

4. Environmental Stress and National Security

4.1 Environmental Stress Component of Resource Scarcity

No one debates the fact that human activity has almost unlimited potential to, alter or damage the environment. Environmental stress is adverse environmental change. Environment stress includes degradation and pollution, loss of ozone shielding the planet's surface from ultraviolet radiation, but is also more, such as the loss of fertile land. A potential area for misunderstanding is confusion that often arises over resource depletion and environmental stress. A distinction needs to be drawn between environmental stress and the strategic dimension of resources. Mineral and fuel resource scarcity or depletion, such as running down oil reserves, is not, at least not directly, an example of environmental stress contributing to national security concerns.

Resource depletion or access to resources in their own right may be a cause of national security apprehension. Throughout history, many wars and mass movements of people may be characterized as being resource inspired. Colonial wars in many instances were wars motivated by a desire to have sovereign control over natural resources. The twentieth century has also seen wars that are, at least in part, resource wars.¹⁷ Germany's aggression during World War II was partly motivated by resource considerations and its quest for Lebensraum (living space). Japanese aggression during the 1930s and 1940s was also resource motivated in part, being directly related to its industrial aspirations and the paucity of domestic resources.

International trading rules, including multilateral and regional trading arrangements, that enshrine rights and obligations upon parties to the arrangement add predictability to a country's commercial transactions. Liberalized trade rules, whether in a bilateral, regional or multilateral context, which establish a secure and predictable trading system should reduce countries' desire to have resources under national control. During the Uruguay Round, Japan had a strong interest in "food security". But Japan interpreted "food security" as essentially a country's domestic ability to meet some degree of food self-sufficiency. With liberalized trade rules, countries have access to global markets as well as sources of supply, and this should reduce any need to bring resources physically under national control. Rules-based free trade contributing to limiting the causes of interstate conflict. But these types of

¹⁷See Arthur Westing, ed., Global Resources and International Conflict: Environmental Factors in Strategic Policy and Action, Oxford: New York, 1986, Appendix 2. The appendix reviews the natural resource aspects of a number of wars and violent conflicts in the twentieth century.