



## RESOURCE SECURITY WATCH

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of  
Changes to the Global Strategic Environment

# Resource Security Watch No. 21

August 13, 2019 **Rebecca Yim**

**Related Categories:** Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Resource Security; Afghanistan; Europe; Latin America; Southeast Asia

### INDIA'S DEEPENING WATER CRISIS

This summer, swathes of India are suffering from severe water shortages, causing thousands to abandon their villages and farms and flock to the country's already water-stressed cities. The four main water reservoirs for India's sixth largest city, Chennai, have completely run out of water, putting five million people and one of India's largest metropolitan centers at the mercy of the weather. Restaurants and hotels have closed, offices have instructed employees to stay home, and the number of hospital patients suffering from water-born illnesses and dehydration has ballooned.

Moreover, because India's agricultural sector is made up mostly of small family run farms, the dwindling availability of water will have significant knock-on effects for the nation, including putting even greater stress on India's poor, and prompting greater urbanization and migration. In turn, the growing number of people in the impoverished areas of India's major cities will create even worse living conditions, foster a greater number of diseases, and damage local economies that depend solely on the monsoons. (London *Guardian*, June 11, 2019; BBC, June 18, 2019)

### A GLOBAL MIGRATION DILEMMA

According to the latest United Nations statistics, more than 70 million people are displaced world-wide today – more than double the number that were in 1992 – thanks to the proliferation of large-scale civil conflicts. The UN Human Rights Council examined three groups in particular in making its quantitative analysis: refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons. The first of these groups now makes up 25.9 million people globally. The second, 3.5 million. And the third, 41.3 million. The figures in each category have ballooned significantly because of ongoing conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Somalia, and Venezuela. The effects of this uptick are being felt by developed nations, who now face pressure to accept and accommodate greater numbers of refugees than ever before. They are also impacting developing ones as well, as border countries and those adjacent to conflicts find their economies and resources strained by migrants in greater and greater numbers. (London BBC, June 19, 2019)

### EUROPE FEELS THE HEAT

This summer has been the hottest in Europe's history, with temperatures hitting over 45C (113F). This has pointed to a global warming trend as summers become hotter than normal, leading to an increase in deaths, health issues, and negative effects on agriculture. The individuals likely to suffer the most are the elderly and the poor, who will have less access to cool facilities and will dehydrate quicker than others. Furthermore, illnesses sensitive to temperatures are typically found with the elderly (as demonstrated by a similarly hot summer in France in 2003, which saw the majority of the 15,000 heat-related deaths recorded belonging to the 55+ age group). As for agriculture, heatwaves rob the soil of precious water, stunting root development and killing crops. For small scale farmers in poorer areas, a bad year can lead to mass migration, such as the current drought-driven mass migration in Namibia. Increased temperatures affect where and how people live, and if certain regions have consistent high temperatures, one can expect disease, health risks, and food and water shortages to accompany such spikes in temperatures. (*The Hill*, June 25, 2019; *Business Insider*, June 28, 2019)

### MELTING HIMALAYAS IMPERIL AFGHANISTAN

A large number of countries in Asia depend on the freshwater of the Himalayas in order to survive, but the growing rate at which the mountain ranges' glaciers are melting will change all that. In particular, land-locked Afghanistan is deeply dependent on a steady flow of freshwater from the Himalayas to provide the majority of the water used by residents for agriculture and personal consumption. Today, however, the glaciers are melting at a much quicker rate than before, affected by rising global temperatures. In the process, they are putting the future of Afghanistan – which has no other major source of water – in jeopardy. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 5, 2019; *New York Times*, June 19, 2019)

## **VENEZUELA'S GASOLINE CRISIS**

In the midst of a protracted political conflict, Venezuela is running out of gasoline, with people waiting in line for days for the chance to barely fill up their tanks. The shortage is the product of U.S. sanctions, which has made it all-but impossible for PDVSA, Venezuela's state-owned oil company, to import the necessary chemicals to turn its thick, heavy crude into gasoline. The result is that hundreds of thousands of people are missing days of work as they queue up for gas. The shortfall, moreover, is exacerbating the effects of the country's existing food and water shortages. Given the gasoline cuts, transportation necessary to bring food rations to the population are being severely impacted, worsening privation among the Venezuelan populace – and potentially driving desperate citizens to flee the country. Gasoline could also end up being responsible for a spike of lawlessness in the Latin American nation; as more and more people go without gas and cannot make it to their jobs, they may be forced to turn to criminal activity in order to get by. (CNN, May 26, 2019)