7.1 International Cooperation

The threat of environment stress leading to violence, in addition to the negative implications of environmental degradation itself, makes a strong case for increasing international cooperation on environmental issues. Environmental problems, resource depletion or environmental stress do not require violent conflict to influence the human condition. For example, air pollution that stimulates respiratory illness directly endangers human health. Renewable and non-renewable resource scarcities will affect human well-being, regardless of whether there is a violent response to the shortages. Environmental problems in themselves, i.e., the direct environmental impact, necessitate cooperation in tackling them. The potential for violence derived from environmental stress reinforces the need for cooperation. Such cooperation is essential for resolving global and regional environmental problems.

The multidimensional nature of how environmental stress translates into violent conflict requires that an integrated multilateral approach be taken to reduce the risk of such violence occurring. Social, demographic, political and economic issues are all inherent factors contributing to the threat. The conceptual framework discussed earlier in the Paper and presented in Figure 1 illustrates the large number of potential policy responses. The three components: environment, social conflict, and violence, as well as the two causal linkages, and the important outside influences not explicitly captured by the framework, such as technology, allow for some increased understanding of the interdependency between environmental stress and national security. Peacekeeping or peacemaking is one potential policy response. This response, which would be costly, would be directed at restoring social stability once environmental stress had resulted in a violent conflict. A more fundamental policy response would be directed at reducing environmental stress in the first instance.

By reducing environmental stress, violent conflict that may arise from it is also affected. Efforts to date on generating global cooperation on environmental issues and reducing environmental stress in general have had moderate success. At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), a Framework Convention on Climate Change was adopted. Article 2 states that the Convention's objective is to stabilize atmospheric gas concentrations at a level that would prevent dangerous interference with the climate. In addition, many countries, mainly the developed countries, have undertaken to adopt national policies to limit greenhouse gas emissions.[49] Other examples of international cooperation are the well-known Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the Convention on

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[49]Ibid. p. 42.