

WATER INSECURITY AND ITS IMPACT ON NATIONAL SECURITY

Securing water resources is not only integral to U.S. national security but every social and economic sector globally. However, those resources are under constant stress from population growth, changing demographics, urbanization, and climate change. The impacts can range from water scarcity and pollution to overabundance and flooding. Many governments are under pressure to meet societal needs by ensuring adequate water resources and conditions, while simultaneously addressing the demands arising from the interconnected energy and food sectors.



The Threat

Increased globalization and levels of prosperity have helped fuel high demands for wildlife and its products. Profiteers exploit this demand through the trafficking of wildlife and wildlife products and are in turn helping finance transnational organized crime and extremist groups and exacerbating zoonotic disease spillover.

- **Water Stress:** Water stress occurs when water demand exceeds the amount available at a given time, or when poor quality impedes its use. Roughly 25 percent of the world's population resides in the 17 countries now experiencing extremely high water stress. Climate change is expected to intensify water stress in many of the countries already experiencing critical water problems.
- **Conflict:** It's a common assumption that water disputes do not escalate to violence, but armed conflict is not required for disruption of regional or global stability. Transboundary water resources—such as rivers and groundwater that cross political boundaries—are often the sources of contentious disputes between nations. Water stress, and the failure of government to adequately address it, can contribute to social disruption and political instability.
- **Displacement:** Water stresses can serve as an accelerant for human migration and population displacement. Water scarcity, severe drought, and pollution reduce a community's safe water access, which contributes to rural-to-urban and transnational migration that can undermine domestic stability.
- **Water & Health:** Water stress poses a number of risks to human health. Pathogens, such as viruses, bacteria, and protozoa, can concentrate in both groundwater and surface water when rainfall decreases.

The Solution

The benefits derived from the conservation of species and habitats go beyond the natural environment, including protecting the security and survival of the human population and ensuring water security. When the basic needs of human populations are met, such as safe water, they are less prone to conflict and political instability. Protecting freshwater systems is not merely an environmental issue but rather one that transects geopolitical, security, and humanitarian domains. As such, we recommend the U.S. government take the following actions:

- **Prevent water scarcity:** The U.S. government should promote actions that reduce water overexploitation, including increased funding and attention for international efforts that halt groundwater over-extraction and desertification. The U.S. should also adopt a systems approach, rather than targeting a handful of ecosystems or countries.
- **Protect critical ecosystem services:** The U.S. should prioritize the protection of critical ecosystem services, such as water purification, that are not geographically specific. Given their importance, the State Department should dedicate a Senior Director for International Water Security in the Office of the Secretary whose sole focus is engagement on international water security issues

