Water has returned to its course in the Syrian and Iraqi Euphrates, albite temporarily!

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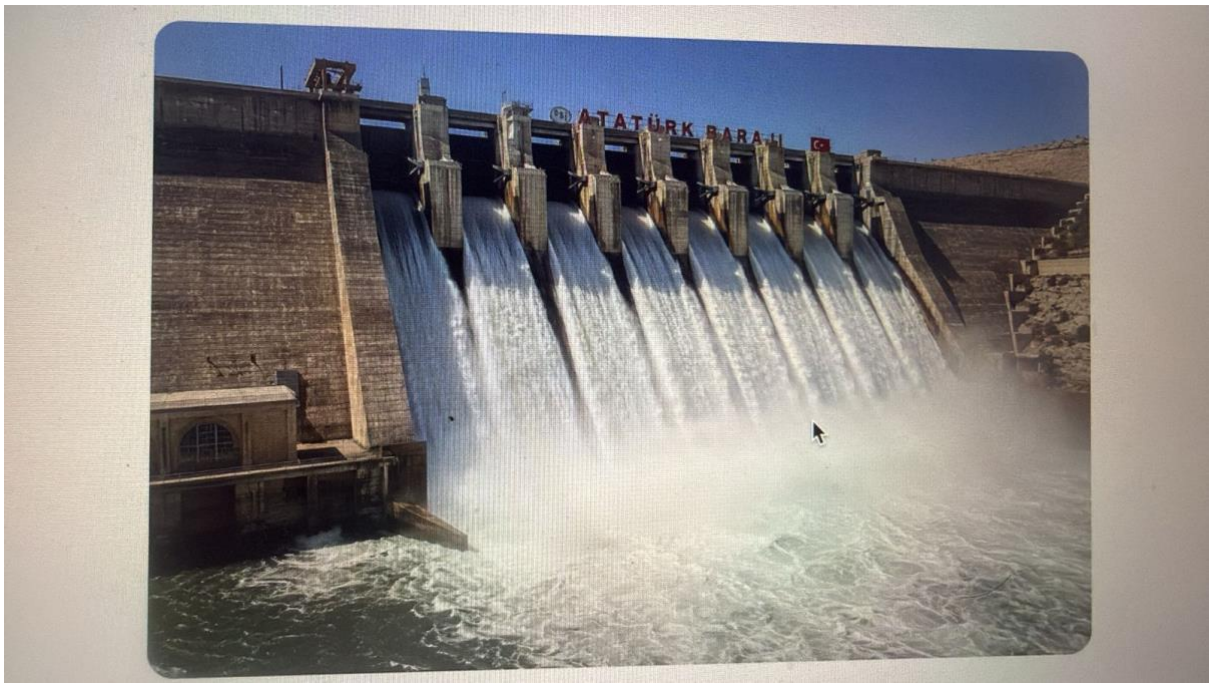
For the first time since 2019, the Ataturk Dam gates opened few days go to release excess water due to the high rainfall season prevailing over Türkiye this year. The Atatürk Dam, located on the Euphrates River in Turkey, is one of the largest dams in the world. Its reservoir, known as Lake Atatürk, has a total storage capacity of approximately 48.7 billion cubic meters
The water released from the Atatürk Dam on the Euphrates River flows downstream into Syria and then Iraq. Both Syria and Iraq are major beneficiaries of the Euphrates, relying on its water for agriculture, drinking water, and other essential uses.
While Iraq has faced recurring droughts in recent years due to climate change, reduced rainfall, and upstream water management, the opening of the Atatürk Dam gates in 2026, and the subsequent increased water flow downstream may temporarily alleviate drought conditions. However, the long-term water situation in Iraq remains precarious, as the country continues to depend heavily on the water released from upstream dams and is vulnerable to fluctuations in both rainfall and international water agreements.



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The pollution of the Tigris River and the Diyala River in the Wasit region has led to a mass death of fish, which calls for a comprehensive study of the causes and the development of an urgent environmental reform plan. Plans shall be put in place to efficiently utilize the excess water even for the Tigris River.

To secure a stable water situation over the coming years, Iraq and Syria should prioritize coordinated water management and diplomatic engagement with Turkey. Establishing joint monitoring mechanisms and transparent data sharing about water releases can help both countries plan for agricultural and municipal needs more effectively.

Additionally, investing in modern irrigation technologies, water conservation practices, and infrastructure upgrades can maximize the benefits of increased water flow while reducing losses.

To maximize their water storage as a result of the increased flow from the Atatürk Dam, Iraq and Syria should focus on optimizing reservoir management and upgrading their existing storage infrastructure. Proactive measures could include lowering reservoir levels ahead of anticipated water releases to create additional storage capacity, as well as conducting timely maintenance on dams and canals to ensure efficient water capture and minimal losses.

Furthermore, both countries could implement short-term emergency storage solutions, such as temporary holding basins or reactivating older reservoirs, to absorb the surplus flow. Integrating real-time monitoring systems and enhancing coordination between their water ministries would also enable rapid adjustments in storage operations, ensuring that as much of the released water as possible is retained for future use.

To minimize flooding and damages, Iraq and Syria should implement robust flood control strategies such as reinforcing levees and embankments along vulnerable river sections and deploying early warning systems to alert communities about rising water levels. Additionally, establishing coordinated emergency response plans and conducting regular flood preparedness drills can ensure swift action during high-flow events.

Both countries could also improve land management practices by restoring wetlands and floodplains, which naturally absorb excess water, and restrict construction in high-risk zones. Integrating real-time hydrological monitoring and communication between their water ministries would further enhance their ability to manage flood risks and protect both agricultural and urban areas.

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