

nature, which in turn is often selective and impressionistic. Given these limitations, such work nonetheless does point to a potential for environmental stress to contribute to violent conflict. Yet it is certainly not the stuff for drawing strong conclusions.

A case study of China concluded that environmental degradation of the country was emerging as an important source of disputes, including potentially violent conflict.²⁶ Contributing factors to environmental deterioration in China, which extends over the full gamut of environmental problems such as deforestation and soil erosion, have been large absolute increases in population and, during the Mao Zedong years, a Stalinist type, heavy industry development strategy that took little account of environmental concerns. Moreover, the post 1978 reform period has seen economic growth outpace implementation of effective environmental policies. The study notes that noise and air pollution have both been the cause of urban conflict. In one case, coal-handling equipment was smashed, as its operation generated dust clouds that prevented local residents from opening their windows.²⁷ Examples of violent clashes over access to water are also given.²⁸ But while the causes of specific incidents, such as the coal incident, are not unique, the number and intensity of such conflicts are not known. The point that environmental stress has contributed to conflict nonetheless makes it difficult to dismiss the possibility that, should environmental stress intensify further, conflict could be expected. In China, it is widely expected that serious environmental challenges will occur over at least the next twenty years.²⁹

²⁶Václav Smil, "Environmental Change as a Source of Conflict and Economic Losses in China," Occasional Paper No. 2, Project on Environmental Change and Acute Conflict, A Joint Project of the University of Toronto and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, December 1992.

²⁷Ibid. p. 11.

²⁸Ibid. p. 16.

²⁹For an insightful analysis of China's economic prospects and environmental challenges, see Stephen Lavergne, "China 2000: The Nature of Growth and Canada's Economic Interests," Policy Staff Paper No. 94/10, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, May 1994. The Paper concludes that environmental problems will pose "a significant challenge to sustainable development in China in the future. Environmental problems in China are more severe than at comparable periods of economic development in most industrialized countries, primarily because of the size of the country's population, and natural resource constraints. They could impair China's potential for economic growth, unless action is taken soon to address both the direct and indirect or underlying causes. Chinese reformers must come to view environmental management as part of the larger process of economic reform and industrial restructuring. Moreover, the continued increase in emissions which generate acid rain and produce greenhouse gases, for example, will increasingly internationalize China's environmental problems." Indeed, from the environmental stress-national security perspective it would appear prudent for China to take a serious look at a non-conventional definition of national security.