



Foreign Policy and International Water Development **Aaron Salzberg**



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By Erin Brady '10

Aaron Salzberg spoke on the U.S. position towards international water issues. He holds the U.S. State Department's only position specifically directed towards issues of water resource management and development. He had also recently returned from the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul, Turkey, where he was a member of the 65-person U.S. delegation.

Salzberg started his presentation with the dismaying statistic that 800 million people across the globe lack access to safe drinking water. He went on to explain that the reality is not only do people not have access to safe drinking water but they do not have access to an improved water source for drinking as well as sanitation. One third of the world's population does not have proper sanitation access. This needs to be a huge concern for the developed world as issues of human rights are tied into this poor sanitation. This lack of access to proper sanitation is the leading cause for girls to drop out of school and work in developing countries. Another issue involved in the lack of access to an improved drinking water source, is the large amount of people who fall ill to water borne diseases. Over 1 billion people each year will become ill due to their drinking water. Among this number, over 6,000 will die each day. Many of those who die are young children under the age of five and women. Women are usually the ones who are in charge of collecting the drinking water for the family.

After Salzberg had outlined some critical concerns for human rights, he moved on to discuss demands for water use as well as concerns for security related to water scarcity. Using a graph based on UNEP data, Salzberg pointed out the global water use. The most surprising was the large amount of water used for the world's agriculture needs (70%) and 90% of that number goes to developing countries. He went on to discuss how the world's demand for beef will rise 91% as countries continue to develop. As affluence rises, so does peoples' appetite for high protein food sources. Due to heavy water use for agriculture and food production the arable land available is decreasing. This lack of arable land presents a concern for U.S. interests. As arable land decreases, unemployment in many countries rises because of developing countries' reliance on agriculture for livelihoods. Salzberg presented the example of Uzbekistan. Here unemployment is rising steadily due to 60% of its land being depleted. This raises concern for U.S. security interests. The country, as well as other countries experiencing the same troubles, will become more unstable and prone to violence.

There is strong U.S. strategic interest in areas where water scarcity is an issue. Looking at an image of groundwater depletion around the globe, it is clear that the band of "most critical depletion" runs through areas where we already have high strategic interest (aka the Middle East). This provides an added incentive to help these regions with their water development. When water quality is poor, there is also an added strain on the economic structure of a country because the cost for water borne diseases is very high. Pollution to fisheries also produces high cost. Salzberg proceeded to show a World Bank graph depicting that rainfall affects growth.

There is a clear correlation between a country's GDP and rainfall amounts. This indicates that managing water is a key to pulling countries out of poverty. He stated that he does not think that there will be wars over water between states. There will more likely be an uptake of local conflicts over water quality and quantity within states.

Salzberg continued to explain why water matters. He has five reasons why he thinks the U.S. should care to help with water issues around the world. First, human dignity should be a right for all. In developing nations, there are girls who do not have that feeling of dignity as they do not have proper access to water for sanitation reasons during their menstrual cycles. This causes many girls to drop out of school in embarrassment. Second, economic growth is only possible if the nation has access to clean water for drinking as well as sanitation. As stated before, there is a clear correlation between rainfall and GDP. Third, if water is readily available, conflict prevention will occur. Competition will be eliminated and people won't become desperate and feel the need to fight over water sources. Forth, if nations come together over issues of water scarcity and degradation, there will be opportunities to build trust and promote cooperation. Water can be a tool for peace versus conflict. Last, water provides an opportunity for the U.S. as well as the rest of the West to promote Democracy building.

By 2025, over 1 billion people will face conditions of absolute water scarcity. This fact presents two challenges for the U.S. First, there will be a challenge to augment supplies of water across the globe. Second, there is a definite management issue. In some cases, water is available but there is a need to figure out how to make sure peoples' needs are met. Climate change will make situations worse in the coming years, which will also add to these two challenges.

Working on water issues in government presents more challenges. Salzberg discussed the four most pressing challenges he deals with everyday in the U.S. Department of State. There is always a lack of capacity in the developing countries. It is difficult for governments to oversee and train thousands of people. There is also usually a lack in resources. Significant funding is required from in-country sources, and in most cases the amount needed to make a difference is not available. Another factor is that there is often a lack of political will even within countries. One example of this not being the case is South Africa. The government recently made water a political goal and they were able to accomplish the goals for water quality and access that they set out for their country.

Everyone in the audience was eager to hear about what Salzberg had to say about what the U.S. Department of State was doing for water issues. Salzberg discussed how they are working on building a constituency on water issues amongst the American public and government as well as international partners. They are also working on improving the way in which the U.S. government works in terms of international water issues. In 2005, Congress passed the Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act. This act makes access to safe water and sanitation for developing countries a specific policy objective of U.S. foreign assistance programs. The act calls on the President to develop a strategy in consultation with numerous agencies and international organizations. The U.S. Department of State has worked with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to act on this call. They have recently developed a water framework.

They believe that it is an appropriate time to conduct a wider assessment of the global challenge of water and to develop a more comprehensive national strategy.¹

The U.S approach for tackling water issues abroad was Salzberg's next speaking point. The first area to target is capacity building. The U.S. needs to help other countries develop the means to train and monitor people to make sure those countries can sustain the water programs in the future without the help of the U.S. There needs to be a focus on diplomatic engagement, which includes active discussions and exchange of ideas between the U.S. and others. Direct investment is the third key target area. The U.S. needs to invest in building and updating infrastructure in the countries dealing with water issues. Finally, the U.S. has a duty to also invest in science and technology advancements to these nations. This is particularly important in the way of wastewater treatment and water treatment systems. Overall there needs to be active partnerships forming between the U.S. government agencies and businesses, and our foreign counterparts.

Salzberg was asked whether or not elements in U.S. water policy look any different under the Obama Administration versus the Bush Administration. He stated that within the last 8-10 years there has been a definite progression, with the Paul Simon Act an example. The next steps will need to be in strengthening the State Department in the field to be able to deliver on their mission. There needs to be more training for field staff in USAID, and more engineers brought overseas as well as trained overseas.

The talk concluded with some words on the recent visit to the World Water Forum in Istanbul. Salzberg mentioned that he was pleased with the U.S. delegation (they brought over 65 representatives). They came to the forum with the objective of sharing the new U.S. domestic initiatives around water policy. They also were hoping to establish more opportunities to create U.S. led training sessions around GIS technology for helping to build country capacity. Overall though, when examining the forum from an international perspective he was a bit disappointed. Most of the meetings did not focus on critical areas such as capacity building as the U.S. had hoped for. There was too much of a focus on negotiating declarations versus actually discussing how to make a difference on the ground.

Concluding, Salzberg came to the conference with clear goals. He came to promote the U.S. State Department's mission and clearly spoke "on the record." Despite this goal, he was able to offer the audience some valuable insight into the world of a diplomat in an office of only a few employees struggling to make progress on such a complicated worldwide issue. The audience definitely gained a better understanding of the challenges that arise in working on water issues at the government level as well as gaining knowledge on the U.S. Government's water vision for the future abroad.

For more information on Salzberg's work and U.S. international water policy, see: (List compiled by Kristiane Huber '11 and Rebeccah Beachell '09)

¹ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Oceans, Environment, and Science, "Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act: Report to Congress," June 2008.
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/105643.pdf>.

Department of State Site for the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs: <http://www.state.gov/g/oes/>

Government Website on the Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act: <http://www.state.gov/g/oes/water/>

Government site explaining the United States' participation in the World Water Forum: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/03/120466.htm>

World Health Organization's Website explaining "The Right to Water:" http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/rightwater/en/ and WHO's Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation: <http://www.wssinfo.org/en/welcome.html>

Oregon State University's Transboundary Freshwater Dispute Database: <http://www.transboundarywaters.orst.edu/database/>

The Pacific Institute's bibliography of water conflict: <http://www.worldwater.org/conflict.html>

The United Nations Environmental Programme's Report on the state of the world's water: <http://www.unep.org/dewa/assessments/ecosystems/water/vitalwater/>. Also, <http://www.unwater.org/flashindex.html>

United Nations World Water Development Report: <http://www.unesco.org/water/wwap/wwdr/index.shtml>

USAID's Environment section – subsection on Water and Coastal Resources: http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/environment/water/index.html

International Water Issues – presentation by Aaron Salzberg: <http://aquadoc.typepad.com/files/salzberg---int.-water-issues.pdf>