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Diving into Water Diplomacy – Exploring the Emergence of a Concept

Jenniver Sehring | ORCID: 0000-0002-0523-7256

IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, Delft, The Netherlands

j.sehring@un-ihe.org

Susanne Schmeier | ORCID: 0000-0001-5462-7499

IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, Delft, The Netherlands

s.schmeier@un-ihe.org

Rozemarijn ter Horst | ORCID: 0000-0002-1506-562X

Wageningen University & Research, Wageningen, The Netherlands

Rozemarijn.terhorst@wur.nl

Alyssa Offutt | ORCID: 0000-0003-0574-4802

IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, Delft, The Netherlands

a.offutt@un-ihe.org

Bota Sharipova | ORCID: 0000-0003-4022-5194

IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, Delft, The Netherlands

b.sharipova@un-ihe.org

Abstract

The term “water diplomacy” has gained currency among policy makers and academics. It reflects an awareness that the use, management, and protection of transboundary water resources is intrinsically political and often embedded in complex political settings. Based on a review of academic and policy documents, we analyze the variety of understandings and common patterns in the definition of water diplomacy. We also analyze tools, tracks, and levels through which and at which water diplomacy is conducted or analyzed. With our own definition of water diplomacy as deliberative political processes and practices of preventing, mitigating, and resolving disputes over transboundary water resources and developing joint water governance arrangements by applying foreign policy means which are embedded in bi- and/or multilateral

relations beyond the water sector and taking place at different tracks and scales, we aim to advance the discourse on water diplomacy both in the academic and policy realms.

Keywords

diplomacy – international relations – water conflict – water cooperation – conflict prevention

Introduction

Water separates and connects states. By serving as a boundary or flowing across man-made borders, surface and ground waters require states to interact. With issues including navigation, the quantity and quality of water flowing from one country to another, or the environmental, economic and social impacts of infrastructure like dams or vast irrigation schemes beyond borders, such topics often become part of diplomatic interactions between countries. Results of such diplomatic interactions have yielded numerous bilateral and basin-wide agreements in recent decades, such as the 1964 Lake Chad Convention, the 1972 Senegal Agreement, the 1994 Danube River Protection Convention, or the 1995 Mekong Agreement, aiming at institutionalizing cooperative relations over time. Moreover, diplomatic efforts at the global level have led to two global conventions¹ that codify generally accepted principles of international water law. At the same time, the role of water as trigger, amplifier or cause for interstate hostilities or even violent interaction has been widely discussed in academia and has placed it on the agenda of global actors.² Historical records and contemporary experiences show that shared water resources can be both a source of conflict and of cooperation.³

1 The 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Helsinki Convention) and the 1997 Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (UN Watercourses Convention).

2 DeStefano, L., J. Petersen-Perlman, E. Sproles, J. Eynard and A. Wolf. "Assessment of Transboundary River Basins for Potential Hydro-political Tensions." *Global Environmental Change* 45 (2017), 35–46; Ide, T. "Why Do Conflicts over Scarce Renewable Resources Turn Violent? A Qualitative Comparative Analysis." *Global Environmental Change* 33 (2015), 61–70.

3 De Stefano, L., et al. "Tracking Cooperation and Conflict in International Basins: Historic and Recent Trends." *Water Policy* 12 (6) (2010), 871–84; Bernauer, T., and T. Böhmelt. "International Conflict and Cooperation over Freshwater Resources." *Nature Sustainability* 3 (5) (2020), 350–56.

In spite of significant progress made on cooperation over shared water resources, they (similar to other environmental issues) pose some peculiar challenges to diplomats and diplomatic processes: First, water is mobile. Water flows, evaporates, and precipitates. It can be stored, but only in limited quantities and not permanently. Flows of surface and groundwater therefore often transcend borders while also maintaining a physical presence in different territories which challenges traditional claims of sovereignty. Water cannot be “owned” by one country as can coal reserves, oil, or forests.

Second, water is variable and the volume of water in a transboundary river, lake, wetland, or aquifer varies from year to year depending on precipitation and weather patterns, increasingly impacted by climate change. Exact measurements of water availability and forecasts are difficult and expensive to conduct, even with modern technologies. All planning and negotiations therefore take place with some, and sometimes high, uncertainty over the object of negotiation.

Third, humans and nature depend on water as the basis of life. This does not only concern survival of the individual, but also of the social fabric and the way economic and political systems have developed. In addition, water has a substantive spiritual significance for many people and societies, for example related to its holy status in many religions or indigenous cultures. Thus, governments making decisions about water have to consider many stakeholders, needs, interests, and values.

As a consequence, those responsible for addressing transboundary water problems have and still do struggle in addressing the complexity of shared water resources in an equitable, effective, and sustainable way. Likewise, research that analyzes these attempts has faced challenges in adequately addressing the multi-disciplinarity of the problem.

For a long time, the paradigm of the hydraulic mission, meaning yielding as many economic benefits as possible from water resources through hydraulic infrastructure, has been the dominant paradigm in water resources management.⁴ Applied to the transboundary level, it meant a focus on what is called “transboundary water management,” which mainly viewed decisions regarding the use, management, and protection of transboundary water resources as technical in nature, hence an issue to be handled by engineers and technical experts.

4 Allan, J.A. “IWRM: The New Sanctioned Discourse.” In *Integrated Water Resources Management: Global Theory, Emerging Practice and Local Needs*, eds. P. Mollinga et al. (Delhi: SAGE, 2004) 38–63.

Since the late 1990s, a new water governance approach emphasized that water and its management are not mere technical but intrinsically political and often embedded in complex societal and political settings that go way beyond the water sector. Accordingly, not only engineers and technical experts, but also policymakers have a role to play.⁵ At the transboundary level, this put more attention to the role of diplomats who are responsible for the relations with neighboring states with which water is shared. This growing awareness has led to the emergence of the “water diplomacy” concept, which has gained rapid traction in policy discourses and increasingly, also academic research.⁶

At the same time, foreign and security policy increasingly focused on matters of environmental and natural resources governance, especially since the 1990s in the context of the growing importance of global environmental politics stemming from the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development and the non-traditional security debate that emerged from the end of the Cold War.⁷ This shift led to an increasing visibility of the engagement of diplomats in matters of shared waters and, especially since the 2010s, a stronger positioning of these diplomats in the transboundary water discourse.⁸

In spite of its ever more frequent use, the concept of water diplomacy remains vague and is used in many different ways. It almost seems to have become a buzzword, used by a wide range of actors to refer to a wide range of activities, processes, and outcomes. As this article will show, many authors who use it do not define the term at all. Sometimes, it simply replaces earlier concepts such as “transboundary water management” or “water cooperation.”⁹ In other instances, it is applied to specific geographical and political backgrounds (such as fragile and conflict prone regions) with the expectation that its application leads to cooperation, without further clarification on how this would work in practice. This vagueness and positive connotation imply the risk of water diplomacy becoming a “nirvana concept,”¹⁰ a concept that

5 Allan, J.A. “IWRM”; Rogers, P., and A. Hall. *Effective Water Governance* (TEC Background Papers No. 7) Stockholm: GWP, 2003.

6 Keskinen, M., E. Salminen, and J. Haapala. “Water Diplomacy Paths – An Approach to Recognise Water Diplomacy Actions in Shared Waters.” *Journal of Hydrology* 602 (2021), 126737.

7 See e.g. Young, O.R., ed. *Global Governance: Drawing Insights from the Environmental Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997); Barnett, J. “Environmental Security.” In *Contemporary Security Studies*, 2nd ed., ed. A. Collins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 218–38.

8 Pohl, B., et al. *The Rise of Hydro-Diplomacy: Strengthening Foreign Policy for Transboundary Waters* (Berlin: Adelphi, 2014).

9 See also Keskinen, M., et al. “Water Diplomacy Paths.”

10 Molle, F. “Nirvana Concepts, Narratives and Policy Models: Insights from the Water Sector.” *Water Alternatives* 1 (1) (2008), 131–56.

embodies an ideal image to how water conflicts could be solved that ultimately obscures power asymmetries and is used by various actors seeking to pursue their own agendas. Nevertheless, the concept has merit, as it lays emphasis on the practices of water diplomacy that have been existing for long, but often were not paid the attention they would deserve. This necessitates, however, a better understanding of the meaning of “water diplomacy” and a thorough conceptualization.

In order to achieve that, this article discusses the emergence of the concept and the different meanings attached to it, basing its assessment on a comprehensive review of both academic and policy literature. The discussion that follows does not look at water diplomacy processes themselves, but focuses on the discourse around the concept. Nevertheless, this thinking is also influenced by the water diplomacy experiences of several of the co-authors. The following article discusses the definition of the concept as such, as well as the main aspects usually associated with water diplomacy, namely its different levels, tools, and tracks. This existing knowledge and discourse is the basis to propose a comprehensive definition of “water diplomacy” which we hope will contribute to the further discourse and policy on resolving water conflicts and promoting transboundary water cooperation.

Broad Overview of the Water Diplomacy Literature

The following is a review of scientific articles and book chapters as well as policy papers and other documents published by think tanks and policy actors, presented here with the aim to reveal trends in the usage and meanings that different authors attach to water diplomacy. The terms searched were “water diplomacy,” “hydro-diplomacy,” and “blue diplomacy” in the title or keywords, limited to English-language publications since 1996, the first year where a publication could be identified with the term “hydrodiplomacy” in its title,¹¹ until the end of 2020. We included also one publication of 2021, which is a similar review as this one, conducted at a similar point in time, and therefore a valuable comparison and confirmation.¹² Also added were publications in which water diplomacy clearly was the main focus, yet was not reflected in the title or keywords. This process resulted in the inclusion of 91 articles and publications

11 Vlachos, E. “Hydrodiplomacy and Dispute Resolution in Private Water Resources Conflicts.” In *Transboundary Water Resources Management*, eds. J. Ganoulis, L. Duckstein, P. Literathy, and I. Bogardi (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 1996), 19–36.

12 Keskinen, M. et al. “Water Diplomacy Paths.”

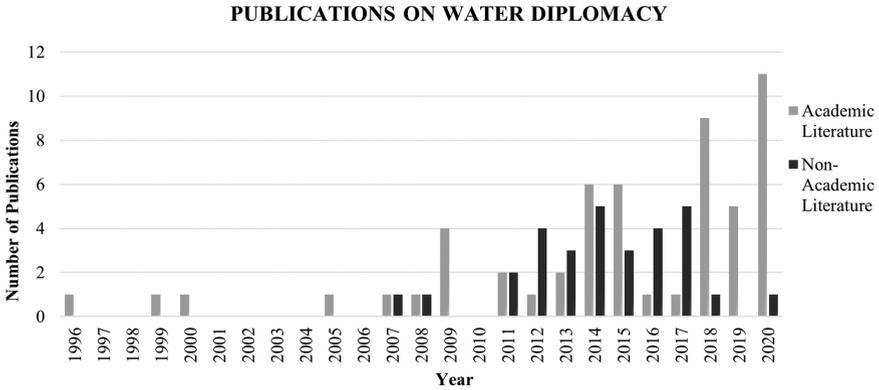


FIGURE 1 Academic and policy publications on water diplomacy 1996–2020 (NOTE THAT PUBLICATIONS WITHOUT A DATE ARE NOT INCLUDED).

in the current analysis. This may not cover all papers related to water diplomacy, but hopefully the most relevant ones.

The articles and publications were classified by their origin into academic (54 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters) and non-academic publications (37 policy papers, reports, websites of think-tanks and third-party actors). For each publication, the definition of water diplomacy proposed by the authors (if any) as well as the aims, tools, levels and tracks of water diplomacy and the roles of third parties were reviewed.

As can be seen in figure 1, it is only since the 2010s that academic and policy cycles have taken up the term, with an ever-increasing popularity that initially grew within the think tank and policy space and has been dominated by academia in recent years.

The geographical focus of publications employing the term “water diplomacy” varies considerably (see Figure 2). A significant number of publications does not focus on a specific region. The regions covered most are South Asia, Europe (including Turkey), the Middle East, and North America (including the United States and Mexico). While case studies vary in the European focus, literature of South Asia focuses primarily on the Ganges-Brahmaputra River Basin, for the Middle East on the Jordan River Basin, and for Southeast Asia on the Mekong River Basin.

These regions largely correspond with basins that have traditionally attracted much research on transboundary water conflict and cooperation. But a particular focus on conflict prone and geopolitically relevant regions can be observed where many third-party actors are engaged in water diplomacy activities. In this respect, it is also telling that the policy actors that have

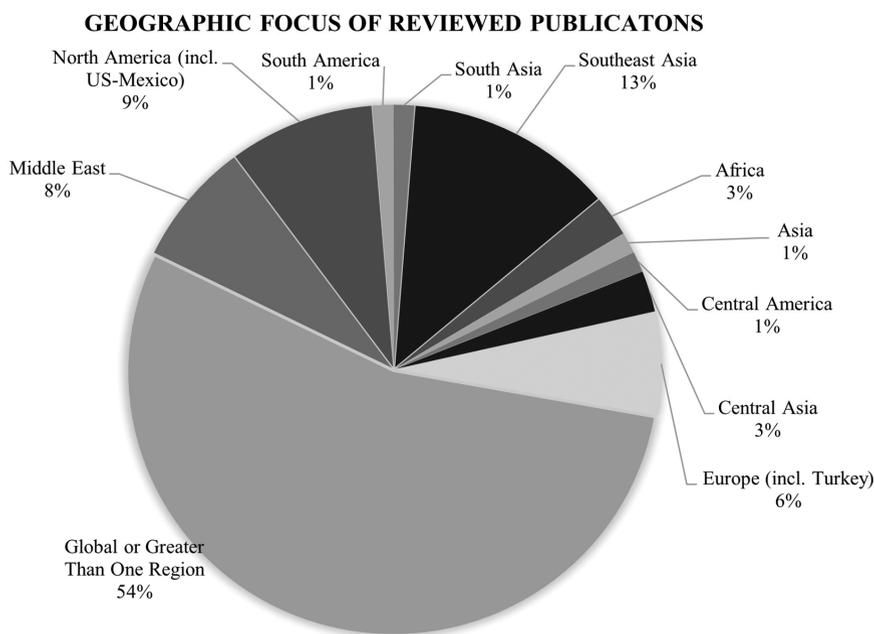


FIGURE 2 Primary geographic focus of reviewed publications.

used (and promoted) the term are only to a minor extent riparian countries or river basin organizations describing their own work, but in particular those that are engaged as third-party actors in promoting water cooperation elsewhere, e.g. the European Union (EU), Switzerland, Germany, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (see also section 5 below).

What Is Water Diplomacy, and What Is It Good for? – In Search of a Definition

This section first looks at how water diplomacy is defined in the reviewed publications, acknowledging that the definition is often related to (if not substituted by) the aim of water diplomacy. This analysis provides the basis for our definition.

It is noteworthy that the term water diplomacy is often not thoroughly defined, either in policy or in academic literature. Even in the academic papers, about one third of the authors use the concept without or only implicitly

defining it. Of those that define or discuss the term (either “water diplomacy” or “hydrodiplomacy”) the following prominent elements can be distinguished:

First, water diplomacy is considered as a sub-field of traditional diplomatic interaction, in this case around water. Authors state, for example, “water diplomacy is a branch of diplomacy, applied to bilateral and multilateral negotiations on water issues between and among states.”¹³ Although most documents do not specify which water-related issues would be addressed by diplomacy, where mentioned, they primarily focused on water availability and quantity.¹⁴

Second, for many scholars as well as policy actors a constitutive element of water diplomacy is that it goes beyond traditional, governmental diplomatic interactions but involves state as well as non-state actors at different levels as an integral part. Often, the term “multi-track (water) diplomacy” is used to point this out.¹⁵ The latter term stems from the literature and practice

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- 13 Hefny, M.A. “Water Diplomacy: A Tool for Enhancing Water Peace and Sustainability in the Arab Region.” Technical document (draft) in preparation for the Second Arab Water Forum Theme 3: “Sustainable and Fair Solutions for the Trans-boundary Rivers and Groundwater Aquifers” (Cairo: 2011). Other examples include Williams P.A. “Turkey’s Water Diplomacy: A Theoretical Discussion.” In *Turkey’s Water Policy*, eds. A. Kramer, A. Kibaroglu, and W. Scheumann (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2011), 197–214; and Schmeier, S., and Z. Shubber, “Anchoring Water Diplomacy – The Legal Nature of International River Basin Organizations.” *Journal of Hydrology* 567 (2018), 114–20.
- 14 E.g. Huntjens, P., et al. *The Multi-track Water Diplomacy Framework: a Legal and Political Economy Analysis for Advancing Cooperation over Shared Waters* (The Hague: The Hague Institute for Global Justice, 2016); Spring, O.U. “Hydro-Diplomacy: Opportunities for Learning from an Interregional Process.” In *Integrated Water Resources Management and Security in the Middle East. NATO Science for Peace and Security Series*, eds. C. Lipchin, E. Pallant, D. Saranga, and A. Amster (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 163–200; Spring, O.U., ed. *Water Resources in Mexico: Scarcity, Degradation, Stress, Conflicts, Management, and Policy* (Vol. 7) (New York: Springer, 2011); United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), United Nations Economic and Cultural Organization-Institute for Water Education (UNESCO-IHE). *Introduction to Water Diplomacy, Module 1: Water Resources and Their Potential for Conflict*, ed. J. Hooker (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 2013); UNITAR, UNESCO-IHE. *Introduction to Water Diplomacy, Module 2: Water Cooperation: a Diplomatic Toolbox*, ed. J. Hooker (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 2013); Zeitoun, M., et al. “Transboundary Water Justice: A Combined Reading of Literature on Critical Transboundary Water Interaction and “Justice,” for Analysis and Diplomacy.” *Water Policy* 16 (2014), 174–93.
- 15 E.g. Barua, A. “Water Diplomacy as an Approach to Regional Cooperation in South Asia: A Case from the Brahmaputra Basin.” *Journal of Hydrology*, 567 (October) (2018), 60–70; Salman, A. *Blue Diplomacy: Transboundary Water Governance from a Foreign Policy Lens* (Islamabad: Heinrich Boll Stiftung, 2015); IUCN. *Water Diplomacy (Building River Dialogue and Governance*, 2017); Mirumachi, N. “Informal Water Diplomacy and Power: A Case of Seeking Water Security in the Mekong River Basin.” *Environmental Science and Policy*, 114 (2020), 86–95; Spring, O.U., ed. *Water Resources in Mexico*; Van Genderen,

of conflict prevention and resolution, and this is a field where much of the water diplomacy discourse closely relates to. Some authors hence put “measures by state and non-state actors that can be undertaken to prevent or peacefully resolve (emerging) conflicts and facilitate cooperation related to water availability, allocation or use”¹⁶ at the core of their definition and often also link it to preventive diplomacy.¹⁷ For some authors, this idea further involves water-related conflicts at subnational level, hence the term is not restricted to inter-state diplomacy.¹⁸

Third, in other understandings, water diplomacy is more or less equated with negotiations and the related analysis focuses on these processes.¹⁹ While in these understandings the outcome of water-related negotiations is open, a few authors have implicit assumptions of water diplomacy always being about positive solutions and “realising win-win solutions.”²⁰

R., and J. Rood. *Water Diplomacy: A Niche for the Netherlands* (Netherlands Institute of International Relations ‘Clingendael,’ with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Water Governance Centre, 2011).

- 16 Huntjens, P., et al. *The Multi-track Water Diplomacy Framework*, quoted by Carmi, N., M. Alsayegh, and M. Zoubi. “Empowering Women in Water Diplomacy: A Basic Mapping of the Challenges in Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan.” *Journal of Hydrology* 569 (2019), 330–46.
- 17 Van Genderen, R., and J. Rood, *Water Diplomacy*.
- 18 E.g. Islam, S., and L.E. Susskind. *Water Diplomacy: A Negotiated Approach to Managing Complex Water Networks* (London: RFF Press, Routledge, 2013). Zareie, S., O. Bozorg-Haddad, and H.A. Loáiciga “A State-of-the-art Review of Water Diplomacy.” *Environment, Development and Sustainability* 23 (2021), 2337–57. Farnum, R.L. “Drops of Diplomacy: Questioning the Scale of Hydro-diplomacy through Fog-harvesting.” *Journal of Hydrology* 562 (2018), 446–54.
- 19 Daoudy, M. “Syria and Turkey in Water Diplomacy (1962–2003).” In *Water in the Middle East and in North Africa: Resources, Protection and Management*, eds. F. Zereini and W. Jaeschke (New York: Springer, 2004), 319–32; Grech-Madin, C., et al. “Negotiating Water across Levels: A Peace and Conflict “Toolbox” for Water Diplomacy.” *Journal of Hydrology* 559 (2018), 100–9. Kittikhoun, A., and D.M. Staubli “Water Diplomacy and Conflict Management in the Mekong: From Rivalries to Cooperation.” *Journal of Hydrology*, 567 (October) (2018), 654–67. Mirumachi, N. “Informal Water Diplomacy and Power”; OSCE. *Water Diplomacy* (2014), <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/120614>; Spector, B.I. “Motivating Water Diplomacy: Finding the Situational Incentives to Negotiate.” *International Negotiation* 5 (2000), 223–36. Zareie, S. et al. “A State-of-the-art Review of Water Diplomacy.”
- 20 Abu-Zeid, K. “Hydro-Diplomacy for Better Transboundary Water Management.” In *Hydrodiplomacy: Sharing Water across Borders*, ed. G. Pangare (IUCN, Academic Foundation, 2015), 125–27. See also Islam, S., and K. Madani, eds. *Water Diplomacy in Action. Contingent Approaches to Managing Complex Water Problems* (London: Anthem Press, 2017); Klimes, M., et al. “Water Diplomacy: The Intersect of Science, Policy and Practice.” *Journal of Hydrology* 575 (2019), 1362–70.

Fourth, some authors and policy actors see water diplomacy serving broader goals beyond addressing water issues, contributing to regional development, stability or peace. Some go as far as to see water diplomacy mainly a means for broader foreign policy goals.²¹

While these are the main tendencies, there are a few very specific understandings of water diplomacy, for example solely defining water diplomacy as a third-party tool to promote water cooperation elsewhere,²² or as science diplomacy focused on transboundary waters.²³

A review of the more explicit aims of water diplomacy shine further light on its interpretation, as the aim of water diplomacy is frequently used to supplement definitions of water diplomacy or provide a sole explanation of the term without defining the concept itself. This clarification of the benefits of water diplomacy provides a strong insight into how it is perceived. Throughout the analyzed publications, the aims of water diplomacy could broadly be identified within three categories, namely (1) (better) water management/governance, (2) benefits beyond water, and (3) cooperation or conflict resolution.

Among the publications which specify aims, approximately two-thirds fall in the first category with the goal of water diplomacy as improved management or governance of transboundary water resources. This literature discusses themes of water security, water availability, and existing water challenges which center water in the discussion of diplomatic efforts.²⁴ Fewer articles

21 E.g. Kraska, J. "Sharing Water, Preventing war – Hydrodiplomacy in South Asia." *International Journal of Phytoremediation* 20 (3) (2009), 515–30; Pohl, B., et al. *The Rise of Hydro-Diplomacy*; Schmeier, S., and Z. Shubber, "Anchoring Water Diplomacy"; Council of the European Union. Council Conclusion on EU Water Diplomacy. Brussels, July 22, 2013; Council of the European Union. Council Conclusion on Water Diplomacy. Brussels, November 19, 2018.

22 Vetter, T. *Water Connects: A Short Guide to Preventive Water Diplomacy* (Berlin: Adelphi, 2016); Leight, N., ed. *CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy: Cases in Water Diplomacy* (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2013).

23 E.g. Milman, A., and A.K. Gerlak. "International River Basin Organizations, Science, and Hydrodiplomacy." *Environmental Science and Policy* 107 (March) (2020), 137–49. Wilder, M.O., et al. "Hydrodiplomacy and Adaptive Governance at the U.S.-Mexico Border: 75 Years of Tradition and Innovation in Transboundary Water Management." *Environmental Science and Policy* 112 (May) (2020), 189–202. Wilder et al. distinguish here also between hydrodiplomacy and water diplomacy.

24 Examples include Caballero-Anthony, M., and P.K.K. Hangzo. "From Water Insecurity to Niche Water Diplomacy: The Singapore Experience." *NTS Insight* 9 (2012); Comair, F.G., and M. Scoullou. "Orontes Hydro-diplomacy: Historical Overview and Lebanon's Transboundary Water Treaties." In *Science Diplomacy and Transboundary Water Management The Orontes River Case*, eds. R. Ballabbio, F.G. Comair, M. Scalet, and M. Scoullou (Verona: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,

state goals of water diplomacy that extend beyond water. These goals include the contribution to regional integration and stability²⁵ and the potential for joint benefits such as through economic development.²⁶ Several authors also see water diplomacy as a source of peacebuilding that extends beyond the water sector.²⁷

Finally, the majority of articles mentions as the sole or one of the aims of water diplomacy to be conflict resolution and cooperation, both specific to water resources and more generally. About half of the relevant papers based this aim on a negative framing (e.g., resolution or avoidance of conflict) and half on a positive framing (e.g., development of cooperation). Interestingly, cooperation and conflict resolution is mentioned both a tool²⁸ and aim²⁹ of water diplomacy.

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- 2015), 29–57; Council of the European Union. Council Conclusion on EU Water Diplomacy; Grech-Madin, C., et al. “Negotiating Water Across Levels,” 100–9; Swain, A. “Water Wars.” In *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. J.D. Wright, 2nd edition (25) (2015), 443–47.
- 25 E.g. Vetter, T. *Water Connects*; Keskinen, M., et al. “Water Diplomacy: Bringing Diplomacy into Water Cooperation and Water into Diplomacy.” In *Hydrodiplomacy: Sharing Water across Borders*, ed. G. Pangare (IUCN, Academic Foundation, 2015), 35–40; Kraska, J. “Sharing Water, Preventing War,” 515–30; Salmoral, G., et al. “Water Diplomacy and Nexus Governance in a Transboundary Context: In the Search for Complementarities.” *Science of the Total Environment* 690 (2019), 85–96.
- 26 E.g. Abu-Zeid, K. “Hydro-Diplomacy for Better Transboundary Water Management”; Vetter, T. *Water Connects*; Hefny, M.A. “Water Diplomacy”; Keskinen, M., et al. “Water Diplomacy”; Kittikhoun, A., and D.M. Staubli “Water Diplomacy and Conflict Management in the Mekong.”
- 27 E.g. Global High-Level Panel for Water and Peace. *Hydro-Diplomacy for Water, Peace and Security – Beyond Shared Water Management*. Think-Tank Roundtable Report (Geneva: Geneva Water Hub, 2017); Molnar, K., et al. *Preventing Conflicts, Fostering Cooperation: The Many Roles of Water Diplomacy* (Stockholm and Koblenz: UNESCO’s International Centre for Water Cooperation [ICWC] at SIWI and UNESCO’s International Centre for Water Resources and Global Change [ICWRGC], 2017).
- 28 E.g. Comair, F.G., and M. Scoullou. “Orontes Hydro-diplomacy”; EEAS (2020) EU Water Diplomacy Website of the European Union External Action Service, https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/water-diplomacy/417/eu-water-diplomacy_en; Grech-Madin, C., et al. “Negotiating Water Across Levels.”
- 29 E.g. Abu-Zeid, K. “Hydro-Diplomacy for Better Transboundary Water Management”; Barua, A. “Water Diplomacy as an Approach to Regional Cooperation in South Asia”; Council of the European Union: Council Conclusions on EU Water Diplomacy (2013); Keskinen, M., et al. “Water Diplomacy: Bringing Diplomacy into Water Cooperation and Water into Diplomacy”; Kittikhoun, A., and D.M. Staubli “Water Diplomacy and Conflict Management in the Mekong”; Klimes, M., et al. “Water Diplomacy: The Intersect of Science, Policy and Practice”; Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of the Environment. *International Strategy*

In addition to these main aims, several authors also introduce normative ideas into these broader goals, namely concepts such as “equity” and “fairness” of outcomes.³⁰ Other authors defined the “effectiveness”³¹ and the “sustainability”³² of arrangements and solutions within their aim.

Finally, it is worthwhile to reflect on how far the definitions and aims of water diplomacy reveal an explicit or implicit idea of exactly who is a beneficiary of water diplomacy. While many papers reflect a generic approach that is state-centric, several authors, in particular on the policy side, emphasize the importance of water users more specifically. For instance, UHESCO-IHP emphasizes that water diplomacy can “build communities.”³³ The EU and IUCN identify the importance of including water users from “multiple levels of governance,”³⁴ and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and others refer to different sectors.³⁵ This range of beneficiaries corresponds to the broadening of the classical diplomatic field to different levels and tracks (see below).

Thus, common understandings of water diplomacy include one or more of the following aspects: they place water diplomacy as a sub-field of diplomacy dedicated specifically to shared water resources; they make reference to multiple tracks and levels at which water diplomacy can happen, potentially including state and non-state actors; they strongly relate water diplomacy to conflict prevention and resolution as well as to negotiation; they emphasize

for Finland's Water Sector (2007); Mirumachi, N. “Informal Water Diplomacy and Power”; Mylopoulos, Y., et al. “Hydrodiplomacy in Practice: Transboundary Water Management in Northern Greece.” *Global NEST Journal* 10 (3) (2008), 287–94; Schmeier, S., and Z. Shubber, “Anchoring Water Diplomacy – The Legal Nature of International River Basin Organizations.” Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. *Strategic Framework 2013–2017* (Global Programme Water Initiative, 2014). Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. *Water and Security. Lines of Action of the FDFA* (Berne, 2015).

30 E.g. Caballero-Anthony, M., and P.K.K. Hangzo. “From Water Insecurity to Niche Water Diplomacy”; Comair, F.G., and M. Scoullas. “Orontes Hydro-diplomacy”; Mylopoulos, Y., et al. “Hydrodiplomacy in Practice.”

31 EEAS EU Water Diplomacy Website; IUCN. *Water Diplomacy*; Mylopoulos, Y., et al. “Hydrodiplomacy in Practice”; Swain, A. “Water Wars.”

32 Caballero-Anthony, M., and P.K.K. Hangzo “From Water Insecurity to Niche Water Diplomacy”; Hefny, M.A. “Water Diplomacy”; Klimes, M., et al. “Water Diplomacy”; Schmeier, S., and Z. Shubber, “Anchoring Water Diplomacy.”

33 UNESCO IHP: *Hydrodiplomacy, Legal and Institutional Aspects of Water Resources Governance. Training Manual* (Paris: UNESCO/GGreta 2016).

34 E.g. EEAS EU Water Diplomacy Website; IUCN. *Water Diplomacy*.

35 Barua, A. “Water Diplomacy as an Approach to Regional Cooperation in South Asia”; Salmoral, G., et al. “Water Diplomacy and Nexus Governance in a Transboundary Context”; Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. *Water and Security*.

the broader goals of water diplomacy beyond the water sector, referring to more general foreign policy goals; and, finally, they emphasize the aim of water diplomacy as achieving an improved governance of the resource, reduced conflict and enhanced cooperation, ultimately leading to benefits beyond water.

Based on this analysis, two broad understandings of water diplomacy may be distinguished: goal-oriented and process-oriented understandings.

Goal-oriented understandings are based on a positive vision of water diplomacy as a constructive process oriented at achieving joint benefits and cooperation, regional stability and peace, often with (implicit) assumptions about good intentions of all participants and a certain power blindness. This is an understanding one often sees in more policy-oriented papers.

Process-oriented understandings emphasize the different practices and tools of diplomats, water officials, and other actors involved in addressing water disputes taking place at different tracks and scales (multi-track diplomacy), often with a focus on negotiation. This is an approach often used by researchers interested in a better understanding of how water diplomacy works in practice and which factors constrain or enable cooperative solutions.

As Mirumachi noted, and confirmed by this analysis, many definitions include both aspects in seeing water diplomacy as “a deliberative process that addresses contested shared waters and seeks dividends beyond those specific to water.”³⁶ The following comprehensive definition includes both the process-related and the goal-oriented aspects in order to capture the entire scope of the water diplomacy concept:

Water diplomacy refers to the deliberative political processes and practices of preventing, mitigating, and resolving disputes over transboundary water resources and developing joint water governance arrangements by applying foreign policy means, embedded in bi- and/or multilateral relations beyond the water sector and taking place at different tracks and levels.

Such water-related foreign policy means are official diplomatic activities like negotiations, consultations, informal dialogue, dispute-resolution, trust-building, and third-party involvement, but also include the actions of non-state actors, such as people-to-people diplomacy, civil society involvement, and scientific collaboration supporting bi- or multilateral relations as well as the use of technical elements (such as fact finding, monitoring) for diplomatic purposes. Water diplomacy processes and the concrete practices of diplomats and water officials involved in them take place at different tracks and scales, and are shaped by the broader physical and socio-political context, encompassing

36 Mirumachi, N. “Informal Water Diplomacy and Power.”

the hydrological, environmental, socioeconomic, historical, political, and cultural factors of the respective basin or region.

This definition also covers the five aspects of water diplomacy that Keskinen et al. included in their proposed general definition (political, integrative, preventive, cooperative, and technical),³⁷ although with a different emphasis. This definition also helps to distinguish both policies as well as analyses that are focused on water diplomacy from those focused on related, but different concepts. These concepts include transboundary water management, water cooperation, water governance, and hydrogeopolitics, which are often used interchangeably.³⁸ In order to separate them from water diplomacy, transboundary water management can be understood as the use of technical means to achieve water-specific outcomes/respond to water-related challenges in watercourses (such as flood management, monitoring hydrological or environmental parameters, etc.).³⁹ Transboundary water cooperation then refers to the use of governance (strategic, institutional, and partly technical) means to harvest the benefits that can be derived from the fact that a watercourse is transboundary, often based on specific legal agreements and implemented through joint institutions (e.g., cooperative dam cascade management, development and implementation of basin management plans or investment plans, water allocation, etc.).⁴⁰ Transboundary water governance, conversely, refers to the institutionalized arrangements in place to govern and coordinate management, protection and allocation of transboundary water resources more broadly.⁴¹ Lastly, the concept of hydrogeopolitics can be understood as the study of the politics of interstate conflict and cooperation over transboundary water resources (often with focus on power relations).⁴²

Based on the above provided definition and the literature review, the next section discusses exactly what these “foreign policy means” are, focusing on the levels, tools, and tracks of water diplomacy.

37 Keskinen, M., et al. “Water Diplomacy Paths.”

38 Molnar, K., et al. *Preventing Conflicts, Fostering Cooperation*; Klimes, M., et al. “Water Diplomacy.”

39 Kittikhoun, A., and S. Schmeier. “Introduction.” In *River Basin Organizations in Water Diplomacy*, eds. A. Kittikhoun and S. Schmeier (London: Routledge, 2020), 1–24.

40 Kittikhoun, A., and S. Schmeier, “Introduction”; Keskinen et al. “Water Diplomacy Paths.”

41 See e.g. Earle, A., and J.N. Marian. “Inclusive Transboundary Water Governance.” *Freshwater Governance for the 21st Century* (Cham: Springer, 2017), 145–58.

42 See e.g. Cascão, A. E., and M. Zeitoun. “Power, Hegemony and Critical Hydrogeopolitics.” *Transboundary Water Management: Principles and Practice*, eds. A. Earle, A. Jagerskog, and J. Ojendal (London: Earthscan, 2010), 27–42. Julien, F. “Hydrogeopolitics is What Societies Make of It (or Why We Need a Constructivist Approach to the Geopolitics of Water).” *International Journal of Sustainable Society* 4 (1–2) (2012), 45–71.

Levels of Water Diplomacy

The literature review showed that there is some variation with regards to the levels at which water diplomacy is conducted.

While some academic authors see water diplomacy as a matter of governmental relations among the riparian states,⁴³ a majority argues that water diplomacy encompasses multiple levels – international, national, (sub-)basin, regional, and local levels as well as between different stakeholders.⁴⁴ In the latter group, there are two different approaches: a number of papers refers to these different levels as part of water diplomacy processes in the context of a transboundary water basin. Hence, they stress that water diplomacy relates not only to interactions at the highest political level, but also, for example, between border districts or among local water users of a transboundary basin. In contrast to these, some papers also apply the concept of water diplomacy to processes inside a country, hence to domestic water conflicts and water governance processes at the local and sub-national levels.⁴⁵ The most prominent and often quoted advocates for this understanding are the scholars from the Tufts Water Diplomacy Program, who define water diplomacy as “the process of defining and resolving water issues at every level – from the design of a small-scale sanitation system in a village, to the development of a contested hydroelectric facility in one region of a country, to formal treaty negotiations among different nations.”⁴⁶ Similarly, Grech-Madin et al. stress the importance of incorporating multilevel analysis of water diplomacy within the state, and suggest specific water diplomacy tools for each of the levels, and Bisht argues

43 See e.g. Karaev, Z. “Water Diplomacy in Central Asia.” *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 9 (1) (2005), 63; Williams P.A. “Turkey’s Water Diplomacy”; Caballero-Anthony, M., and P.K.K. Hangzo. “From Water Insecurity to Niche Water Diplomacy”; Comair, F.G., and M. Scoullas. “Orontes Hydro-diplomacy.”

44 See e.g. Spring, O.U. “Hydro-Diplomacy: Opportunities for Learning from an Interregional Process”; Van Genderen, R., and J. Rood. *Water Diplomacy: A Niche for the Netherlands*; Zeitoun, M., et al. “Transboundary Water Justice,” 174–93; Islam, S., and A.C. Repella. “Water Diplomacy: A Negotiated Approach to Manage Complex Water Problems.” *Journal of Contemporary Water Research & Education* 155 (2015), 1–10; Global High-Level Panel for Water and Peace. *Hydro-Diplomacy for Water, Peace and Security*; Molnar, K., et al. *Preventing Conflicts, Fostering Cooperation*; Barua, A. “Water Diplomacy as an Approach to Regional Cooperation in South Asia,” 60–70; Bisht, M. “From the Edges of Borders: Reflections on Water Diplomacy in South Asia.” *Water Policy* 21 (6) (2019), 1123–38. Klimes, M., et al. “Water Diplomacy”; Zareie, S., et al. “A State-of-the-art Review of Water Diplomacy.”

45 E.g. Islam, S., and L. Susskind. *Water Diplomacy: A Negotiated Approach to Managing Complex Water Networks*; Farnum, R.L. “Drops of Diplomacy,” 446–54.

46 Ibid.

for scaling down the level of analysis for a better understanding of the embodiment of water diplomacy at local level.⁴⁷

Interestingly, policy papers demonstrate more coherence in including sub-state actors into their understanding of, generally still international, water diplomacy processes. While the application of the water diplomacy concept to domestic processes helps to stress that “water management is, by definition, conflict management,”⁴⁸ these aspects are well covered with the elaborated conceptual discussions in the water governance and water politics literature.⁴⁹ Yet, the lack of a central authority and the interaction of sovereign entities are key aspects of water diplomacy, thus the definition advanced here applies to transboundary waters only. Also here water diplomacy connects to different scales, including the local level, and certain diplomatic tools are also tools of conflict management and resolution of intra-state water conflicts. An interesting hybrid case in this respect are “transboundary” water resources in federal states. By this strict definition, they would not count as transboundary. However, in many federal states such as India or Germany the mandate of the individual states over rivers is strong, and their management is thus mainly an intergovernmental process between these states with a limited role of the federal level.⁵⁰

Tools of Water Diplomacy

Our definition refers to the use of foreign policy means as constitutive element of water diplomacy. As stated above, these include official diplomatic activities like negotiations, consultations, informal dialogue, dispute-resolution, trust-building, or third-party involvement, and actions of non-state actors supporting bi- or multilateral relations. They also include the use of technical activities (such as independent fact finding, joint monitoring, the exchange

47 Grech-Madin, C., et al. “Negotiating Water across Levels”; Bisht, M. “From the Edges of Borders.”

48 Wolf, A.T. “A Long Term View of Water and International Security.” *Journal of Contemporary Water Research and Education* 142 (1) (2009), 67–75.

49 See e.g. Zwartveen, M., et al. “Engaging with the Politics of Water Governance.” *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Water* 4 (6) (2017), 1245; Huitema, D., et al. “Adaptive Water Governance: Assessing the Institutional Prescriptions of Adaptive (Co-) Management from a Governance Perspective and Defining a Research Agenda.” *Ecology and Society* 14 (1) (2009); Woodhouse, P., and M. Muller “Water Governance – an Historical Perspective on Current Debates.” *World Development* 92 (2017), 225–41.

50 See e.g. Garrick, D.E., et al., eds. *Federal Rivers: Managing Water in Multi-layered Political Systems* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014).

of data and information) for diplomatic purposes. These activities are not diplomatic per se, but their embeddedness and purposeful use within diplomatic processes makes them tools for water diplomacy. An example mentioned by several authors is fact finding.⁵¹ In the context of water diplomacy, it can be applied as a trust building exercise for the parties involved. Which tools are considered depends very much of the scope of the definition of water diplomacy.

The literature review shows that many publications that mention tools focus in particular on deliberative types, namely: negotiation, which is mentioned particularly often in publications emphasizing conflict prevention and management;⁵² dispute resolution mechanisms (including specific types of dispute resolution such as litigation, arbitration and mediation);⁵³ and finally, the much more general concept of dialogue,⁵⁴ which is referred to in various publications as a tool of water diplomacy without, however, providing much detail on how such dialogue looks like (an exception is the Brahmaputra Dialogue).⁵⁵ In addition, also law, and especially international law,⁵⁶ as well as river basin organizations⁵⁷ are identified as tools for water diplomacy.

Many publications also attach great relevance to the involvement of third parties, meaning the role national governments and international

51 See e.g. Milman, A., and A.K. Gerlak. "International River Basin Organizations, Science, and Hydrodiplomacy," 137–49; Salman, A. *Blue Diplomacy: Transboundary Water Governance from a Foreign Policy Lens*; Yasuda, Y., et al. "Multi-track Water Diplomacy: Current and Potential Future Cooperation over the Brahmaputra River Basin." *Water International* 43 (5) (2018), 642–64.

52 Schmeier, S. "Water Diplomacy at the Basin Level"; Singh, S. "Teaching Gender and Hydrodiplomacy in South Asia: Critical Reflections." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 21 (1) (2019), 138–43; Spector, B.I. "Motivating Water Diplomacy"; Spring, O.U., ed. *Water Resources in Mexico*.

53 Milman, A., and A.K. Gerlak. "International River Basin Organizations, Science, and Hydrodiplomacy," 137–49; Schmeier, S. "Water Diplomacy at the Basin Level. What Role for River Basin Organizations."

54 Klimes, M., et al. "Water Diplomacy"; Pohl, B., et al. *The Rise of Hydro-Diplomacy*.

55 Barua, A. "Water Diplomacy as an Approach to Regional Cooperation in South Asia."

56 E.g. Honkonen, T., and A. Lipponen "Finland's Cooperation in Managing Transboundary Waters and the UNECE Principles for Effective Joint Bodies: Value for Water Diplomacy?" *Journal of Hydrology* 567 (October) (2018), 320–31; Koff, H., C. Maganda, and E. Kauffer. "Transboundary Water Diplomacy among Small States: a Giant Dilemma for Central American Regionalism." *Water International* 45 (4) (2020), 275–91; Van Genderen, R., and J. Rood. *Water Diplomacy*; Zeitoun, M., et al. "Transboundary Water Justice," 174–93.

57 E.g. Schmeier, S., and Z. Shubber, "Anchoring Water Diplomacy"; Milman, A., and A.K. Gerlak "International River Basin Organizations, Science, and Hydrodiplomacy"; Blumstein, S., et al. *Water and Climate Diplomacy: Integrative Approaches for Adaptive Action in Transboundary River Basins* (Berlin: Adelphi, 2016).

organizations that originate from outside of the basin at stake can play in supporting cooperation. Governments of the United States, the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland, to name only a few, have engaged in water diplomacy in various basins, including the Nile, Jordan, Euphrates-Tigris, Aral Sea, and Mekong. Likewise, international organizations, including the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), have actively engaged in conflictive basins for decades. In recent years, third party actors have also more proactively advocated for water diplomacy and, in this context, shaped the definition of the concept itself. As a consequence, some influential papers on water diplomacy originate from third parties themselves (or from think tanks and policy institutes affiliated with them).⁵⁸

Not surprisingly, these publications most often advocate for a strong engagement of third parties. They do so by emphasizing the positive role third parties can play as they “support the dialogue”⁵⁹ or in alternative dispute resolution processes.⁶⁰ They typically also emphasize the positive results that third-party engagement can bring to conflictive basins, e.g., by promoting “the ‘ideal’ of maximizing benefits and benefit sharing.”⁶¹

It is therefore important to note that there is typically no clear differentiation between third party water diplomacy involvement in the narrow sense and the much broader engagement of national and international actors through development cooperation and other processes beyond water diplomacy.⁶² Instead, this combination of different external interventions is often regarded as particularly conducive to achieving certain outcomes in conflictive basins, for instance when “water diplomacy in combination with donor engagement could play a role as facilitator and provide (financial or technical) incentives for generating unbiased data and information through a regional basin organization.”⁶³

Academic literature has also increasingly acknowledged the role that third parties, including regional and development organizations, play in water diplomacy by creating and enabling an environment for offering incentives through funding and technical support.⁶⁴

58 Van Genderen, R., and J. Rood. *Water Diplomacy*; Pohl, B., et al. *The Rise of Hydro-Diplomacy*; Huntjens, P., et al. *The Multi-track Water Diplomacy Framework*.

59 Huntjens, P., et al. *The Multi-track Water Diplomacy Framework*, 4.

60 UNESCO IHP. *Hydrodiplomacy*.

61 Pohl, B., et al. *The Rise of Hydro-Diplomacy*, 14.

62 EIU. *The Blue Peace Index 2019* (London: EIU, 8).

63 Blumstein, S., et al. *Water and Climate Diplomacy*.

64 See e.g. Barua, A. “Water Diplomacy as an Approach to Regional Cooperation in South Asia”; Abu-Zeid, K. “Hydro-Diplomacy for Better Transboundary Water Management”;

Understanding the role that third parties can play, why and how such actors get involved, with which tools and on which tracks they do so, what the explicit or implicit objectives of these parties are, and why and under which conditions their engagement is actually conducive to certain desired outcomes clearly remains a research gap.

Tracks of Water Diplomacy

The abovementioned tools of water diplomacy include activities outside official diplomatic channels and actors beyond the government. In literature, these concepts are described as the multiple tracks of water diplomacy, or in short “multi-track diplomacy.”

Multi-track diplomacy, sometimes also referred to as formal and informal tracks of water diplomacy, has gained increasing attention among scholars in the last five years with a number of academic papers specifically studying multi-track diplomacy. In this concept, track 1 denotes official negotiations happening between official countries’ representatives, track 2 encompasses dialogue and collaboration between non-governmental actors such as civil society organizations and academic institutions, and track 1.5 involves both state and non-state actors in an unofficial setting. The importance of track 3 – people-to-people diplomacy occurring primarily in the border areas – is also mentioned by a number of authors.⁶⁵

About a fourth of the papers reviewed refer either explicitly or implicitly to multi-track water diplomacy. Most of these papers focus on a specific basin or multi-track process, hence their objective is mainly to assess this multi-track process and not a conceptual discussion, so that many are lacking an in-depth theoretical discussion and overarching framework for analysis.

Within the literature that discusses different tracks, the vast majority of authors from both academia and non-academic fields acknowledge the merits of tracks 1.5, 2, and 3 in building trust, promoting cooperation across borders in basins with limited dialogue between governments and ensuring sustainability

Klimes, M., et al. “Water Diplomacy”; Grech-Madin, C., et al. “Negotiating Water across Levels.”

65 Global High-Level Panel for Water and Peace. *Hydro-Diplomacy for Water, Peace and Security*; Barua, A. “Water Diplomacy as an Approach to Regional Cooperation in South Asia”; Salmoral, G., et al. “Water Diplomacy and Nexus Governance in a Transboundary Context”; Klimes, M., et al. “Water Diplomacy.”

of the agreements' implementation after the negotiations⁶⁶. However, scholars also noted that despite the benefits of tracks 2 and 3, their effectiveness in influencing the outcomes of negotiation processes remains lower than track 1 diplomacy "because of incentives, funding, intelligence and logistical resources at [their] disposal."⁶⁷

Conclusion

This article pays tribute to the emerging scholarship on water diplomacy and aims to contribute to furthering the conversation through a better understanding of the different definitions and approaches used in the political and academic discourse. It showed that the term started to be occasionally used from the mid-1990s onwards, but gained increased popularity in the last ten years. This popularity is primarily owed to the use of the term by policy actors and think tanks – their publications outnumber academic papers in most of the years between 2011 and 2017. Only in the last years have academic papers increased in number, highlighting a trend of growing academic focus on water diplomacy. That can be explained in part by the different time spans of publication in peer-reviewed journal articles and books as opposed to strategy papers by government agencies, think tanks and similar actors. However, this trend also reflects how much more the term initially resonated with policy-related actors, who used it to justify or promote their own (third party) activities in supporting water cooperation in different parts of the world. Not surprisingly, third party involvement is therefore also often discussed as a tool.

Despite the variety of understandings and the often-observed lack or ambiguity of definition and specification of its instruments and elements, there are some identifiable common elements of water diplomacy. Leaving aside the authors who apply the term solely to transboundary water management or governance, then the link to negotiations and other foreign policy tools seems to be a common denominator in the literature, together with a broadening of

66 E.g. Van Genderen, R., and J. Rood. *Water Diplomacy*; Global High-Level Panel for Water and Peace. *Hydro-Diplomacy for Water, Peace and Security*; Barua, A. "Water Diplomacy as an Approach to Regional Cooperation in South Asia"; Grech-Madin, C., et al. "Negotiating Water across Levels,;" Salmoral, G., et al. "Water Diplomacy and Nexus Governance in a Transboundary Context"; Katz, D., and A. Shafran. "Energizing Mid – East Water Diplomacy: The Potential for Regional Water – Energy Exchanges." *Water International* 45 (4) (2020), 292–310. Klimes, M., et al. "Water Diplomacy"; Mirumachi, N. "Informal Water Diplomacy and Power."

67 Mirumachi, N. "Informal Water Diplomacy and Power," 88.

the traditional diplomatic spheres to multiple tracks. This pattern indicates the closeness of the water diplomacy discourse to not only International Relations literature but also, to a greater extent, to peace and conflict studies.

One could also see that there is a regional bias for the cases analyzed in the academic literature and referred to in policy papers. As mentioned above, this bias reflects a general preoccupation of the transboundary waters literature, as well as focus area of international donors' engagement, towards geopolitically relevant and/or conflict-prone regions. A better understanding of these geographic imbalances and their impact would be an important future contribution to the field.

A consolidated definition of water diplomacy as the deliberative political processes and practices of preventing, mitigating, and resolving disputes over transboundary water resources, and developing joint water governance arrangements by applying foreign policy means, embedded in bi- and/or multilateral relations beyond the water sector and taking place at different tracks and scales, may advance the discourse on water diplomacy both in the academic and in the policy realm. That might happen particularly if it inspires other scholars to be explicit with their own definitions and so advance the academic understanding and rigorous analysis of water diplomacy processes, practices, and theories. In other words, this definition further helps to identify similarities and differences in approaches and potentially facilitates interaction between different disciplines, while, for policy purposes, it entices the wide range of practitioners to reflect on their own assumptions and values underlying their approaches to water diplomacy, as well as on who and what is at the center of their activities and who is (possibly) excluded.

Based on the increased academic engagement with the term and the advanced conceptual discussions that can be observed in the recent years, water diplomacy practice and scholarship can develop into a new school of thinking about political transboundary water processes – and not into a nirvana concept and a buzz word that will sooner or later be replaced by the next fancy term. This new thinking (1) acknowledges the complexity of water-related problem settings and their interlinkage with other policy fields, issue-areas and professional and academic communities; (2) takes into account the interrelatedness of transboundary water governance with regional security and stability beyond the water sector and their interdependence; (3) focuses on the political processes of preventing, mitigating, or resolving water disputes and/or establishing long-term joint water governance arrangements; (4) looks beyond state-centric explanations by aiming to understand the practices employed by diplomats and others doing transboundary water cooperation at different levels; and (5) is aware and creates awareness about explicit or implicit normative

assumptions like expectations about equitable and sustainable outcomes or regional stability and development effects beyond the water sector.

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