

Interstate violence could stem from internal social instability. From one point of view, if negative environmental effects do not extend beyond the local community or state (i.e., no spillovers or transborder externalities), there is no pressing need for international action. But this erroneous conclusion is reached on the basis of the environmental effects themselves, not the possible social conflict arising from the environmental effects. There are a number of ways domestic environmental stress that contributes to social instability could also contribute to interstate conflict. First, the international system could become more prone to conflict due to domestic instability. Should environmental stress result in a shift in the relative strength of states, the use of violence could be considered a more attractive option by the party gaining in strength. Secondly, conflict could conceivably arise from an increased flow of emigrants, or from political elites channelling public dissatisfaction on to a foreign country, or even from the country experiencing the environmental stress attempting to gain new resources to compensate for its losses.¹⁵ Therefore, what may be considered domestic environmental problems are of interest to the international community from a national security perspective.

Interstate violence could also result from transboundary pollution and global commons issues.¹⁶ The reality that ecosystems and pollutants do not respect national boundaries calls into question the current concept of national sovereignty. As currently understood, countries have the sovereign "right" to pursue their national interests, including environmental resource usage and protection. However, as part of a larger whole, it is possible that the pursuit of what a country considers its national interest is a national security threat to other countries. Such an event could occur with respect to upstream air or water pollution. In a multilateral context, it also raises the possibility of "free riders" to international environmental agreements (IEAs). While some or most countries may agree to a course of action to reduce environmental degradation, other countries may consider it in their interest not to accept international practices. If such non-compliance were to pose a global environmental threat, countries could contemplate the use of violence as a last resort

¹⁵This last point is an example of how environmental stress and the more general case of resource scarcity are linked. While it cannot be categorically stated, it is not outlandish to suggest that chronic scarcities of renewable and non-renewable resources will occur over the next century. Whether such scarcity will be acute enough to promote violence, or whether the scarcity is caused by environmental stress, is difficult to say.

¹⁶As will be discussed later in the Paper, in the case of China, the medium-term prospect for interstate violent conflict is less than that for intrastate conflict.