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Review: Water, War, and Peace: Confronting the Global Water Crisis

By Brahma Chellaney

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Chellaney, Brahma. *Water, Peace, and War: Confronting the Global Water Crisis*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013. 400 pp. ISBN: 9781442221390, hardbound, US \$39.95; acid-free paper.

Fresh water is both one of the most important and heavily exploited resources on the planet. Key for agriculture, industry, energy, and sanitation, demand for fresh water continues to rise. Pressures from environmental degradation, population growth, rising standards of living, and climate change also contribute to an imbalance between the global supply and demand for fresh water. As with any resource, decreasing quantity paired with increasing demand creates a situation ripe for competition and potential conflict.

International geostrategist Brahma Chellaney's new book, *Water, Peace, and War: Confronting the Global Water Crisis* uses this threat of conflict to paint a sobering picture of the current condition of our planet's fresh water resources. Conflicts over control and use of freshwater resources are already a common occurrence in some water stressed areas in the form of land grabs or diverting water flow. Chellaney argues that water will become the primary cause of political strife in the near future, saying, "the battles of tomorrow are likely to be over the most precious of all natural resources – water" (p. 1).

Chellaney succeeds in creating a comprehensive record of the geopolitical consequences of the shift in demand for water, synthesizing both scientific and political literature. The comprehensive nature of *Water, Peace, and War* is also evident in its global scope, focusing specifically on internationally shared waterways and aquifers. Chellaney draws on case studies from the United States, India, Israel, Pakistan, Turkey, Yemen, and many more. He focuses more attention on China than any other country, though, referring to it as "a water hegemon with no modern historical parallel" (p. 229). China's water related activities in the last century, which include annexing the water rich Tibetan Plateau, building mega-dams on a previously unheard of scale, and proceeding with the Great South-North Water Diversion Project, all point to a country intent on controlling the water resources not only within its own borders but, more troublingly, also those of its neighboring countries as well.

Chellaney does offer some hope, outlining recommendations on minimizing the impacts of the global water crisis. The agriculture, manufacturing, and energy sectors must invest in water saving technology including desalination, recycling wastewater, and recovering contaminated water sources. Water use best practices should also incentivize efficiency and infrastructure maintenance and upgrades require significant investment. For maximum impact, these steps must exist within a larger framework of international cooperation. Nations with shared freshwater resources, be it above or below ground must stop viewing water as a zero-sum resource and instead embrace collaboration. It is only through increasing the number and power of international water sharing agreements that Chellaney sees hope for preserving our planet's freshwater resources and avoiding major conflicts. He is not alone in this hope, as the United Nations' declared 2013 the "International Year of Water Cooperation."

The dire warning of a parched and conflict ridden future makes *Water, Peace, and War* compelling for anyone interested in environmental or geopolitical issues, including students and researchers. Although the text occasionally repeats ideas due to the thematic structuring of its chapters, *Water, Peace, and War* is noteworthy for its authoritative approach to blending science and policy and is recommended for academic and research libraries.

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