

A more interesting issue is whether, ironically, China might experience more domestic violence by foregoing or slowing economic growth that adversely affects the environment. This formulation sets the usual environmental stress - violent conflict paradigm on its head. Without growth, even growth with negative environmental impacts, the social and political centre of a developing country might not hold over the short to medium term. Not unnaturally, nor incorrectly, leaders must manage the immediate as well as the longer term, which often means making unhappy but unavoidable choices. This dilemma is not unique to China, but given contextual factors such as population size, environmental conditions and economic development strategies, it may have a prominent position in Chinese thinking on environment-national security linkages. Rapid industrialization and modernization may increase environmental degradation. Yet economic growth by making people better off in a material sense may also constrain their dissatisfaction with their lot in life or the policies of the ruling regime, thereby providing sufficient stability to implement longer-term policies. This dilemma is seldom, if ever, recognized in the literature on environment-conflict linkages. While environmental stress may contribute to violence, so may a lack of economic growth. A sharp reduction in economic growth in China could well threaten the legitimacy of the government and spark potentially violent political instability which could in turn have negative environmental impacts.

This said, Chinese reformers must come to view environmental management as part of the larger process of economic reform and industrial restructuring.⁹⁶ In the short term, the objective of promoting economic growth, alleviating poverty and protecting the environment are not always easily compatible, and governments often confront difficult choices in pursuing them simultaneously. Nevertheless, in the long term they are mutually supportive objectives. Systemic economic reform should be linked to better environmental management. It should improve efficiency, such as by using modern technology, to reduce pressures on the environment; make the enforcement of environmental policies more effective by strengthening the operational independence of regulatory authorities; and promote a pricing system that reflects the

⁹⁶There is some good news on this front. President Jiang Zemin recently spoke about the importance of the environment, as well as its interdependence with other factors. Jiang's remarks have been viewed by environmentalists at both the Administrative Centre for China's Agenda 21 and NEPA as demonstrating a new political will to grapple with China's environmental challenges. A Chinese official with the Administrative Centre thought that Jiang's comments "show a heightening of the political will by Chinese leaders to address the issues of environment and sustainable development."