

The ENMOD Convention is an important and so far successful but quite modest, and in some respects inadequate, instrument in this field. If it is to continue to be effective, it must be placed in the larger context of international and inter-society conflicts, and be relevant to the increasingly serious environmental issues of today. The forthcoming Review Conference provides an opportunity to examine whether ENMOD is a suitable instrument around which to build this larger function, or whether something different is needed.

In a perceptive series of essays, Matthias Finger (1992) has examined the relationships between environment and military actions and incentives. His analyses have lessons for ENMOD. The basic incompatibility between military objectives, which are to give priority, above all else, to entrenchment or consolidation of a pre-defined authority or power structure, and environmental issues and objectives that recognize situations and forces not related to national borders or human institutions of authority, means that any instrument that seeks to limit modification of the use of environment as a military instrument, if successful, will inevitably reduce and change the goals and priorities of conflict and military actions. If it is not successful, the military activities will increasingly hold the environment hostage to military priorities, no matter what the environmental cost and the self-destructive costs to the military and to national goals themselves. The issues opened up by the ENMOD Convention and the review of its applicability in the world today are thus much larger than whether a fifteen-year-old convention is workable in legal and political terms — or even worth keeping — today. They are issues of the place of humankind and human political institutions in the natural world and the world of nations, and of the ability of both to sustain us all.

References

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