

## **Hydropolitics: Water Policy and Conflict**

Dr. Michael Tiboris (mtiboris@thechicagocouncil.org)

Syllabus

**Class Location:** Tuesday/Thursday 10:30-11:50 AM, Room 140B

**Office Hours:** Tuesday 1-2, Location TBD

**Introduction.** Water resources are increasingly contested in nearly all parts of the world. In some cases, this is because water is scarce. In other cases it is because there is inadequate infrastructure, inefficient and conflicting use patterns, or because *too much* water overwhelms a population's capacity to manage it safely. In nearly all cases, however, the consequences for humans, economies, and the environment is mediated by policy. Some of the driest regions of the planet carefully manage their water resources, in some instances well enough to export reserves to their neighbors. In other places, some of them very wet, poor infrastructure policies and farming practices prevent the conversion of those resources into sustainable productive benefits for the population. This course introduces students to some of the central challenges of water resource politics, particularly in contexts where water insecurity is a national security threat.

The course does not presume any non-general knowledge about water resources or even environmental resource policy. The goal will be to establish a firm basis from which to pursue more narrowly focused and empirically supportable research projects on the causes and consequences of water conflict. The first two meetings will describe water resource policy at a variety of different levels and identify some of the basic concepts for thinking about water as a shared, limited, non-substitutable, immediately vital resource which, despite its fundamental importance for human life, is frequently left unregulated. Subsequent weeks will look at current thinking about a subset of more specific topics, including managing competition between agricultural and municipal uses, the relationship between water insecurity and food insecurity, international water treaties, development disputes over infrastructure, and attempts to establish a human right to water. We will look at the difficulties in establishing causal connections between human migration, extremism, and water scarcity, and discuss the degree to which these difficulties should matter for making policy recommendations in this space.

The course takes a broad view of what "water conflict" means, and includes discussion of attempts to deal with inter-sectoral competition, international allocation treaties, the diplomatic and economic consequences of unilateral infrastructure construction, local communities competing for resources in a changing climate, and water scarcity as component of violent conflict and human migration. The "local-ness" of water and its contribution to nearly every productive human activity, we will see, makes water scarcity a problem that cannot be solved, merely managed.

**Requirements. Attendance and active participation** in the seminar are expected, of course. Students should complete all readings before class and be prepared to discuss them. I encourage students to participate regularly and vocally in class, but I do not assume that being quiet is a sign of incapacity. Hence, one should feel free to fulfill the requirement of class participation by approaching me outside of class or over email to discuss their thoughts on course topics. Written assignments are as follows:

1. **Case study examining the success or failure of a particular policy intervention** (3 pages). Students will identify a particular case of water resource conflict of interest to them and produce a short policy brief with some practical responses drawn from research literature.
2. **Presentation of case studies.** Starting on week 4, students will begin giving a short (5 minutes speaking + two audience questions) presentation on their case study. Depending on the number of enrolled students, we will either begin the class with 1-2 of these presentations or set aside

some time to complete them all on a single day. Students who are uncomfortable presenting (after being suitably encouraged to try it anyway) may be able to schedule a one-on-one presentation with me at a mutually acceptable time.

3. **Seminar Paper** (~15 pages). The seminar paper will take one of two forms, either (1) offering an assessment of an on-going case of water conflict, with an analysis of relevant policies and recommendations; or (2) a historical account of a case of water conflict that explains how the problem arose and was resolved, and offers an analysis of the political context that led to it and its resolution. Alternative paper topics will be considered on a case by case basis.

**Texts.** There is no authoritative text on water conflict as yet. The topic is relatively new. So we will mainly draw entirely from journal articles, policy reports, well-researched journalism, and book chapters. At the end of each class I will give some guidance about which sections of the readings for the next week on which to be particularly attentive. Copies of readings will be made available for download.

**Assessment.**

**Participation:** 10%

**Case Study:** 20%

**Presentation:** 20%

**Seminar Paper:** 50%

**Course Schedule**

Subject to revision.

All readings and assignments are due at the beginning of the class on the day they are due.

| Wk | Topic and Goals   | Readings  | Due |
|----|---|---|-----|
| 1  | <b>Introduction to Water Resources, Politics, and Policy:</b> Background on the world's water resources and what we mean by "water policy"; how it operates at the local, state, national, and international levels.        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hoekstra, "Introduction" from <i>The Water Footprint of Modern Consumer Society</i></li> <li>2. Chellaney. "The Power of Water" from <i>Water, Peace, and War</i>.</li> <li>3. Ingram, <i>et al.</i>, "Water and Equity in a Changing Climate," in <i>Water, Place, &amp; Equity</i>.</li> <li>4. Gleick, "United States International Water Policy" in <i>A Twenty-First Century U.S. Water Policy</i></li> </ol>  |     |
| 2  | <b>Water Rights, Property, and Shared Uses:</b> Water's contested status as a commodity, entitlement, and natural good casts a long shadow over claims made on the resource by different groups. <b>Focus case: Bolivia</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Schmitz, "Why Isn't Everyone Destitute?" and "Responsibility and Community" from <i>Social Welfare and Individual Responsibility</i></li> <li>2. Conca, "Invisible Hand, Visible Fist: The Transnational Politics of Water Marketization" from <i>Governing Water</i></li> <li>3. Lustgarten, "A Free-Market Plan to Save the American West from Drought" <i>The Atlantic/Propublica</i></li> <li>4. Baer, "The Global Water Crisis, Privatization, and the Bolivian Water War" in <i>Water, Place, and Equity</i></li> </ol> |     |
| 3  | <b>Intersectoral Conflict—Water, Energy, Food:</b> Agriculture is the chief consumer of water resources. How does agricultural water policy contribute to social instability? <b>Focus case: Syria</b>                      | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cooley, <i>et al.</i>, "Water Risk Hotspots for Agriculture" <i>OECD Report</i></li> <li>2. Hendrix, "When Hunger Strikes: How Food Security Abroad Matters for National Security at Home" <i>CCGA Report</i></li> <li>3. Braga, <i>et al.</i>, "Water and Energy" from <i>Water and the Future of Humanity</i></li> <li>4. Gleick, "Water, Drought, Climate Change, and Conflict in Syria" <i>Journal of the American Meteorological Society</i></li> </ol>  |     |

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| 4 | <p><b>Establishing Causes in Water Conflict:</b> The idea that we might use policy to avert water conflict implies that we have some ability to identify causal factors that convert water insecurity into conflict. What do we know about these factors at the moment? <b>Focus case: East African Nile</b></p>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cartwright, "Causal Inference" in <i>Philosophy of Social Science</i></li> <li>2. Petersen-Perlman, <i>et al.</i>, "International Water Conflict and Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities" <i>Water International Journal</i></li> <li>3. Gizelis, "Water Resources, Institutions, &amp; Interstate Conflict" <i>Political Geography</i></li> <li>4. Mason, <i>et al.</i>, "Linkages Between Sub-national and International Water Conflicts: The Eastern Nile Basin"</li> <li>5. Zeitoun and Warner, "Hydro-Hegemony – A Framework for Analysis of Trans-Boundary Water Conflicts" <i>Water Policy</i></li> </ol> | Case Brief |
| 5 | <p><b>Geopolitics Approaches to Water Resources International Treaties:</b> Geopolitical (national-level) interactions are the traditional cite of research on water politics. What are the strengths and weaknesses of assessing water security through treaties, international law, and transboundary water commissions? <b>Focus case: The Indus Rivers Treaty</b></p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dinar, "Water, Security, Conflict, and Cooperation" <i>SAIS Review</i></li> <li>2. Troell &amp; Swanson, "Adaptive Water Governance and the Principles of International Water Law" in <i>Transboundary Water Governance: Adaptation to Climate Change</i></li> <li>3. Devlin and Hendrix, "Trends and Triggers Redux: Climate Change, Rainfall, and Interstate Conflict" <i>Political Geography</i></li> <li>4. Chellaney, "Rivers of Conflict Between India and Pakistan" <i>Nikkei Asian Review</i></li> </ol>   |            |
| 6 | <p><b>Cross-scale and Sub-State Water Resource Conflict:</b> Much of the actual conflict over water happens at the local and sub-state level. How does this factor into policy approaches to mitigating water conflict? Should we move away from traditional geopolitical analysis? <b>Case study: Pakistan</b></p>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. De Stefano, <i>et al.</i> "Tracking Cooperation and Conflict in International Basins: Historic and Recent Trends" <i>Water Policy</i></li> <li>2. Moore, "Rethinking Conflict Over Water" <i>Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Environmental Science</i></li> <li>3. Giordano, "The Geography of Water Conflict and Cooperation: Internal Pressures and International Manifestations" <i>The Royal Geographic Society</i></li> <li>4. Briscoe, "The Water-National Security Nexus: The Case of Pakistan" in <i>Water Security: The Water-Food-Energy-Climate Nexus</i></li> </ol>  |            |
| 7 | <p><b>Development Disputes:</b> Unilateral or uncoordinated infrastructure development of shared resources is a major source of interstate (and sub-state) conflict. Solutions are complicated by regional politics. <b>Focus case: The Tibetan Plateau</b></p>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Chellaney, "Exploiting the Riparian Advantage," from <i>Water: Asia's New Battleground</i></li> <li>2. Moore, "The Politics of Thirst: Managing Water Resources Under Scarcity in the Yellow River Basin, People's Republic of China" <i>Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs</i></li> <li>3. Gleick, "China Dams" in <i>The World's Water</i></li> <li>4. Pak, "China, India, and War over Water" <i>Parameters</i></li> </ol>   |            |
| 8 | <p><b>Human Migration and Extremism:</b> Human migration may be both cause and effect in water crises. What do we know about the water-migration-extremism connection? Also, to what extent is water a target or tool of war for extremist groups? <b>Focus cases: Yemen, East Africa, Syria and Iraq</b></p>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reuveny, "Climate-Change Induced Migration and Violent Conflict" <i>Political Geography</i></li> <li>2. Gleick, "Water and Terrorism" in <i>The World's Water</i></li> <li>3. King, "The Weaponization of Water in Syria and Iraq" <i>The Washington Quarterly</i></li> <li>4. Raleigh and Kniveton, "Come Rain or Shine: An Analysis of Conflict and Climate Variability in East Africa" <i>Journal of Peace Research</i></li> <li>5. Fergusson, "Yemen is Tearing Itself Apart Over Water" <i>Newsweek</i></li> </ol>  |            |
| 9 | <p><b>The Human Right to Water:</b> While universally supported, the humanitarian effort to make water access complete has proved to be a practical, legal, and political challenge. Is a human right to water coherent? And if so, can it be effectively instituted and protected? <b>Focus case: Detroit, MI</b></p>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hayward, "A Global Right to Water" <i>Midwest Studies in Philosophy</i></li> <li>2. Bluemel, "The Implications of Formulating a Human Right to Water" <i>Ecology Law Quarterly</i></li> <li>3. Bakker, "The 'Commons' Versus the 'Commodity': Alter-globalization, Anti-privatization, and the Human Right to Water in the Global South" <i>Antipode</i></li> <li>4. Taylor, "Tapped Out: Threats to the Human Right to Water in the United States" <i>Georgetown Law Human Rights Institute</i></li> </ol>  |            |

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| 10 | <b>Adaptation, Cooperation, and National Security:</b> This will be a forward-looking discussion about the future of global water policy in a world with escalating tensions and climate changes. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cooley, <i>et al.</i> "Global Water Governance in the Twenty-First Century" in <i>The World's Water</i></li> <li>2. Huntjens, <i>et al.</i>, "The Multi-Track Water Diplomacy Framework: A Legal and Political Economy Analysis for Advancing Cooperation Over Shared Waters" <i>Hague Inst. For Global Justice</i></li> <li>3. Kehl, "Oil, Water, Blood and Diamonds: International Intervention in Resource Disputes" <i>International Negotiation</i></li> <li>4. Fischhendler, <i>et al.</i> "The Politics of Unilateral Environmentalism: Cooperation and Conflict over Water Management along the Israeli-Palestinian Border" <i>Global Environmental Politics Journal</i></li> </ol> |                    |
| F  |   |   | <b>Final Paper</b> |

### Additional Fine Print

**Computers and Phones.** We're all adults, so I expect that you won't inappropriately use these in class. I will add, however, that I discourage taking notes on a computer. Paper notes feel old fashioned, but there is ample evidence that written note-taking is more effective for learning as people trying to record what is happening digitally tend to focus on verbatim recording rather than identifying and sorting key ideas.

**Office Hours.** Tuesdays 1-2. I'll settle the location after the first day and will announce in class.

**Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism.** You will be beholden to the University's code of conduct, definitions, and consequences as outlined here: <https://college.uchicago.edu/advising/academic-integrity-student-conduct>. But much more importantly, from my perspective, is that you do your own work honestly and with earnest effort because anything else is a waste of your time and mine. There is little daylight between dishonest work and dishonest character. Think about the kind of person you want to be and act accordingly.

**Disabilities and Other Special Accommodation.** If you have any concerns or needs here please approach me about them as soon as is convenient. I want to make the class equally accessible to all students. See also the University guidelines on disability accommodation here: <https://disabilities.uchicago.edu/accommodations>.

**Late Assignments.** My policy on late assignments is that **I don't accept them at all if you have not made prior arrangements with me to turn them in at another time.** This means contacting me at least 48 hours in advance. (i.e. You can't just fire off an email to me the night before and say "sorry, I'm not turning it in," the matter must be *settled between us 48 hours in advance*. That said, you will find I am willing to be flexible if the reasons are sensible. Emergencies will be handled on a case-by-case basis.