

Intrastate violence could arise from environmental stress. In the most simple case, environmental stress would result in living conditions so harsh that the public, or certain elements of the public, would resort to violence in the hope of altering the conditions they face. But there is nothing simple here about the causal links. Political factors, the distribution of income and social-ethnic factors may influence environmental degradation. A dualistic land ownership structure, with resource allocation and control held by a small, possibly different ethnic group or elite may encourage the non-elite to use ecologically vulnerable and marginal lands for agriculture. Moreover, with insecure land tenure, the non-elite farmers have little incentive to conserve the land and this would contribute to a greater rate of environmental degradation. Intrastate violence could also arise indirectly. Internal migrants might move from environmentally exhausted lands to areas that, while also under environmental stress, offer somewhat better living conditions. Again, if different ethnic groups were involved the prospect for violence may increase, and the causal links become more complex.

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 contributing to internal 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.²¹ 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. The reality that ecosystems and pollutants do not respect national

²¹This 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.