Environmental Insecurity

The placement of environment as one element within national security portfolio is based on recognition of the fact that persistent, widespread environmental degradation and/or scarcity of natural resources can have long-term consequences of strategic nature. Both these factors can raise the temperature of economic competition and, in case of small, economically weak and politically divided states they may even undermine not only the social and economic stability of these states, but their political security as well. Seen from this perspective, forces that lead to environmental degradation or resource scarcity – be it natural catastrophes, global warming or human-induced environmental stress – can each and all be viewed as security risks. What appears to be less clear, however, are the means that ought to be used to address these threats. In particular, while military threats to national security have been traditionally addressed by military means, it is yet to be defined what instruments are available, or appropriate, to deal with environmental security threats.

This study argues that one policy instrument that might be appropriate for dealing with the threats to environmental security are the arms control CSBMs. Such argument might be sustained on the following grounds.

The concept of environmental security, as states routinely use it in their communications, refers fundamentally to the threat that is posed by environmental degradation and/or the sudden scarcity of vital resources to political stability.[2] Such threat is likely to be pronounced in the absence of formal treaties and/or agreements to rule on disputes over resource sharing, abstraction rates and pollution. In case of multiple parties being dependent on a resource held in common (i.e., trans-frontier forests, international river basins) such disputes might turn into political conflicts and even wars, if or when they are compounded by pre-existing political conflicts. Conflicts over access to freshwater resources serve in this context as a particularly salient case in point. The following, for instance, has been reported from the World Water Forum, recently held in Kyoto, Japan:

> "Almost half the world's population lives in 263 international river basins. The Danube, Rhine, Congo, Nile, Niger and Zambezi rivers all pass through nine or more nations. But two-thirds of these basins have no treaties to share the water. With world's water use expected to triple in the next 50 years, "real wars" over water are increasingly likely, said former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev, who is in Kyoto representing an international environmental group called Green Cross International."[3]

Given the above, it could be argued that many parties could benefit from entering into agreements designed principally to improve the availability of information with respect to developments and/or activities on one side of the border but which are likely to have a deleterious impact on the natural environment or resource consumption on the other. It could be further argued that such an agreement would have two key benefits:

- Greater openness and transparency would build faith (i.e., political confidence) in the intentions of all sides concerned;

- Factual, objective information would help clarifying misunderstandings and/or misinformation concerning the activities of all sides, and thus would serve to: a) limit or eliminate the role of military factors in conflict resolution; b) reduce and/or possibly eliminate the risk of military conflict arising out of misperception, suspicion and fear, and c) clear away the motives for and chances of the equivalent to a military surprise attack – some engineering *fait accompli*, for instance, designed to divert the flow of a river away from its traditional course, and its traditional downstream water users.

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[2] Katrina S. Rogers, "Pre-Empting Violent Conflict: Learning From Environmental Cooperation," ch. 30 in: Nils Petter Gleditsch *et al.*, (eds.), *Conflict and the Environment*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers in Cooperation with NATO Scientific Affairs Division, (1997), esp. pp. 505-507. For the argument that it is the abundance, and not the scarcity of natural resources that fuels military conflicts, see the *2002 State of the World Report* from the Worldwatch Institute, cited in: "'Resource Wars' Ignite Around the World." A *New Scientist* News Service Story (January 10, 2002), pp. 1-2.
[3] "Scientists to Resolve Future Water Wars." A *New Scientist* News Service Story (March 21, 2003), p. 1.