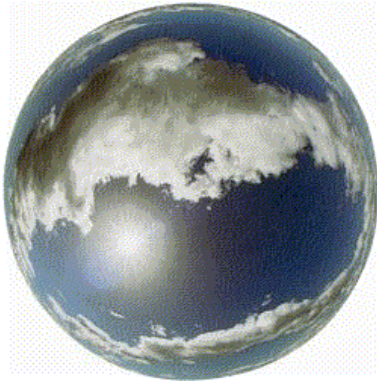


09/07/00

Water Conflict Chronology¹

September 2000 Version



Compiled by Peter Gleick, [Pacific Institute for Studies in Development, Environment, and Security](#)

Date	Parties Involved	Basis of Conflict	Violent Conflict?	Description	Sources (See also reference section at bottom of this page)
1503	Florence and Pisa warring states	Military tool	Yes	Leonardo da Vinci and Machievelli plan to divert Arno River away from Pisa during conflict between Pisa and Florence.	Honan 1996
1642	China; Ming Dynasty	Military tool	Yes	The Huang He's dikes have been breached for military purposes. In 1642, "toward the end of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), General Gao Mingheng used the tactic near Kaifeng in an attempt to suppress a peasant uprising."	Hillel 1991
1863	United States Civil War	Military tool	Yes	General U.S. Grant, during the Civil War campaign against Vicksburg, cut levees in the battle against the Confederates.	Grant1885, Barry 1997

Date	Parties Involved	Basis of Conflict	Violent Conflict?	Description	Sources (See also reference section at bottom of this page)
1898	Egypt; France; Britain	Military and political tool, Control of water resources	Military maneuvers	Military conflict nearly ensues between Britain and France in 1898 when a French expedition attempted to gain control of the headwaters of the White Nile. While the parties ultimately negotiates a settlement of the dispute, the incident has been characterized as having "dramatized Egypt's vulnerable dependence on the Nile, and fixed the attitude of Egyptian policy-makers ever since."	Moorhead 1960
1924	Owens Valley, Los Angeles, California	Political tool, Control of water resources, Terrorism, and Development dispute	Yes	The Los Angeles Valley aqueduct/pipeline suffers repeated bombings in an effort to prevent diversions of water from the Owens Valley to Los Angeles.	Reisner 1986, 1993
1935	California, Arizona	Political tool, development dispute	Military maneuvers	Arizona calls out the National Guard and militia units to the border with California to protest the construction of Parker Dam and diversions from the Colorado River; dispute ultimately is settled in court.	Reisner 1986, 1993

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1938	China and Japan	Military tool, Military target	Yes	Chiang Kai-shek orders the destruction of flood-control dikes of the Huayuankou section of the Huang He (Yellow) river to flood areas threatened by the Japanese army. West of Kaifeng dikes are destroyed with dynamite, spilling water across the flat plain. The flood destroyed part of the invading army and its heavy equipment was mired in thick mud, though Wuhan, the headquarters of the Nationalist government was taken in October. The waters flooded an area variously estimated as between 3,000 and 50,000 square kilometers, and killed Chinese estimated in numbers between "tens of thousands" and "one million."	Hillel 1991, Yang Lang 1989, 1994
1940-1945	Multiple parties	Military target	Yes	Hydroelectric dams routinely bombed as strategic targets during World War II.	Gleick 1993
1943	Britain, Germany	Military target	Yes	British Royal Air Force bombed dams on the Mohne, Sorpe, and Eder Rivers, Germany (May 16, 17). Mohne Dam breach killed 1,200, destroyed all downstream dams for 50 km.	Kirschner 1949

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1944	Germany, Italy, Britain, United States	Military tool	Yes	German forces used waters from the Isoletta Dam (Liri River) in January and February to successfully destroy British assault forces crossing the Garigliano River (downstream of Liri River). The German Army then dammed the Rapido River, flooding a valley occupied by the American Army.	Corps of Engineers 1953
1944	Germany, Italy, Britain, United States	Military tool	Yes	German Army flooded the Pontine Marches by destroying drainage pumps to contain the Anzio beachhead established by the Allied landings in 1944. Over 40 square miles of land were flooded; a 30-mile stretch of landing beaches was rendered unusable for amphibious support forces.	Corps of Engineers 1953
1944	Germany, Allied force:	Military tool	Yes	Germans flooded the Ay River, France (July) creating a lake two meters deep and several kilometers wide, slowing an advance on Saint Lo, a German communications center in Normandy.	Corps of Engineers 1953

1944	Germany, Allied force:	Military tool	Yes	Germans flooded the Ill River Valley during the Battle of the Bulge (winter 1944-45) creating a lake 16 kilometers long, 3-6 kilometers wide, and 1-2 meters deep, greatly delaying the American Army's advance toward the Rhine.	Corps of Engineers 1953
1947 onwards	Bangladesh, India	Development disputes, Control of water resources	No	Partition divides the Ganges River between Bangladesh and India; construction of the Farakka barrage by India, beginning in 1962, increases tension; short-term agreements settle dispute in 1977-82, 1982-84, and 1985-88, and thirty-year treaty is signed in 1996.	Butts 1997, Samson & Charrier 1997
1947-1960s	India, Pakistan	Development disputes, Control of water resources, and Political tool	No	Partition leaves Indus basin divided between India and Pakistan; disputes over irrigation water ensue, during which India stems flow of water into irrigation canals in Pakistan; Indus Waters Agreement reached in 1960 after 12 years of World Bank-led negotiations.	Bingham <i>et al.</i> 1994, Wolf 1997
1948	Arabs, Israelis	Military tool	Yes	Arab forces cut off West Jerusalem's water supply in first Arab-Israeli war.	Wolf 1995, 1997
1950s	Korea, United States, others	Military target	Yes	Centralized dams on the Yalu River serving North Korea and China are attacked during Korean War.	Gleick 1993

1951	Korea, United Nations	Military tool and Military target	Yes	North Korea released flood waves from the Hwachon Dam damaging floating bridges operated by UN troops in the Pukhan Valley. U.S. Navy plans were then sent to destroy spillway crest gates.	Corps of Engineers 1953
1951	Israel, Jordan, Syria	Political tool, Military tool, Development disputes	Yes	Jordan makes public its plans to irrigate the Jordan Valley by tapping the Yarmouk River; Israel responds by commencing drainage of the Huleh swamps located in the demilitarized zone between Israel and Syria; border skirmishes ensue between Israel and Syria.	Wolf 1997, Samson & Charrier 1997
1953	Israel, Jordan, Syria	Development dispute, Military target, Political tool	Yes	Israel begins construction of its National Water Carrier to transfer water from the north of the Sea of Galilee out of the Jordan basin to the Negev Desert for irrigation. Syrian military actions along the border and international disapproval lead Israel to move its intake to the Sea of Galilee.	Samson & Charrier 1997
1958	Egypt, Sudan	Military tool, Political tool, Control of water resources	Yes	Egypt sends an unsuccessful military expedition into disputed territory amidst pending negotiations over the Nile waters, Sudanese general elections, and an Egyptian vote on Sudan-Egypt unification; Nile Water Treaty signed when pro-Egyptian government elected in Sudan.	Wolf 1997
1960s	North Vietnam, United States	Military target	Yes	Irrigation water supply systems in North Vietnam are bombed during Vietnam War. 661 sections of dikes damaged or destroyed.	Gleick 1993, Zemmali 1995

Date	Parties Involved	Basis of Conflict	Violent Conflict?	Description	Sources (See also reference section at bottom of this page)
1962 to 1967	Brazil; Paraguay	Military tool, Political tool, Control of water resources	Military maneuvers	Negotiations between Brazil and Paraguay over the development of the Paraná River are interrupted by a unilateral show of military force by Brazil in 1962, which invades the area and claims control over the Guaira Falls site. Military forces were withdrawn in 1967 following an agreement for a joint commission to examine development in the region.	Murphy and Sabadell 1986
1963-1964	Ethiopia, Somalia	Development dispute, Military tool, Political tool	Yes	Creation of boundaries in 1948 leaves Somali nomads under Ethiopian rule; border skirmishes occur over disputed territory in Ogaden desert where critical water and oil resources are located; cease-fire is negotiated only after several hundred are killed.	Wolf 1997
1965-1966	Israel, Syria	Military tool, Political tool, Control of water resources, Development dispute	Yes	Fire is exchanged over "all-Arab" plan to divert the Jordan River headwaters and presumably preempt Israeli National Water Carrier; Syria halts construction of its diversion in July 1966.	Wolf 1995, 1997
1966-1972	Vietnam, US	Military tool	Yes	U.S. tries cloud-seeding in Indochina to stop flow of materiel along Ho Chi Minh trail.	Plant 1995

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1967	Israel, Syria	Military target and tool	Yes	Israel destroys the Arab diversion works on the Jordan River headwaters. During Arab-Israeli War Israel occupies Golan Heights, with Banias tributary to the Jordan; Israel occupies West Bank.	Gleick 1993, Wolf 1995, 1997, Wallenstein & Swain 1997
1969	Israel, Jordan	Military target and tool	Yes	Israel, suspicious that Jordan is overdiverting the Yarmouk, leads two raids to destroy the newly-built East Ghor Canal; secret negotiations, mediated by the US, lead to an agreement in 1970.	Samson & Charrier 1997
1970s	Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay	Political goal, Development dispute	No	Brazil and Paraguay announce plans to construct a dam at Itaipu on the Paraná River, causing Argentina concern about downstream environmental repercussions and the efficacy of their own planned dam project downstream. Argentina demands to be consulted during the planning of Itaipu but Brazil refuses. An agreement is reached in 1979 that provides for the construction of both Brazil and Paraguay's dam at Itaipu and Argentina's Yacyreta dam.	Wallenstein & Swain 1997
1974	Iraq, Syria	Military target, Military tool, Political tool, Development dispute	Military maneuvers	Iraq threatens to bomb the al-Thawra dam in Syria and massed troops along the border, alleging that the dam had reduced the flow of Euphrates River water to Iraq.	Gleick 1994

1975	Iraq, Syria	Development dispute, Military tool, Political tool	Military maneuvers	As upstream dams are filled during a low-flow year on the Euphrates, Iraqis claim that flow reaching its territory is "intolerable" and asks the Arab League to intervene. Syrians claim they are receiving less than half the river's normal flow and pull out of an Arab League technical committee formed to mediate the conflict. In May Syria closes its airspace to Iraqi flights and both Syrian and Iraq reportedly transfer troops to their mutual border. Saudi Arabia successfully mediates the conflict.	Gleick 1993, 1994, Wolf 1997
1975	Angola, South Africa	Military goal	Yes	South African troops move into Angola to occupy and defend the Ruacana hydropower complex, including the Gové Dam on the Kunene River. Goal is to take possession of and defend the water resources of southwestern Africa and Namibia.	Meissner 2000
1978-onwards	Egypt, Ethiopia	Development dispute, Political tool	No	Long standing tensions over the Nile, especially the Blue Nile, originating in Ethiopia. Ethiopia's proposed construction of dams on the headwaters of the Blue Nile leads Egypt to repeatedly declare the vital importance of water. "The only matter that could take Egypt to war again is water" (Anwar Sadat-1979). "The next war in our region will be over the waters of the Nile, not politics" (Boutrous Ghali-1988).	Gleick 1991, 1994
1981	Iran, Iraq	Military target and tool	Yes	Iran claims to have bombed a hydroelectric facility in Kurdistan, thereby blacking out large portions of Iraq, during the Iran-Iraq War.	Gleick 1993
1980-1988	Iran, Iraq	Military tool	Yes	Iran diverts water to flood Iraqi defense positions.	Plant 1995

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1988	Angola, South Africa, Cuba	Military goal, military target	Yes	Cuban and Angolan forces launch an attack on Calueque Dam via land and then air. Considerable damage inflicted on dam wall; power supply to dam cut. Water pipeline to Owamboland cut and destroyed.	Meissner 2000
1982	Israel, Lebanon, Syria	Military tool	Yes	Israel cuts off the water supply of Beirut during siege.	Wolf 1997
1986	North Korea, South Korea	Military tool	No	North Korea's announcement of its plans to build the Kungansan hydroelectric dam on a tributary of the Han River upstream of Seoul raises concerns in South Korea that the dam could be used as a tool for ecological destruction or war.	Gleick 1993
1986	Lesotho, South Africa	Military goal; Control of water resources	Yes	South Africa supports coup in Lesotho over support for ANC and anti-apartheid, and water. New government in Lesotho then quickly signs Lesotho Highlands water agreement.	American University 2000b
1990	South Africa	Development dispute, Control of water resources	No	Pro-apartheid council cuts off water to the Wesselton township of 50,000 blacks following protests over miserable sanitation and living conditions.	Gleick 1993
1990	Iraq, Syria, Turkey	Development dispute, Military tool, Political tool	No	The flow of the Euphrates is interrupted for a month as Turkey finishes construction of the Ataturk Dam, part of the Grand Anatolia Project. Syria and Iraq protest that Turkey now has a weapon of war. In mid-1990 Turkish president Turgut Ozal threatens to restrict water flow to Syria to force it to withdraw support for Kurdish rebels operating in southern Turkey.	Gleick 1993 & 1995

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1991-present	Karnataka, Tamil Nadu (India)	Development dispute, Control of water resources	Yes	Violence erupts when Karnataka rejects an Interim Order handed down by the Cauvery Waters Tribunal, empaneled by the Indian Supreme Court. The Tribunal was established in 1990 to settle two decades of dispute between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over irrigation rights to the Cauvery River.	Gleick 1993, Butts 1997, American University 2000a
1991	Iraq, Kuwait, US	Military target	Yes	During the Gulf War, Iraq destroys much of Kuwait's desalination capacity during retreat.	Gleick 1993
1991	Iraq, Turkey, United Nations	Military tool	Yes	Discussions are held at the United Nations about using the Ataturk Dam in Turkey to cut off flows of the Euphrates to Iraq.	Gleick 1993
1991	Iraq, Kuwait, US	Military target	Yes	Baghdad's modern water supply and sanitation system are intentionally targeted by Allied coalition.	Gleick 1993

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1992	Czechoslovakia, Hungary	Political tool, Development dispute	Military maneuvers	Hungary abrogates a 1977 treaty with Czechoslovakia concerning construction of the Gabčíkovo/Nagymaros project based on environmental concerns. Slovakia continues construction unilaterally, completes the dam, and diverts the Danube into a canal inside the Slovakian republic. Massive public protest and movement of military to the border ensue; issue taken to the International Court of Justice.	Gleick 1993

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1992	Bosnia, Bosnian Serbs	Military tool	Yes	The Serbian siege of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, includes a cutoff of all electrical power and the water feeding the city from the surrounding mountains. The lack of power cuts the two main pumping stations inside the city despite pledges from Serbian nationalist leaders to United Nations officials that they would not use their control of Sarajevo's utilities as a weapon. Bosnian Serbs take control of water valves regulating flow from wells that provide more than 80 percent of water to Sarajevo; reduced water flow to city is used to 'smoke out' Bosnians.	Burns 1992, Husarska 1995
1993-present	Iraq	Military tool	No	To quell opposition to his government, Saddam Hussein reportedly poisons and drains the water supplies of southern Shiite Muslims, the Ma'dan. The European Parliament and UN Human Rights Commission deplore use of water as weapon in region.	Gleick 1993, American University 2000c
1993	Yugoslavia	Military target and tool	Yes	Peruca Dam intentionally destroyed during war.	Gleick 1993

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1995	Ecuador, Peru	Military and political tool	Yes	Armed skirmishes arise in part because of disagreement over the control of the headwaters of Cenepa River. Wolf argues that this is primarily a border dispute simply coinciding with location of a water resource.	Samson & Charrier 1997, Wolf 1997
1997	Singapore, Malaysia	Political tool	No	Malaysia supplies about half of Singapore's water and in 1997 threatened to cut off that supply in retribution for criticisms by Singapore of policy in Malaysia.	Zachary 1997
1998	Tajikistan	Terrorism, Political tool	Potential	On November 6, a guerrilla commander threatened to blow up a dam on the Kairakkhum channel if political demands are not met. Col. Makhmud Khudoberdyev made the threat, reported by the ITAR-Tass News Agency.	WRR 1998
1999	Lusaka, Zambia	Terrorism, Political tool	Yes	Bomb blast destroyed the main water pipeline, cutting off water for the city of Lusaka, population 3 million.	FTGWR 1999

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1999	Yugoslavia	Military target	Yes	Belgrade reported that NATO planes had targeted a hydroelectric plant during the Kosovo campaign.	Reuters 1999a
1999	Bangladesh	Development dispute, Political tool	Yes	50 hurt during strikes called to protest power and water shortages. Protest led by former Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia over deterioration of public services and in law and order.	Ahmed 1999
1999	Yugoslavia	Military target	Yes	NATO targets utilities and shuts down water supplies in Belgrade. NATO bombs bridges on Danube, disrupting navigation.	Reuters 1999b
1999	Yugoslavia	Political tool	Yes	Yugoslavia refuses to clear war debris on Danube (downed bridges) unless financial aid for reconstruction is provided; European countries on Danube fear flooding due to winter ice dams will result. Diplomats decry environmental blackmail.	Simons 1999
1999	Kosovo	Political tool	Yes	Serbian engineers shut down water system in Pristina prior to occupation by NATO.	Reuters 1999c

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1999	Angola	Terrorism/ Political tool	Yes	100 bodies were found in four drinking water wells in central Angola.	International Herald Tribune 1999
1999	Puerto Rico, U.S.	Political tool	No	Protesters blocked water intake to Roosevelt Roads Navy Base in opposition to U.S. military presence and Navy's use of the Blanco River, following chronic water shortages in neighboring towns.	New York Times 1999
1999	East Timor	Military tool, Political tool, terrorism	Yes	Militia opposing East Timor independence kill pro-independence supporters and throw bodies in water well.	BBC 1999
1999	Kosovo	Terrorism/ Political tool	Yes	Contamination of water supplies/wells by Serbs disposing of bodies of Kosovar Albanians in local wells.	CNN 1999
1999- 2000	Namibia, Botswana, Zambia	Military goal	No	Sedudu/Kasikili Island, in the Zambezi/Chobe River. Dispute over border and access to water. Presented to the International Court of Justice	ICJ 1999.

Notes:

1. Conflicts may stem from the drive to possess or control another nation's water resources, thus making water systems and resources a *political or military goal*. Inequitable distribution and use of water resources, sometimes arising from a water development, may lead to *development disputes*, heighten the importance of water as a strategic goal or may lead to a degradation of another's source of water. Conflicts may also arise when water systems are used as instruments of war, either as *targets* or *tools*. These distinctions are described in detail in Gleick (1993, 1998).

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