
Water and International Relations

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Reflections on Water, Climate and Humanity | Part 5

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In February 1994 *The Atlantic* ran a cover story by the American journalist Robert D. Kaplan entitled “The Coming Anarchy”. This story, based on a then-forthcoming book by Kaplan bearing the same title, looked a few years into the future and predicted a bleak dystopia for much of the world, a Hobbesian environment of all against all. Kaplan saw climate change (not yet a commonplace of daily conversation), overpopulation, and rampant pandemics leading to resource wars, intractable conflicts fueled by accelerating demands on ever-scarcer resources, water included. Sometimes it seems that predictions about future resource issues have scarcely advanced beyond Kaplan’s baleful expectations.

Yet there are less pessimistic scenarios on offer. Not quite a decade after Kaplan wrote, a quartet of experts on water management and governance, Torgny Holmgren, Anders Jaegerskog, Jens Berggren, and John Joyce wrote in the *Guardian* about cooperation on water management across borders, noting that many of the world’s major supplies of water are transboundary; in other words, they traverse national borders. Many are without formal agreements governing their use, to boot. Yet there are exceptions. Under the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty, India and Pakistan cooperate to develop and manage the resources of the Indus River system, and have done so for decades despite a generally tense relationship. And after the 1993 Oslo Agreement, and then the 1995 Taba Agreement, Israel and the Palestinians cooperated to manage West Bank water resources, albeit not without difficulties. The point is that cooperation to manage scarce water resources is possible and often necessary, even where the relationship is fundamentally conflictual. The future of the world’s water resources depends on whether we follow the logic of interdependence or the logic of exclusive exploitation. The future is up to us, as always.



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Greg Donaghy is Director of the Bill Graham Centre for Contemporary International History. Prior to joining the Centre on 1 July 2019, he was Head of the Historical Section, Global Affairs Canada.

Dr. Donaghy received his BA from the University of Toronto (1986), his MA from Carleton University (1989), and his PhD from the University of Waterloo (1998).

He has written over fifty scholarly articles and reviews on the history of Canadian foreign policy and edited or co-edited another twelve collections of scholarly essays on Canadian history, diplomacy, and foreign policy. These include, *A Samaritan State Revisited: Historical Perspectives on Canadian Foreign Aid* (with David Webster, 2019), *Canada and the Challenges of Globalization, 1968-2017*, a special edition of *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* (with Stéphane Roussel, 2018), and *From Kinshasa to Kandahar: Canada and Fragile States in Historical Perspective* (with Michael Carroll, 2016).

He is co-author (with John Hilliker and Mary Halloran) of *Innovation and Adaptation: Canada's Department of External Affairs, 1968-84* (2017). He is also the author of the monograph, *Tolerant Allies: Canada and the United States, 1963-1968* (2003, 2008) and of the biography, *Grit: The Life and Politics of Paul Martin Sr.* (2015), a finalist for the 2015 Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing.

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