



Essay for the Roundtable Workshop Environment and Security: Challenges for Change

IUCN World Conservation Congress 2008, Barcelona

WAGING SUSTAINABLE PEACE:

A Meeting of Security and Environment to Create a Climate for Positive Alliances

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Ice dams give way, inundating the impoverished countryside with glacial melt-water. Sea level rises, forcing coastal residents inland into already overpopulated areas. One country diverts a dwindling river; tensions flare as a downstream country faces a desperate water shortage.

These scenarios are far from hypothetical. The glaciers of the Himalayas are disappearing at an exponential rate, leaving billions of people who rely on the Indus, Ganges, and Yangtze river systems in danger of short-term flooding and long-term drought, while many in already overpopulated coastal regions, such as in Bangladesh, face rising sea levels.

This is when members of conservation community and the military must sit down at the same table.

"If these rivers run dry, imagine the security risk," says Wouter Veening, president of the Institute for Environmental Security (IES), an NGO working worldwide from offices in the Hague, Brussels, London and Washington, and Deputy Chairman of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP). "The Red Cross and other aid organizations are great, but they do not have the ships, the helicopters, the transport trucks. You need experience in large-scale operations, such as the military."

This connection between environmental issues and security is becoming increasingly apparent, and increasingly urgent.

"Climate change is a national security threat. It is a threat multiplier for instability in fragile regions," says Sherri Goodman, General Counsel for the Arlington, Virginia think tank CNA, and former U.S. Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Environmental Security. "We need to protect natural resources, food, water, forests, agriculture, as a matter of security."

The field of environmental security "is all about the threats, vulnerabilities, and opportunities that our interactions with the environment pose to our national security," explains CNA research analyst David Catarious. The field is broad, with issues range from the dangers of unexploded ordinance, to global climate change, to the study of how environmental factors like water or food scarcity contribute to localized and regional conflict.

IUCN CONGRESS TO BRING TOGETHER MILITARY AND CONSERVATIONISTS AT GLOBAL LEVEL

Environmental and security communities need to learn to communicate effectively with one another, realized Frits Hesselink, CEO of HECT Consultancy and member of the IUCN Commission on Education and Communication(CEC). In discussions with colleagues, it became apparent that opportunity to foster this interaction could be created at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Barcelona. Workshop goals reflect the spectrum of changing attitudes and approaches to environmental security.

“We want to look beyond just primary environmental care by the military: cleaning up pollution they cause or postponing manoeuvres to let birds breed,” Hesselink says.

These direct negative environmental effects have dominated past environment and security discussions, from toxins like perchlorate, a component of rocket fuel, poisoning groundwater near military bases, to destruction of natural resources in the course of active armed conflict.

“War is the worst destructor of nature and the environment. Depleted uranium and other pollutants leave large tracts devastated,” Veening agrees. “It uses tremendous amounts of fossil fuels, tremendous CO2 emissions from military operations. Seventy percent of what you bring to the battlefield is fuel.”

While contention over both active and peacetime military operations continues, the IUCN Congress workshop spearheads a paradigm shift in the relationship between environment and security communities.

“We want to explore the extent to which military strategies and operations can be more pro-active, integrate impacts on the environment, and examine issues like poverty and climate change,” Hesselink says. “We need transformational change towards integration and cooperation if we want to generate peace and sustainability. For example, peace mission instructions could include mandates for the military to also guard natural resources like mines, forests, water flows or food supplies. At the same time, we have to open the ears of environmental people, who may see the military as a threat instead of an ally.”

EMERGING VIEW OF MILITARY ROLE AS ALLY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION: DRC Example

Alliance between security and environment concerns can be seen at Virunga National Park, which spans the borders of Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is presently site of the UN's largest militarized peacekeeping mission. Over 17,000 troops are working “to keep rebels apart and protect world heritage sites including the mountain gorillas,” Veening explains. But it needn't stop there. Veening envisions potential for post-conflict transformation: “One thing I would hope could happen is you demobilize the rebels, then try to retrain the young men, typically young men, to restore agricultural lands, engage in reforestation and terracing to prevent erosion. Then you also train them to be park

guards and serve ecotourism. We need some of the old-fashioned military drilling types to make environmental guards out of them.”

Conservation NGOs also increasingly ponder their own operational security needs. IES specializes in mapping and remote sensing to protect environmentally sensitive areas from intrusions like illegal resources extraction. In Columbia, IES provides assistance to a federation of indigenous persons, helping to protect the Orinoco River basin.

“How can we help without putting our personnel or the indigenous persons into a dangerous situation? They are facing threats of encroaching coca plantations and violence. We are very good at remote sensing, we do mapping and locate the coca fields, but we still have to figure out how to share those data with the communities without compromising their safety,” Veening says.

BENEFITS ARE MUTUAL WHEN MILITARY REACH OUT TO CONSERVATION COMMUNITY: Afghanistan Example

While conservation organizations face security threats, military organizations increasingly see how environmental problems threaten their equipment and facilities as well. Naval bases, for example, are inherently located in positions vulnerable to rising sea levels. This realization has focused military leadership on environmental assets and opportunities.

“When I was at the U.S. Department of Defense, I did a lot of outreach to the environmental community, so that the environmental community could get to know us, and also so that the military could learn from environmental organizations,” Goodman recalls. “Many conservation organizations, for example the Nature Conservancy, work hand-in-glove with the DoD. DoD is the third largest federal (U.S.) landowner, and its lands have the highest number of endangered species. Communities with military installations want to keep those lands open, they are a natural oasis and anchor for environmental stability in the area.”

The security community also experiences positive consequences of environmentally-minded military actions: “While environmental security is usually seen through the security lens of ‘threats’ and ‘vulnerabilities,’ the environment also presents some of our most valuable levers of soft power. In regions where we may have strained diplomatic relations, cooperating over environmental issues like food and water scarcity can be a very effective way of rebuilding strong ties that can help in other areas,” Catarious says.

Piet Wit, director of Syzygy, a conservation consultancy firm, recently returned from Afghanistan. There he served as a major in the Dutch army’s peacekeeping forces. He worked on provincial reconstruction in fields of sustainable agriculture and food development, the kind of environmental military assistance that can lead to international good will and the basis for lasting peace. “I would go into the fields and meet with small farmers, advising them on water projects, animal husbandry,” Wit says. Recent armed conflict destroyed many of the irrigation systems. “By working with the farmers to improving their technology and rebuild irrigation systems, we could make the farmers see the importance of getting organized together.”

In peacetime, such assistance might have been provided by civilian organizations,

but “because it’s an insecure situation, it must be a militarized intervention,” Wit explains. “I’ve been in a convoy that ran over a bomb. It’s very dangerous. But I hope that people realize that even during conflict, it is very much possible to join forces to work on environmental conservation issues and humanitarian issues.”

A CLIMATE FOR CREATIVE ALLIANCES

Wit looks forward to returning to another service opportunity in Afghanistan next year. “Most military personnel I have worked with have a notion now that we not only win hearts and minds but bring economic stability. Security is also food security, and food security depends on ecosystem stability. It’s exciting and satisfying work,” he says.

Opportunities to participate in new creative alliances for environmental security will likely increase in the coming years, underscoring the need to work together.

“As climate change continues to progress, we ...anticipate that the U.S. military and international community at large will be called upon more frequently to perform disaster relief and humanitarian assistance missions,” Catarious says. “It will be critical for the military and NGOs to cooperate and develop a working relationship with each other. If the organizations look at each other with suspicion, the mission and people in need will not get the help they require.”

The IUCN Congress Roundtable on Environment and Security, organized by the CEC and the CEESP, will provide a sound platform for developing these working relationships as representatives from the military (USA, Netherlands, Spain, Thailand, Nepal, Mauritania), NATO, and other representatives of the world’s security community meet with IUCN Councillors and other key environmental leaders to explore strategies for waging sustainable peace.

“What I would tell the environmental community is, Get to know our great soldiers and sailors and airmen and marines, and get to know the kinds of problems we face day to day in our work,” Goodman says. “We have a lot of really great people in our armed services. Let’s work together to solve our common challenges.”

IES and the two IUCN commissions are already planning a follow-up meeting next year, to bring the positive climate for environmental security alliances to the attention of parliamentarians and key world opinion leaders.