



# Introduction

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Looking back on the latter half of the twentieth century, one can clearly discern that the politics of ideology largely determined the extent, magnitude and nature of conflicts. In this way, Cold War security specialists developed a plethora of terms: mutually assured destruction (MAD), flexible response, credible deterrence and the like, in order to come to terms with their conflict-ridden world. Despite the fact that such terminology was used in an all-encompassing manner, and that the titanic struggle between the USA and the USSR was waged on almost every continent, the truth is that from the perspective of the ordinary people in the South, this ideological struggle was rather abstract in relation to their daily struggle for survival. Put simply, the possibility of famine or communal violence for the peasant farmer in Kathmandu or Kampala was far more real than the threat of a global thermonuclear war. Thus, the strategic discourse of the twentieth century, though couched in global terms, really reflected the strategic concerns and imperatives of the dominant states in the global order.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the security discourse rapidly changed and broadened. People, as opposed to states, were regarded as the primary referents of security. This necessitated broadening the security agenda to include non-military security threats, such as narco-trafficking, AIDS, and environmental degradation. This new security discourse has been labelled human security

and has been defined by the Bonn Declaration as '... an absence of threat to human life, lifestyle or culture'. This new, more inclusive definition of security was a better 'conceptual fit' to the stark realities faced by developing countries and their populations.

Of course, the changes in the theoretical discourse reflected the tectonic shifts in the post-Cold War global security landscape. Freed from the strait-jacket of global bipolarity, international politics is following a more turbulent trajectory. Nowhere is the saliency of this observation more clearly reflected than in the area of resource-based conflict. One such potential conflict area is scarce fresh water resources. That this is so, is hardly surprising. Within the context of the developing world, water availability determines the sustainability of economic development. According to Anthony Turton,<sup>1</sup> even in countries where the industrial sector is weak, water consumption in the agricultural sector can be as much as 80%. Thus, within the context of the South, water security does not simply translate into economic development, but also food security, and the very survival of states and their citizens. Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the World Commission on the Environment and Development (WCED) has concluded that such resource conflicts '... are likely to increase as the resources become scarcer and competition over them increases'.<sup>2</sup> It has been estimated that more than 1,7 billion people, spread over 80 countries, are suffering water shortages. Evidence also suggest that such water shortages, and conflicts over water, will intensify during the coming years.

This, then, was the backdrop which saw the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), the African Water Issues Research Unit (AWIRU) at the Centre for International Political Studies, the University of Pretoria and Green Cross International jointly hosting a conference at the University of Pretoria on 24 February 2000. The theme of the conference was 'Water and Conflict in Southern Africa'. Papers from this conference found their way into a book entitled *Water for Peace in the Middle East and Southern Africa*. The book was published by Green Cross International and was distributed at the Second World Water Forum, which took place at The Hague on 20 March 2000.

Whilst this compilation also owes its origins to the 24 February conference, the editors decided to critically review the contributions and realised some shortcomings. The first of these related to the lack of a clear theoretical focus, and this resulted in us including a chapter by Professor Anton du Plessis, which firmly grounds the water and security nexus within the wider

debates of International Relations theory. Secondly, there was the realisation that, in large measure, the subject matter was approached ahistorically. We believe Richard Meissner's excellent study on the hydro-politics of the Kunene River does very well in correcting this point. The Kunene River is shared by Namibia and Angola, and his discussion falls within the context of the evolving international relations between these two countries. It was also felt that whilst the focus is on Southern Africa, it is imperative to learn how our brothers and sisters in other parts of the continent are coping with the same problem. Hence, the inclusion of Marie-Thérèse Sarch's paper on Lake Chad, which we felt would lend a comparative perspective to the study. Finally, an urgent need was expressed for a structured framework for future research within a regional context. This is discussed in Anthony Turton's concluding chapter.

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## Notes

- 1 Turton, A., 1999. Water and Conflict in an African Context. *Conflict Trends*, No.5, December 1999, South Africa: ACCORD.
- 2 Hudson, H., 1996. Resource Based Conflict: Water (in)security and its Strategic Implications, in Solomon, H., (ed), *Sink or Swim? Water Resource Security and State Co-operation*, ISS Monograph Series No.6, Halfway House, South Africa: Institute for Defence Studies.

