

Climate, Arms, & Migration Policy Program

Riverkeepers Project

Rivers are a critical source of surface freshwater on which all ecosystems and human life depend. Only 0.3 percent of the earth’s freshwater is found on the earth’s surface and is accessible for human use. While rivers account for a small amount of freshwater resources, this is where a majority of humans access water globally.

More and more, upstream rivers are being damned, drained, or polluted, causing significant downstream effects and compounding existing pressure on freshwater availability caused by climate change. Ultimately, it is civilian populations who suffer most due to the compounding harms of lack of water access. These populations are often left out of conversations about approaches that could enhance water security and sustainable development.

The impact of water scarcity has cascading negative consequences on the planet and human wellbeing around the world. Conflict driven by resource scarcity and displaced populations are a leading causes of widespread famine, global health crises, and intensifying ideological extremism. Military support and equipment provided by the US and other nations in the global north to governments facing insurgencies often make matters worse. Additionally, policymakers too often employ siloed approaches to food instability, conflict, or global health challenges, instead of understanding the cross-cutting nature of these issues.

Therefore, CIP is conducting a survey of ten rivers across the world and exposing the intersecting impacts of climate change, corruption, migration, and arms on water management, civilian wellbeing, and geopolitics. Our goal is to highlight the current approaches to addressing water security around the world and assess their impact on multiple measures

of wellbeing, as well as where the approaches fail or are counterproductive. We achieve this through rigorous research on cross-cutting foreign policy topics, expert feedback, and interviews with grassroots organizations (interviews to be conducted in Spanish, English, and Arabic). These interviews are intended to highlight the perspectives, challenges, and solutions of the people on the ground who are directly affected by these multitudes of factors.

Lastly, we analyze current US policies aimed at improving equitable global water security and assess their impact. We compare current policies to the proposed solutions from water defenders across the different regions to help inform US policymakers on more effective and impactful strategies for enhancing sustainable water security approaches.

River Name	Countries Impacted
Danube River	Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, and Ukraine
Helmand River	Afghanistan and Iran
Jordan River	Jordan, Israel, and Palestine, Golan Heights region
Mekong River	China, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam
Niger River	Mali, Niger, Benin and Nigeria
Nile River	Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan
Brahmaputra	India, China, and Bangladesh
Rio Grande/Bravo	US and Mexico
Tigris-Euphrates	Iran, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait
Amu Darya	Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan