Water conflict on the Mekong River

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Abstract:
The study deals with the suffering of the Mekong River, which is of great economic value and one of the most important rivers in the world because it is the main source of food, water and economic opportunities for more than sixty million people living on its banks. It is also home to many endangered animals, plants and fish, (Xinhua) - Mekong has caused disturbing changes caused by deadly fishing, deforestation and construction of huge hydroelectric dams, and many observers say the situation is out of control and could lead to increased civil unrest and protests in states such as Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam and Tibet as a result of this devastating development.

Key words: Mekong River, south-East Asia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Tibet.

1. Introduction:
The Mekong River flows millions of years ago as a testament to the greatest civilizations on its shores. Today, it plays a vital role in moving the economy of South-East Asia, as well as in the world's most diverse fish and plant world. The construction of seventeen dams and tributaries in China, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, as well as eleven additional dams planned for construction, posing a major threat to the future of fisheries and thus to the food security provided by those fisheries to millions of beneficiaries.

Today, millions of people living along the Mekong River, over 60 million, face an irreversible depletion of major food supplies caused by dam construction and poor practices of agricultural land use in the Mekong Delta, sparking a looming crisis.

The study aims to highlight the Mekong River crisis, which has escalated among the six Asian countries - China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam - especially after China's huge dam, which caused the river's water level to drop to its lowest level in nearly 100 years In addition to the increasing pace of construction of the dams by these countries individually without coordinating or obtaining the consent of the partner countries bordering the river, causing severe economic losses, threatening the food security of the population and displacing them from their areas, Through axes For the following:

2. Entrance to the Mekong River:
The Mekong River is one of the world's greatest rivers, the longest river In Southeast Asia, with the 12th largest river in the world.

The Mekong River is the second largest river in the world after the Amazon in terms of abundance and diversity of fish wealth. It is the eleventh largest river in the world. It extends 4,800 km from
Qinghai in the far west of China, And then enter Cambodia to form a unique phenomenon, which occurs as a result of small changes in the water level determined by the movement of water direction is called the "Bounan" Chinese before entering the Myanmar territory (Burma) (Reverse water flow phenomenon) ice water flow Uh, unlike the natural flow of the river and from the Grand Lake through the Tonle Sap basin of the Mekong River, where he begins the main stream of the river fragmented to a growing number of branches before heading towards Vietnam, which forms the Mekong Delta and then pour into its waters in the South China Sea [1].

The Mekong River plays a vital role in providing food and transportation for more than 60 million people living along its banks. The Mekong Delta is the world's rice pot, producing about 80% of world production. The river provides about 2 million tons of fish per year to the population. Since its waters flow through many countries, it has been named by various names, the most famous of which is the Mekong, an abbreviation of its Thai name (My Nam Kong).

2.1 Historical Background:

The French tried to discover a good way to navigate the Mekong River to reach China in the late 1860s, but their hopes went to the winds. They discovered a great series of waterfalls near the city of Karate in Cambodia, south of Laos known as the Kun Falls, They discovered the fact that there were no waterfalls comparable to the force of the world. Its water is twice as dense as the Niagara Falls flowing across the Canadian-American border.

Today, China has controlled its sources in the Tibetan plateau since its invasion of Tibet in the 1950s, 3 where its water flows profusely to fall in the form of waterfalls that descend on the mountain slopes and run through China's deep valleys with a steep slope of about 5,000 square meters. Almost half the distance. It is called "Lantsang" in China.

In the second part of his journey, the river descends five hundred meters to calm its waters and complete its march towards the estuary. The river, on its way out of China, forms the border between Myanmar and Laos and most of the border between Laos and Thailand. Branches when entering Vietnam to finally hit the South China Sea. It is a major transport artery, a major food exporter and a water supply to 60 million people.

2.2 Economic importance of the Mekong River:

The Mekong River plays a vital role in moving the economy of South-East Asia in the following areas:

1) The Mekong River basin covers 795,000 square kilometers, with an area almost equal to Germany and France combined, and includes part of China, Burma, Vietnam, about one-third of the territory of Thailand and most of the territory of Cambodian and Laos. The length of the river is 4,800 km, and six geographical regions are characterized by different terrains and climates. Vientiane, the capital of Laos and Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodian, is one of the important ports on the river. Where agriculture is the most important sector of the Cambodian economy, where 59% of the population relies on their livelihood (rice is the main crop).

2) The Mekong River is the vital artery of Vietnam, which is divided into seven branches with a total length of about 200-3 km. This flood of water tells the orchards and rice fields that rely on it mainly because it feeds it with silt which also increases the soil fertility, Farmers can harvest three seasons of rice each year, and Vietnam is the second largest exporter of rice after Thailand for this staple food.

3) The Mekong River contains more than 2,000 species of fish, some of which are grown in fish farms such as prawns and endangered species.

4) The role of the Mekong River is not only to provide food for millions of people, it is also a major route through which boats of various sizes are crossed and frequented by many tourists.

3. The roots of the crisis:

Tensions over the Mekong waters are rising among the six countries cited as a result of unequal competition for freshwater resources, which could seriously threaten long-term peace and stability in Asia.

3.1 China and the fuse of the crisis:

Most of the Mekong River, with which China shares water with other countries, is located in the Tibetan plateau, which it occupied in the early 1950s. Its efforts focused on re-engineering the exploitation of trans boundary river flows by
building the largest number of dams in that plateau, Of the flow of water across the border on the one hand, and the imposition of greater control and influence on Asia, on the other hand, especially as it possesses an unparalleled river wealth, where there are 110 rivers and a lake passing countries flowing to the “18” countries.

In fact, China's dam builders are targeting most of the international rivers flowing out of Chinese territory, such as China's 2015 shutdown of a tributary of the Brahmaputra River, the lifeblood of Bangladesh and northern India, to build a dam as part of a massive hydroelectric project in Tibet. China is building a dam on another tributary of the Brahmaputra River, to create a series of artificial lakes.

China built six huge dams on the Mekong River, causing major damage. The impact on the downstream areas began to materialize. Instead of limiting dam construction, China has been working hard to build more dams. On the river.

The Chinese government has continued to pursue a policy of exile by claiming that "the policy of building dams that affect it has affected the environment and damaged the level of the Mekong River, but this policy improves the conditions of navigation in the river and prevents flooding and helps to fight drought in the lower parts of the watercourse because 4% of the water flowing into the Mekong River, and it canceled projects at the expense of its needs of hydropower protection of the environment.

The fisherman, 10 years ago, was brushing his traditional garment called "Cramas" in the water and lifting it soon after carrying a large amount of fish! But what is happening to the residents of a huge number of wooden and bamboo houses on the banks now is often enough to feed their families without selling anything, especially as traders with larger boats enter, use electricity, and flooding the market with them (7).

"The Mekong River is facing serious challenges. It may have been partially paralyzed after its waters were witness to the emergence and destruction of civilizations, and to happy and sad events, including the blood of hundreds of thousands of people lying on its banks or in its waters," according to the Mekong River population After being free, the river is affected only by the natural factors of the seasons of drought and floods, and enjoys the side of forests and green farms, and knows no water limits. Today became the victim of projects called development, circulating in the most prestigious offices of Washington and Beijing away from what threatens the population of the river basin of poverty and hunger.

3.2 Water war is raging between partners: The Mekong River is threatened by the rapid and unrestricted development of hydroelectric dam construction. The devastating development is the increased likelihood of armed conflicts among nations, civil unrest and protests within states such as Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam and Tibet. By late 2013, the Mekong River had undergone worrisome changes caused by the construction of huge hydroelectric dams, and controversy over Chinese dams erupted over the Mekong highways. Panic of the Lower Mekong Sub-Saharan Basin was quickly shaken when the sharp peak of water levels in December led to massive flooding in parts of northern Thailand and Laos. In the face of the sudden onset of the so-called "Mekong tsunami", families living on the banks of the Mekong In the provinces of Chiang Qin, Chiang Khan and Thai Khong Cheim that muddy river waters carried their crops, boats and livelihoods - all within hours, and the problem is the construction of the huge dam in China which helped dry this year to push part of the Mekong River into its lowest level in nearly a hundred General (9).

Although China has built many dams on the upper part of the river, its lower reaches - shared by Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam - continue to flow freely. More than 60 million people depend on the Lower Mekong for food, income, health and their cultural identity. However, the four governments have revived plans to build a series of huge dams across the river to generate electricity, despite better options.

Plans for a series of dams on the Lower Mekong are back to the 1950s, but war and instability in the region have made these proposals impossible for decades. This has changed now. In the 1990s, the Chinese government began building a series of large dams on the upper Mekong. In mid-2000, Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese and Malaysian companies began to revive plans for 11 major hydroelectric projects on the Lower Mekong. Nine of these dams will be proposed in Laos and two in Cambodia. Most of the electricity will be sold to Thailand and Vietnam. When the dams were first proposed, there was a limited understanding of the
ways people depended on the Mekong River and its ecosystems. The economic, social and environmental risks of the dams were not sufficiently understood. Now that the threats posed by the Mekong dams are becoming clearer, tensions have increased between people who will benefit from the dams and who will suffer the damage that could threaten the food security of millions of people.

In 1995, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam signed a treaty to promote cooperation in the use and management of the Lower Mekong Subregion, [10] and established the Mekong River Commission to manage the longest waterway in South-East Asia and to assist in the implementation of the Treaty. With planned projects. As part of the treaty, governments also agreed to consult among themselves on proposals for the Lower Mekong dams.

3.3 The dams of Laos exacerbate the water crisis:

The four governments found it difficult to implement the treaty. In 2012, Laos announced that it would proceed with the Zypapuri Dam, claiming it had a sovereign right to do so. Indeed, the treaty requires governments to make efforts to reach agreement before any dams are approved. In 2011, governments of the Migrant Resource Center agreed to conduct further studies on the effects of dams, but Laos refused to postpone these projects until the effects were studied. The Ziyaburi Dam has been a dangerous precedent, with Laos starting to build dams without addressing the concerns of its neighbors first.

In November 2012, Laos and Thailand held an opening ceremony for the controversial Zypapuri dam. In fact, Laos and Thailand have implemented the project since 2010, despite ongoing protests from Cambodia and Vietnam due to the devastating effects of the dam on their economies.

Today, the Lao government plans to build nine of the proposed dams, [11] envisioning it as a "South East Asia battery" and planning to sell electricity to its wealthier neighbors. Laos's government official's claim that the lower Mekong dams will open the door to rapid economic development ... But the Lao government is plagued by rampant corruption. A large part of the revenue will disappear when it moves from dams to Lao people, because it lacks the institutions and capacity to manage revenue effectively. It also lacks a strong civil society and media to monitor how money is spent independently. This has happened to previous hydropower projects in Laos ... so the poorest Lao people living near the dams are unlikely to see the benefits ... Two dams of these dams are dam Don Sahung near the Cambodian border and the Banque Pang dam in northern Laos ... None of these projects have been approved by neighboring governments.

Reviving plans to build a series of dams on the Mekong River in Laos and Cambodia poses a serious threat to the river's environment and jeopardizes the well-being of millions of people who depend on the river for food, income, transportation and other needs.

4. Mekong and Food Security:

The Lower Mekong is a major source of food security on the mainland of Southeast Asia. Of the 60 million people living in the river basin, about 80 per cent depend directly on the river for their food and livelihoods. It has the world's largest and most productive inland fisheries. Scientists have identified about 850 species of fish, but estimate more than 1,000 species of fish. More than a third of these species migrate more than 1,000 kilometers along the river in search of nutrition and breeding ... In some areas, they can peak up to three million fish per hour, making Mekong home to one of the largest migrations in the world.

4.1 The economic value of the Mekong River:

Fish are the main source of protein for many people across the region. Research by the World Wildlife Fund and the Australian National University found that replacing this missing protein would be difficult. There is simply not enough land and water available in the Mekong to raise wealth Animals needed to replace the protein provided by Mekong fisheries. The economic value of fisheries in Mekong is enormous. Every year the Mekong fish have a first sale value of between US $ 3.9 billion and US $ 7.0 billion, but their overall economic value is much higher. However, this statistic does not include the number of people selling fish on the market, transporting fish to cities, attending food, and making related products and supplies. It also does not include millions of people living along the river who hold their own fish and live largely outside the monetary economy.

The river also provides food in other ways, where millions of vegetables grow in the riverbank...
gardens, which are the main food for the villagers. The rice fields of Southeast Asia rely on nutrients transported by the Mekong from the north.

4.2 Dangers of dams on the ecosystem:

In 2016, the MRC's strategic environmental assessment concluded that the 11 dams would transform more than half of the free flowing Mekong River into stagnant tanks. Dams would prevent the migration of fish and alter their habitats, which would reduce Mekong species by 26 to 42 per cent, resulting in losses of $ 500 million per year. More than 100 species will be at risk of extinction ... and thus the food security of more than 2 million people will be at risk, which will also overshadow their sources of income and way of life. [17]

Damages are affected by the work of dam reservoirs that flood more than half of the river garden gardens, usually cultivated by subsistence farmers, as well as dams that prevent nutrients and sediment flowing into the river, affecting the fertility of agricultural land in the area.

According to the SEA, Chinese dams are expected to reduce sediment flow by an estimated 50 percent, which will decline again if the lower Mekong dam is built, leaving about 25 percent of the original levels ... This in turn would destabilize Coastal stability and flood plains in the Mekong Delta, threatening Vietnam's rice and agriculture fields, and thus the local population will become a victim of these dams and will not necessarily have any benefits.

According to the International Rivers Organization, two communities that have been resettled in China have not received adequate compensation in exchange for the reduction in the catch of fish that could be caught and the increase in the incidence of diseases.

A strategic environmental assessment in 2016 found that 29.6 million people affected their lives in Thailand, Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, along with 14 million people in Vietnam. The analysis also concluded that at least 2.1 million people will be directly affected if all 12 major dam projects are to be carried forward. The forced displacement of communities, villages and families close to the Mekong is a serious and real prospect. It is estimated that some 10,000 people living in Cambodia's Strong Treng and Krati districts will be displaced for the second, third or even fourth time in 15 years.

In contrast, governments have tried to justify the construction of the lower Mekong dams as the best way to save energy and meet the growing demand for energy in the region, but in fact contribute only 6-8% of the projected energy demand in the region by 2025. There are alternatives already in place to meet this demand. Studies show that Thailand, for example, can meet its energy needs in the future without any additional imports of hydroelectric, coal or nuclear energy. Investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy sources and obsters Common to reduce electricity bills to consumers by 12% by 2030, which saves $ 67 billion ... Yet corruption remains a powerful driving force behind dam construction.

All these projects are built, they will transform one of the world's most famous rivers, the second river in the world in terms of biodiversity globally, into a series of reservoirs that will have trans boundary negative effects on the environment and on people through the Mekong Basin. If these dams are built, they endanger the future of the Mekong as a sustainable ecosystem of life. [22]

5. Conclusion:

The Mekong River is one of the most valuable rivers in the world and is called the "lifeline" because it is the main source of food, water and economic opportunities that directly support an estimated 70 million people. As a vast geographical and climatic region, as well as being home to many endangered animals, fish and plants.

The Mekong River is under threat today from rapid and unrestricted development of large hydropower dams. The imminent development of at least 12 dams is likely to lead to significant ecological, economic, social and cultural destruction of the Mekong River.

The development and consequences of hydropower will lead to conflict between riparian States, civil unrest within riparian States, and violence within communities. Moreover, hydropower along Mekong is being developed at the expense of States, causing serious effects and increasing instability within the region.

The race to seize water resources in the Mekong delta adversely affects agriculture and fisheries, harms ecosystems and fosters serious distrust and discord in the region. This is supposed to end by
clarifying the water policies of each of the six Mekong states, Agree on effective dispute resolution mechanisms and agree on more transparent water sharing arrangements ... which will lead to the construction of a harmonized water management system based on rules and regulation.

In order to solve this crisis, the following steps must be taken:

1. Identify early risks.
2. Play on social and cultural criteria for positive pressure.
3. Use experienced mediators as well as being neutral and sympathetic to causes.
4. Reform and reconstruction of the Mekong River Commission.
5. Efforts to ensure increased state responsibility for hydropower projects are vital to ensure stability, especially to those affected by dam projects.
6. Cooperation and exchange of information between partners.
7. The responsibility of partner States to ensure that development does not lead to conflicts and to ensure that institutional capacities are effectively designed to suppress the potential of conflict.
8. Address the legal and institutional weaknesses within the country so that citizens affected by hydropower development can challenge a decision, which is critical to conflict prevention.
9. International donors to hydropower dams, such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, should identify state guarantees for national development goals and apply sustainable development conditions before granting financial aid.
10. The task of the Mekong River Commission is to plan for sustainable development, to conserve and manage the river's water and related resources in a reciprocal manner, and to channel resources to its program of work.

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