

Forum: General Assembly Second Committee

Issue: Access to Clean Water as a Cause of Conflict

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Introduction

The one substance that all people depend on is water. Water is the most important resource and currently about 1.2 billion people have scarce access to water¹. As a result conflicts have arisen in accordance with both access and control of water. In fact about 85 deaths per year are recorded² in Africa as the result of clashes over water access. There have also been multiple conflicts between nations and the “War” over water in between Israel, Jordan and Syria is considered to be one of the reasons for the 6 day war beginning. There are few instances of modern nations fighting one another for control of water but most instances occur internally by local people who fear that they will die of thirst if they are not able to control the water sources. ISIL currently also control many dams in Iran and are refusing to supply water to many of the farmers in the Mesopotamian marshes of Iran which is causing the farmers to move out lessening the amount of crops for the nation.

An important aspect of this topic is also the fact that in 50 years several nations will not have access to clean drinking water from their own nation. An often stated solution to fix this issue is to desalinate water, although the desalination of water is a tedious process which requires advanced tech machinery which may be hard for some less economically developed nations (LEDC's) to maintain and control. Also the desalination of water is proved to harm our atmosphere by adding heat to the air which is damaging to the environment.

Definition of Key Terms

Water Stressed Region

The UN defines a region as water stressed if the amount of renewable freshwater available per person per year is below 1,700 cubic meters. Below 1,000, the region is defined as experiencing water scarcity, and below 500 amounts to absolute water scarcity³.

The Euphrates and Tigris River Dams

Dams which were built by Turkey on the above rivers. The dams restrict water access to nations of both Iraq and Syria⁴. The Dam built on the Euphrates River named Ataturk dam almost led to an armed confrontation between Syria, Iraq and Turkey⁵.

¹ “International Decade for Action “Water for Life” 2005-2015. Focus Areas: Water Scarcity”, 2013.

<http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/scarcity.shtml>.

²BBC. “Worldwide Battle for Water.” *BBC Science/Nature*. August 19, 2008.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7569453.stm>.

³ “New Age of Water Wars Portends “Bleak Future”.” Middle East Eye, March 19, 2015.

<http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/new-age-water-wars-portends-bleak-future-804130903>.

⁴ “Water-Shortage Crisis Escalating in the Tigris-Euphrates Basin.” *Future Directions*, August 28, 2012.

<http://www.futuredirections.org.au/publications/food-and-water-crises/678-water-shortage-crisis-escalating-in-the-tigris-euphrates-basin.html>.

⁵ Ibid

Jordan River Basin

A large river that covers a distance of 223km and ends in the Red Sea. The river supplies water to Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria. The Jordan River Basin is mainly located in Jordan with 40% of the river flowing through Jordan.

Water Conflict

The conflict between countries, states, or groups over an access to water resources. The United Nations recognizes that water disputes result from opposing interests of water users, public or private.

Lake Turkana

A lake in eastern Africa which is facing a serious issue of running out of water. A dam that is being built by the Ethiopians on the Nile may restrict water flow running to the lake, Ethiopia denies this but Kenya feels that it could affect their water supply and therefore also opposes the building of this dam.

Cochabamba Protests

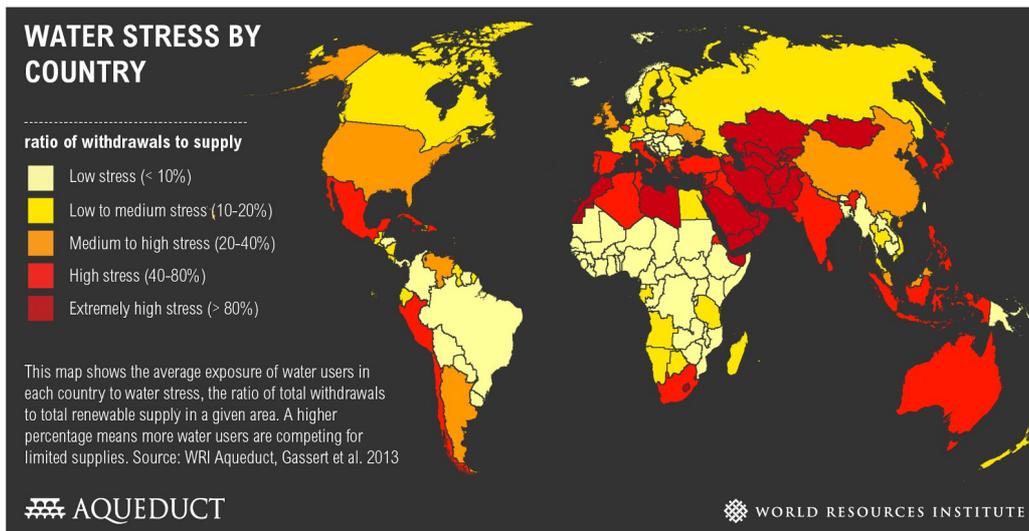
A series of protests that took place in Cochabamba, Bolivia during the years 1999-2000. The protests were a result of the firm Aguas de Tunari dramatically raising the water rate prices. In the aftermath of the protests one civilian was killed and 175 more were injured⁶.

Explanation of the Question

The access to clean water is something that all nations depend upon. Without constant clean water supply access even the most advanced and modernized cities and nations would be crippled. This has resulted in a shift or change towards nations that already have limited water supply for their people looking for things that can be done to improve the infrastructure in order to create water sources or improve the quality of access to the water like the dams being built in Ethiopia. A 2012 U.S intelligence report stated that by 2022 the decrease in water supply worldwide would make it more plausible for water to be used as a weapon of terror⁷. ISIL controlled dams have restricted the water flow to Syrian cities forcing the locals to flee their homes. This is one of the first recorded uses of water for terror and it has forced many to move showing the true power of controlling clean water.

⁶ "FRONTLINE/WORLD . Bolivia - Leasing the Rain . Timeline: Cochabamba Water Revolt." Accessed December 9, 2015. <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/bolivia/timeline.html>.

⁷ "New Age of Water Wars Portends "Bleak Future"." Middle East Eye, March 19, 2015. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/new-age-water-wars-portends-bleak-future-804130903>.



The above diagram specifies which nations are facing stress for water control through colour⁸.

Clean Water Access

The access to clean water is a necessary right to every nation as stated in the passed UN resolution 64/292. According to this resolution water is a necessary human right in which the UN calls upon all nations to supply the people of Earth with water from their finances as the access to clean water is a basic human right. Not every person however has access to clean water. In fact it is estimated that 1 in 10 people lack access to clean water, which has resulted in several struggles over water control. Typically such conflicts occur in areas such as wells, freshwater rivers and lakes.^{9,10} About 50 deaths per year in Kenya are accorded to fighting over water access or control at the local level¹¹. This number is expected to grow as the volume of water available to the world decrease and our population increases. Water Stressed nations will have to depend on nations other than their own to gain a supply of fresh clean water which may damage infrastructure of the societies of water stressed nations. This dependence on one nation for water is something that no nation has had to face, but yet it must be considered by these countries.

Conflict

The conflict in accords to water is often not related to two governments or nations clashing over control. Most violence and deaths in association with conflict for water are local. That does not mean however that tensions are not tight between nations in accordance to water supply. Tensions currently between Turkey and its surrounding nations are tight as dams built by Turkey have resulted in water loss for the surrounding areas. Although coming close to armed conflict nothing happened between the nations. The idea of conflict over water does not necessarily mean that nations are fighting or people are dying. Conflict is by definition a serious disagreement or argument, typically a lengthy one, this does not mean people must fight.

⁸ CityLab, and Reuters Africa - Online. "Comments", February 26, 2015.
<http://www.wri.org/blog/2013/12/world%E2%80%99s-36-most-water-stressed-countries>.

⁹ WHO. "Progress on Sanitation and Drinking Water." *World Health Organization*. World Health Organization, July 1, 2015.
http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/monitoring/jmp-2015-update/en/.

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¹¹ BBC. "Worldwide Battle for Water." *BBC Science/Nature*. August 19, 2008.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7569453.stm>.

Relevant Areas, Nations and NGOs

Middle East

The Middle East is the area of the world most rapidly facing a possibility of not having enough water to sustain their people. One major conflict has occurred here over access to clean water between nations although only one resulted in deaths. Currently 70% of all the world's desalination factories are located in the Middle East¹². Although that may be important to maintaining water for the population, desalination factories have other effects on health and the environment such as the weakening of our atmosphere and the over salination of nearby water sources¹³. The Middle Eastern countries also face internal conflict over water control and it is predicted that 4,000 people are estimated each year to die fighting over a limited water supply in Yemen¹⁴. The first and more well known conflict the "war over water" occurred in the Middle East resulting in several casualties.

Africa

Facing many of the same issues of the Middle East, Africa, especially Northern Africa, faces a substantial lack of not only water, but also clean water. Where the Middle Eastern nations are more developed as a result of their oil exportation Africa is not. Many NGO's have been created to aid the creation of both wells and to supply the people of Africa with different items to aid the process of creating cleaner water. Conflict in Africa over water occurs mainly at a local level. There was a conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt over the building of a dam on the Nile but that issue has since been solved. About 37% of the 785 million without clean water access reside in sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore most African nations face significant issues when it comes to access to clean water. Nations such as Ethiopia, that face high death tolls if they do not act on their surrounding bodies of water, have begun to build dams. Specifically in nations like Kenya that may not be able to build a dam, the population relies more on localized water sources and other resources provided by NGO's.

Red Cross

The red cross is quite possibly one of the most well known Non-Governmental Organizations of all time. The red cross has aided numerous peoples throughout numerous conflicts. The red cross is active in most nations in Africa. The aid that the red cross supplies in correlation to both water conflict and water access are varied. The red cross often attempts to supply water and other basic goods within Africa. There are also other things that the Red Cross does including the improvement of water supply, using local or common goods into more effective devices to improve sanitation and water access. An example of a red cross innovation is the tippy tap which aids locals with washing their hands. During the many power cutouts and water shortages that plagued the city of Aleppo, Syria it is recorded that red cross efforts helped approximately 16 million people¹⁵.

Bolivia

Bolivia faced an issue very different to that of Africa and Middle East. Those who controlled the water sources within Bolivia began to increase the price of water which outraged the people who could no longer afford to purchase water. This issue raises the debate of whether or not water is a basic human right and nobody should have to pay for it. The result was massive protests throughout the city of Cochabamba. This is an important aspect of understanding the conflict issues over water as it

¹² "Water in Crisis - Spotlight Middle East." n.d. Accessed November 26, 2015.
<http://thewaterproject.org/water-in-crisis-middle-east>.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ SciDev. "Thousands Die in Yemen in Fights over Water." n.d. Accessed November 26, 2015.
<http://www.scidev.net/global/water/news/water-death-yemen-conflict.html>.

¹⁵ "Red Cross: Water Being Used as Weapon of War in Syria." September 2, 2015. Accessed December 9, 2015.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/09/red-cross-water-weapon-war-syria-150902114347090.html>.

addresses the ideas of privatization of water, which is something that some nations are taking steps towards.

UN Resolutions and Documents

Resolution 64/292: <http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=A/RES/64/292&lang=E>

On 28th July 2010, resolution that states water is a necessary human right. This resolution was adopted by the general assembly.

Resolution 68/157:

<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N13/448/87/PDF/N1344887.pdf?OpenElement>

On 12 February 2014, the human right to safe drinking water. Adopted by the general assembly.

Resolution 24/18: http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/24/L.3

23rd October 2009, the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation

Resolution 55/2: http://www.preventionweb.net/files/13539_13539ARES552ResolutiononUNMillenniu.pdf

2000, UN Millennium Declaration

Resolution 60/1: <http://www.ifrc.org/docs/idrl/I520EN.pdf>

2005, World Summit Outcome

Economic and Social Council addressing Emerging challenges and trends in water resources management

<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/B10/019/76/PDF/B1001976.pdf?OpenElement>

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
May, 1964	Jordan River Conflict Begins
1960	Turkish dams are built
December 1999	Cochabamba protests begin
July, 28, 2010	Resolution is signed that state's water is a necessary human right
September, 2015	Reports of ISIL controlled dams restricting flow of water to locals

Possible Solutions

Desalination

Desalination, although often not available to many nations with a less developed infrastructure, is a viable solution. Although the desalination of water is often harmful to the environment around desalination factories, this method of turning salt water into drinking water is most likely the best way to create fresh water for the future citizens of the world. Should more time and research be put into this method of creating fresh water, it is more than likely that more nations would begin to use desalination.

Since there is a greater supply of fresh water as a result of such a solution, conflict over the access to clean water should reduce as the water is readily available to the majority of . Currently there are few other solution which could turn something we have much of into something usable and drinkable. Considering the facts that about 97.5% of the world's water is salt water.¹⁶ It is important, however to recognize that the desalination of water does not eliminate the issue of access to clean water. Eventually the world will run out of a supply of drinking water as well as facing the issue of the environmental sustainability of the issue. This solution therefore should be thought of as temporary. Desalination would eventually be replaced by other methods of sustainability which might be introduced in the future.

Regulation of Water Access Points to Reduce Violence

Much of the death related to conflict over water occur at water access sites. These sites are often left to the people around to take up as much water as the need for their daily activities. Often those who are paranoid or want water will inflict violence upon others in order to get the water. Perhaps the U.N or other organizations could develop a way of somehow watching over these water wells or sites and ensuring that violence/extortion is not something the people use. It is understandable that some might say this solution is not practical but when many deaths can be associated with this issue nations might act differently . As more nations face the issue of conflict over clean water access they might be more willing to communicate with the U.N and come to a worldwide solution.

Social Issues

The most important social issue is that of communication. People need to be informed on the issue through various means of communication and given information on how to solve problems themselves. Communities need to have the means to resolve issues efficiently and they must be given a greater understanding of what affect a lack of water, or a conflict over it, has on the citizens of a nation.

Humanitarian Aid

Humanitarian aid is one of the main ways that nations are currently helping. It is typical for many NGO's to invest in the aid of nations in many different ways, be it from the installation of wells to the actual supplying of food and water.

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¹⁶ "Human Appropriation of the World's Fresh Water Supply." n.d. Accessed November 26, 2015.

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