



**Water “Security”:
Defining the Links between Water, Peace, and Stability
A Conversation with Loïc Fauchon**

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SUMMARY

Traditionally, the term “strategic” has applied to issues relating to nuclear weapons or defense posturing. Accordingly, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has primarily focused on such themes, only peripherally delving into questions that would be labeled “development issues” such as HIV/AIDS and water. The transformations of recent decades, however, have created a much more complex environment in which the definition of “strategic” has drastically widened. CSIS has followed course and has launched the Global Water Futures project to assess the impact of global water challenges on our collective future.

As part of this effort, CSIS was pleased to welcome Loïc Fauchon, president of the World Water Council, to lay out his views and those of the WWC on the links between water, peace, stability and security. Mr. Fauchon drew from his long and varied career managing water and water projects as a leader in the government, private sector, and several nongovernmental organizations.

LOÏC FAUCHON

According to Mr. Fauchon, the lack of access to potable water kills ten times more people around the world today than all armed conflicts combined. In this sense, the ‘water wars’ that many scholars predict will occur in the future are actually a present and ongoing problem. In essence we are fighting a war against poverty. The struggle persists because few politicians have the political will to end the war. Water insecurity is a problem of the world’s weakest and most marginalized people—far away from cameras and the public eye.

Water and stability are closely linked as human development cannot occur without control over water. The global water situation is deteriorating for several complex reasons: demography, pollution, and climate.

As the global population increases, our ability to meet water demands will become an increasingly difficult task. We already see the trend of over-solicited water resources in rural areas, and ultimately hundreds of thousands of farmers and herders will have extremely limited access to water (or none at all). Also, the explosion of mega-cities—many with more than ten million inhabitants each—will add another factor of instability and potential disorder when these cities can no longer be easily supplied with water. Furthermore, water will drive the demographic problem of great migrations, which will throw tens of millions of poor people on the road without access to water, financial income, or essential services.

Pollution—from both agricultural and industrial sources—is another factor intensifying the global water situation because it is often unforeseen and dangerous, and because fighting pollution is expensive. Although it leads to soil degradation, the disappearance of ecosystems, atrophied lakes, and much more, we fail to adequately address the pollution problem. In the future this phenomenon will be tied to transboundary situations, which will provoke even more tension and crises.

Finally, we face the critical trend of climate change. Our knowledge of this phenomenon is limited to the slight warming trend of the last century. We cannot yet conclusively pinpoint the exact causes of this change, and we are limited to only examining the effects. For example, countries are investing in raising dikes to prevent floods and multiplying dams to avoid droughts.

The role of the World Water Council is to examine the ways in which the abovementioned tensions are expressed and to then find solutions to these problems. Strains over water availability appear in location, sustainability, quality, and quantity. Is water accessible where it is most needed, and will it be available in the future? How can water resources be utilized for various agricultural, industrial, and domestic uses? Will sufficient amounts of water be available to growing populations?

Mr. Fauchon outlined a range of solutions across a number of themes that the Council seeks to promote: (1) consumption; (2) water management; (3) risk management; (4) technology; (5) finance; (6) morality; (7) energy; and (8) geopolitics.

First, we must work to change attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyles with the goal of decreasing per capita water consumption.

Second, we must improve the technical management of water resources by both public and private institutions. By decentralizing water authorities and bringing management closer to the people, water users can better monitor the management practices, combat corruption, and improve efficiencies.

Third, we need to facilitate greater risk management and improve international coordination in response to water related disasters.

Fourth, we must expand technological innovation through further advances in desalinization, water recycling, deeper drilling, and water transportation techniques. Research should be conducted within the countries that are facing the most severe water challenges so that the nuances of their specific water issues are addressed.

Fifth is the need for greater financing. Currently, only about five percent of development aid is devoted to water. As Mr. Fauchon noted, “We need to place the taps before the mobile phones.” In other words, if families and communities are able to afford cell phones, we should be able to find a workable solution to extend water and sanitation services to them, but it is not happening.

Sixth is the issue of morality. In a modern society, every single person deserves access to sufficient quantities of clean, drinkable water. As the nomads of the Sahara say “Aman Iman,” water is life. It is indispensable to humanity and human development. In this context, however, we must make a distinction between individual rights to water and sovereign rights to water.

Seventh, we need to focus on the fundamental connections between energy and water. The instability of the price of oil and gas terribly weakens access to water for the world’s poor. Hydropower will also be an increasingly important source of energy as the search for viable renewable energy sources continues.

Finally, we need to take into account geopolitics. In the future, developing countries will have their own financial and technical capacities as well as their own strategic interests. Therefore, today’s major powers will need to incorporate these new players into their international cooperation.

We should all be concerned about growing water challenges across the world, not only because access to water is a moral issue, but also because water is vital to security and strategic interests. Today, we will only have enough water if we cooperate with common superior values. The World Water Council attempts to make this debate public and inform all stakeholders of the best strategies and solutions. Mr. Fauchon closed by stating that the future of our planet is conditioned by the mastering of water resources.

CLOSING REMARKS:

Erik Peterson, senior vice president of CSIS and director of the Global Strategy Institute, concluded the discussion by commenting on the common perspectives of CSIS and the World Water Council on water and stability. He said that we are collectively facing what is already a daunting challenge and one that will only become more daunting as time goes by. In effect, we are on countdown and any effective response requires a blend of technological approaches as well as a combination of actors and institutions. Mr. Peterson closed with the French saying, “*il faut s’accorder les violons.*” In other words, we need to put our violins in tune.