly that the presence of Soviet economic legacy in some states, such as the economic focus of state-supported cotton production in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, coupled with the aging infrastructure had made the water basin of Amu-Darya vulnerable. The Regional Water Intelligence Report (Granit et al. 2010) had demonstrated that the tension between upstream-downstream states, especially the differences in how to use the water from the two main river (Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya) had been the major contributing factor of the water problem.

However, the focus of this paper is not to argue whether or not the water security is a real or perceived problem in Central Asia. Nor is this paper seek to analyse the cause of the problem. The focus is on why, even though they realised the potential problem, they had been unable to work together. Petersen-Perlman et al. (2012) argued that the problem could only be solved if all the states work cooperatively and that further collaboration is need to ensure the stability of the water basin. Therefore, there was the need to focus on the security frameworks of the region.

Based on the ICG report (2014), there were several problems such as the competition between regional leaders, the lack of help from superpower, and the existence of mistrust between states. Makhmedov (2012), having analysed the conflictual relations between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, argued that further regional cooperation would be unrealistic if each states pursued their own interest rather than the region's interest. In

accordance with Makhmedov, Juraev (2012) had also argued about the mutual personal distrust between Emomali Rakhmon (leader of Tajikistan) and Islam Karimov (leader of Uzbekistan). Juraev (2012) argued that the personal disagreement between these two leaders had brought the Roghun plan into its initial demise. Confirming those assumptions, Bohr (2004) argued that the regionalisation in Central Asia was hampered by the contestation between states. In this regard, Bohr argued that Uzbekistan's eagerness to become the regional hegemon since the demise of the Soviet Union had caused a rift between Uzbekistan and the other four states, especially Kazakhstan. Bohr (2004) then argued that unless this rift was mediated, the regionalisation of Central Asia will be unlikely to move forward and the Central Asia regional identity will be just a utopian discourse.

Based on those several previous works, it is suffice to state that the probable reasons of why the Central Asian states had been unable to form a regional response to mitigate the issue of water security were the mutual distrust between states and the absence of any regional identity. As Bohr (2004) argued, the absence of Pan-Central Asian identity was caused by the contestation between states, and this absence had, in turn, caused the impossibility of regional cooperation. Therefore, this paper tries to elaborate these two issues as the major contributor towards the absence of systematic regional response to water insecurity.

To analyse those condition, this paper utilises the idea that how the states view each other related to the water problem and how each states view the need of cooperation on the issue as essential factor in understanding the condition. Securitisation theory, which is formulated by Ole Waever and developed by Barry Buzan, emphasises the concept of security as a construction when an issue is developed as a threat to collective security (Dannreuther 2007, 42). Ole Waever (2008, 582) explains that securitization was intended as a political and discursive processes through a political community, with a view to consider an issue as a threat to the referent object, and to allow a more elaborate treatment in dealing with the problem.

Thus, Buzan and Waever put people as the subjects, not objects, of security. The approach of securitisation, since its emergence, had been trying to put themselves between the traditional view of security with critical view of global security that focuses on the combination between individual and state security (Buzan & Hansen, 2009, p.213). Waever even emphasised that the security analyst is not the one who determines the security issue. He (2008, p.582) rather focused on the question:

> "... WHO manages to securitize what under what conditions and how? What are the effects of this? How does the politics of a given issue change when it shifts from being a normal political issue to becoming ascribed the urgency, priority and drama of 'a matter of security'? ... "

The main point raised by Buzan and Waever is the understanding that the definition of security still depends on how the main political power in the state constructed the view. The other important points that need to be clarify are the three important factors in securitisation: the referent objects, securitising actor, and audience. Referent object could be considered as something that is considered threatened and should be protected, which in this research is the state's security. Securitising actor is the main actors who try to depict the threat by explaining whether something could be considered as the actual/real threat or just the perceived threat. The audience was usually the main target of the securitisation process. The interconnection between these three factors, together with the process of securitisation itself, will be the main foundation of this paper's analysis.

In the case of Central Asian water security, the referent objects should have been the regions itself, rather than the state. But, building on the facts that there was no successful attempt on dealing with the problem regionally, this paper assumes that to each states, the referent objects was their own regime, rather than the people. In that sense, the securitising actor will be the regime itself, trying to convince the audience (both their own people and the foreign actor) that the threat (about the water security) to the referent objects (the regime) is obvious and entails the necessity of extraordinary measures.

In terms of regional security, Buzan and Waever (2003) had proposed the use of regional security complex (RSC) theory. RSC had been defined by Buzan and Waever (2003, 43) as the condition where states or other units are so interlinked, that their securities (or insecurities) cannot be analysed separately from each other. The existence (or absence) of RSC will depend on the securitisation/de-securitisation process exercised by the regional actors. The works of Klimenko (2011) and Troitskiy (2015) had utilises the concept of RSC to analyse the security problem in Central Asia. Klimenko (2011) had argued about the presence of the regime as the obstructing factor, while Troitskiy (2015) argued that the intrusion by external superpower (US and Russia) had been the main reason of the failure to construct RSC in Central Asia. Both of the analysis had been neglecting the social construction process of the RSC, which specifies the patterns of amity and enmity in the region (Buzan & Waever 2003, 50). Consequently, this paper argues that these patterns of discursive security perceptions between the states in the region are one of the main reason of the absence of RSC in Central Asia.

To analyse the securitisation process and the patterns of amity-enmity, this paper applies the discourse analysis as proposed by Hansen (2006). She offered three models of studying the intertextual discourses related to foreign policy, which are the official discourse, the wider debate, and the marginal discourses. This paper focuses on the official discourse (first model) promoted by the government. However, due to the author limited ability of local languages and the lack of official documents in the English language, the report by local news media outlet will also be used. As the sources of official discourse, foreign policy concept of all five states will be considered. The official statement by the regime will also be considered as the part of analysis.

Analysing Security Discourse on the Aral Sea: An Assessment of the Official Portrayal of Threat

The official discourse about water security differed greatly in every states. Building from the report by Granit et al. (2010), the usual classification used by analysts is the upstream and downstream states. However, as both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are the downstream countries, this paper differs with the previous analysis in that this paper offers a deeper analysis of the tension between two bigger powers in the region. Their official statement and discourses regarding the Aral Sea will be analysed.

Kazakhstan Official Discourses on Water Security and the Aral Sea

Kazakhstan foreign policy concept (2014-2020) included the statements about the current condition of water problem in Central Asia. As the only country, which the official policy concept was translated into English, Kazakhstan government had declared that water-energy nexus in Central Asia remains their main priorities. In fact, according to the document, one of the first priority of Kazakhstan was the plan to "develop intra-regional integration in Central Asia with the purpose … tackling water-energy issues". The government also declared that, related to the environmental protection, they will "improve the legal framework with neighbouring countries on the usage and protection of trans-boundary water resources".

However, inconsistencies in the official documents occur, as expected, when the government listed their main bilateral and regional profiles. After mentioning Russia as their first priority, the document declared that cooperation with China, including the common use of trans-boundary water resources, was their second priority. Instead of reiterating the need to enhance the regional cooperation with the other

Central Asian states on water issues, they had portrayed themselves as acting to their own interest. The cooperation with China on water resources, and with Japan-South Korea on the water-saving technologies, had contradicted their earlier effort to portray their priorities in creating a regional response to regional threat. While still stating that the development of relations with other Central Asian states as their third priorities (after Russia and China), the absence of the reappearance of water issues in relations with Central Asian cooperation could be seen as the contradictory policy and the dualism of Kazakhstan foreign policy regarding water issues.

Regarding the Aral Sea the government declared in their policy concept that they will continue to work with the international community, especially within the framework of International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea. No further statement, in the policy concept, regarding the cooperation with Uzbekistan on the Aral Sea, could be found. Certainly, the decision to focus on the framework of International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea could be seen as one of the regional cooperation. Nevertheless, since the approval of the cooperation in January 1993, the Kazakhstan's document had recorded several attempts on the 3rd of March 1995 (President Nazarbayev attended the meeting in Turkmenistan to discuss the Central Asia response towards the Aral Sea) and on the adoption of the Almaty Declaration 28th of February 1997. On October 5-6 2002, Nazarbayev attended the meeting of the International Fund again. However, as the report suggested, it was the cooperation with the World Bank, started in 2005, which finally showed some progress.

Ministerial statement remains scarce, with the exception of the official statement at the OSCE Ministerial Meeting in December 2014. On that meeting, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alexei Volkov, declared that the sustainability problem of the Aral Sea could be solved by stronger coordination. He failed to mention though, whether the coordination would include the other Central Asian states or under the broader OSCE's group. Instead of focusing on the regional cooperation, Volkov responded that Kazakhstan would use Expo 2017 to advance their ability in promoting "green energy".

This typical answer of expanding the national interest and national image of the state rather than the regional answer to security problem exemplified the official discourse of Kazakhstan. They tried to portray themselves as recognising the need of regional cooperation, but their other discourse portrayed them as an individual state trying to solve their own problem. Their securitising process had worked, but their intended audience was the foreign actors that can help the individual attempt by Kazakhstan to solve the problem. Instead of aiming at the

regional state, especially Uzbekistan, the Kazakhstan government tried to encourage the international actors to help them.

Uzbekistan Official Discourses on Water Security and the Aral Sea

The absence of any reference to Uzbekistan related to the problem of Aral Sea could be considered as the rejection to work bilaterally and even on the scope of regional cooperation with Uzbekistan related to the problem of Aral Sea. EurasiaNet report (2012) had shown that there were differing approaches between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. However, official discourse of the government remains unclear. In the report, it was indicated that the Uzbek state-controlled media had publicised the effort by the government to save the Aral and the condition of the people there. The Uzbekistan National News Agency (UzA) had reported that the government had sponsored several tourism-based events in the Aral Sea region (UzA 2012). In 2011, UzA (2011a) reported that there was a plan to modernise and to develop the Aral Sea areas, especially in the region of Karakalpakstan, by introducing the cement plant and gas-chemical complex. However, after extended search on the UzA website, no actual plan regarding the security problem on Aral Sea could be found.

Instead, the government (through the state-controlled media) seemed keen to promote the tourism, the modernisation, and the development of the Aral Sea region as opposed to how the Kazakhstan government portrayed the Aral Sea issue as the threat to security. The recurrent themes that occurred in the news agency's website were the international conference on the Aral Sea, the growth of tourism industry in the region, the continuous development of the region, and the sending of health train to the region. The environmental issue was rarely reported and even could be considered neglected. In 2009, the UzA reported that the government, with the help from UNDP, had implemented several projects aiming at preservation of biodiversity and natural resources (UzA 2009).

However, no special mention could be found regarding the shrinking of Aral Sea. In his address towards the International Conference "Towards the 6th World Water Forum – joint action towards water security" on 12 May 2011, President Karimov asked the participant to establish a mechanism for effective regional cooperation. His official intention was to guarantee that the rivers are used according to international rules and regulations, thereby ensuring the fairness of supply in the region (UzA 2011b).

Several statements from the state media or from the Uzbek President revealed the lack of similarity with the patterns of Kazakhstan's contradictory policy. The willingness to portray the official discourse as promoting the regional cooperation was lacking, compared to the official statement of the Kazakhstan regime. Instead, the Uzbek government tried to switch the attention from the security threat to the ordinary policy of development and tourism. This de-securitising policy were presented, at its best, when the UzA focused their coverage on tourism and economic plan rather than the environmental degradation and the threat of water scarcity.

Furthermore, as the EurasiaNet reported (2012), the government actually had done nothing to solve the problem, according to the Tashkent-based environmental activist. Several activist, according to the report, had also voiced their concerns that the government was actually permitting the environmental problem to persist. There are concerns that the government was waiting for the desertification of Aral Sea to be completed and will try to exploit the potential oil and gas deposit there. These conditions could be understood as the evidence that the government had tried to de-securitise the problem. The Karimov regime, as argued by Makhmedov (2012) and Juraev (2012) had shifted the national audience's attention to Rakhmon and Tajikistan's Rogun policy. However, at the same time, Uzbekistan was trying to de-securitise the problem and changing the security approach towards Aral Sea with the economic approach. This dual policy, targeting the same domestic audience by providing economic development in the area while neglecting the environmental aspect and the threat of scarcity was the indication of different approach compared to Kazakhstan.

A Short Note: The Absence of Amity-Enmity Nexus

Even though they differed in the approach, no evidence could be found regarding the amity-enmity nexus. Compared to the relations between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, to which the personal contestation between Rakhmon and Karimov had emerged as the major factor, the Nazarbayev-Karimov rivalry did not emerged in the issue of water security. Rather, during their meeting in November 2014, both Karimov and Nazarbayev reiterated their vision of cooperation. In so doing, they echoed their official discourse of regional cooperation. As UzA reported, one of the issue in the negotiation between them was the activity of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea. Together, they had declared that the cooperation offers a "unique and universal platform for the interaction among the countries of the region to implement scientific and practical projects and programs designed to improve the ecological situation and address socio-economic issues in the areas suffering from the impact of the Aral catastrophe" (UzA 2014).

This absence of any visible amity and enmity had proven that framework of RSC could not be used in understanding the official discourse of Central Asian states and their continuous inability to form any regional security arrangement, especially in the case of Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan inability to solve the Aral Sea threat together.

Concluding Remarks

The tension between securitisation process in Kazakhstan and the effort for de-securitisation in Uzbekistan had been the major findings of this paper. The official discourse propagated by the Kazakhstan government had been fairly consistent. The effort to portray their country's willingness to cooperate under the authority of regional security cooperation had been the main target of the government. However, the solution that was offered by the Kazakhstan government was more in relations with the targeted audience, which is the international actors such as OSCE and the World Bank. The absence of any reference to Uzbekistan in relations with the Aral Sea was the indicator of Kazakhstan reluctance to resolve the problem by collaborating with the Uzbek.

In the Uzbek side, the lack of sources on the official discourses was not helpful to the analysis. Several other analysts (such as the one in Eurasia Net) considered the state-controlled media, which was used by the government to publicise their official stances, as propaganda. However, the material could be used as the evidence of the lack of willingness from the Uzbek to treat the Aral Sea as a security threat. Instead of securitising the problem, they chose to de-securitise it, and therefore making the regional security framework even more useless. Other effort to switch the blame to the personal tension between Rakhmon and Karimov could also be understood as the additional effort to weaken the current security situation and, without caring for the real threat, act as the individual state looking for their own interest.

These complications had given another twist to the regional security problem currently being faced by the region. The lack of security infrastructure since the dissolution of the Soviet Union had been joined by the reluctance of the states to engage in the regional security cooperation. After the discourse analysis, it was found that the securitisation process in in both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan had differed greatly, so that the cooperation seems unlikely. Even though the evidence for the amity-enmity patterns was lacking, the regional security complex that was supposed to emerge in Central Asia is absent.

In short, this paper has revealed that there are consistent, albeit contradictory policies in the official discourse promoted by the Kazakhstan and Uzbek government. The discourse analysis has shown, instead of tracing the sources of the discourses, that the other official texts in an intertextual analysis has proven the existence of the consistent portrayal, even though the portrayal had been one of the reason why the regional security arrangement had failed to materialise.

However, some probable problems might be found. The use of only the official discourses had limited the analysis to the first model of Hansen's approach (2006). Future analysis could advance the analysis further by elaborating both the official and the wider discourse. The limited ability of the author to analyse sources in the local language has also contributed to the lacking depth of the official discourse, restraining the analysis to the English-translated documents. On another note, the lack of sources on both states' official discourse had contributed to the lack of depth in the analysis.

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