

Water & Conflict

Access to clean, affordable water is a basic human right. Without this access, humans are unable to ensure life, liberty and security for themselves and their families. Given the critical importance of water to life, water scarcity can lead to political and social tension, often referred to as "**water stress**." Competition for water resources has contributed to tensions around the globe between competing uses-urban vs. agricultural, environmental protection vs. industry-and users, from neighboring irrigators to neighboring nations.

There are 261 watersheds and countless aquifers that cross the political boundaries of two or more countries. International basins cover 45.3 percent of the land surface of the Earth, affect about 40 percent of the world's population, and account for approximately 60 percent of global river flow. International waters are crucial for trading, transportation, and consumption, and competing interests between countries can often add tension to these situations.



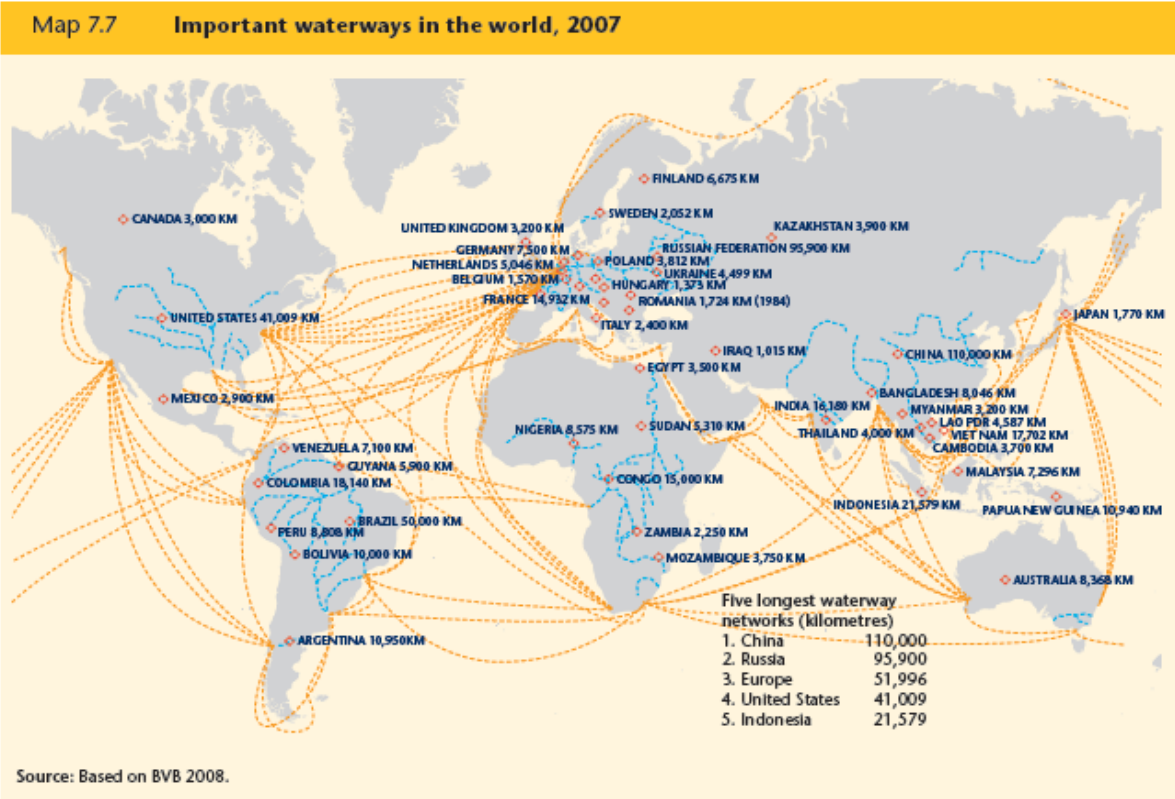
Some believe that water is likely to be a greater source of conflict in the 21st century than oil or any other natural resource; however, history shows that while international conflicts over water often emerge and give rise to political tensions, most disputes are resolved peacefully. The last (and only) war fought specifically over water took place 4,500 years ago, between the city-states of Lagash and Umma along the Tigris River. Despite significant limits to international laws regarding control of water resources, disputes over international waters tend to induce cooperation rather than incite violence. Still, as water stress increases due to population growth and climate change, conflicts are likely to become more heated and harder to resolve.

Questions to consider:

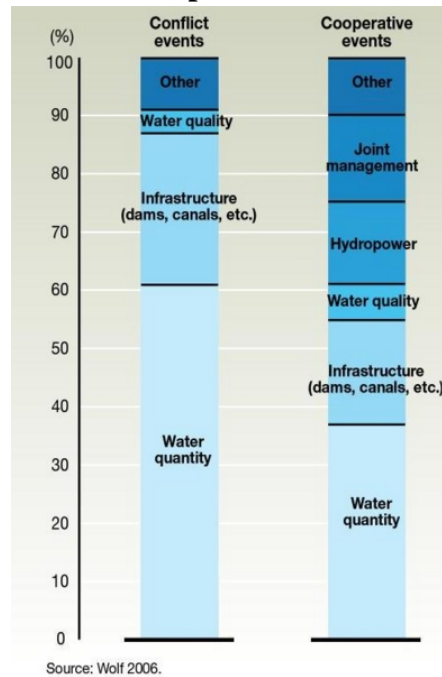
- What are some commonly seen problems in international water-based conflicts? What have some resolutions to these conflicts been?
- What is the UN's role in mediating disputes over control of international waterways?
- Why are countries often not held accountable for polluting international waters?
- What steps has the UN taken to ensure fair distribution of water worldwide?
- How does the construction of large dams impact international waterways?
- How do cultural conditions influence international water-based conflicts or disagreements?

Key Terms

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| - Universal Declaration of Human Rights | -UN Convention on International Watercourses |
| -Absolute Territorial Integrity of Rivers | -United Nations (UN) |
| -Absolute Territorial Sovereignty of Rivers | -Water Rights |
| -Hydropolitics | -Water Security |
| -International Customary Law | -Water Stress |
| -Riparian | -World Commission on Dams (WCD) |
| -Transboundary Aquifers | -World Water Council (WWC) |



Water: Cooperation or Conflict:



From: <http://maps.grida.no/go/graphic/water-cooperation-or-conflict>