Conservation and Conflict Resolution:
Crossing the Policy Frontier

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Contribution to the Woodrow Wilson Center's *Environment and Security Project Report*, 2005 (Issue 11)

International conservation efforts are generally relegated to specific government agencies and scientists without linkages being made to issues of regional cooperation between adversarial states or communities. Thus, a "policy frontier" separates conservation initiatives and foreign policy or intra-state community relations. Within states this frontier appears between county and state jurisdictions and between various governmental organizations. While environmental security literature has tried over the years to inject the importance of resource scarcity and quality into defense circles,[1] the empirical focus on conflict causality has led to the decline of this influence. Governments have grown wary of linking environmental issues to security, and historical accounts of civilizations' collapse (Diamond, 2005) are now viewed as narratives of ethical persuasion rather than policy prescriptions.[2]

Perhaps there is yet another way of invoking the environment in conflict resolution that would address the concerns of the skeptics. Instead of trying to tease out environmental causality in conflicts and thereby accentuate the importance of conservation, one can also look at how environmental issues can play a role in cooperation—regardless of whether they were part of the original conflict. For example, the Realist contention that the Darfour crisis is based on ethnic and political factors could still be addressed by this approach, which states that desertification is a common threat to both sides and could thus be a way to bring the opposing parties together. Scholars have only recently begun to examine the utility of this approach, which is termed "environmental peacemaking" (Conca and Dabelko, 2002). The main premise of environmental peacemaking holds that certain key attributes of environmental concerns could lead acrimonious parties to consider them as a means of cooperation. Thus, environmental issues could play an instrumental role, even in cases where the conflict does not involve environmental issues. The theoretical basis for this approach has been presented in the literature on environmental planning (Ali, 2003). Indeed, environmental planners could galvanize action, since planning forums often bring natural scientists and social scientists together in applied settings.

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[1] This represents the peak of the influence of environmental security theorists such as Homer-Dixon (1999).
[2] See Partha Dasgupta's review of Diamond's latest book *Collapse* in *The London Review of Books* Vol. 27, No. 10, 19 May, 2005.

Environmental Endogeneity

Social scientists studying causal relationships of any kind must contend with the problem of "endogeneity"—the direction of causality. Hence environmental cooperation and the resolution of larger conflicts must be considered in this light as well. Is environmental cooperation a result of conflict mitigation or does it reduce conflict itself? The temporal analysis can often be so closely intertwined that the causality confounds researchers. Most politicians are quick to state that a minimal level of conflict mitigation is essential for environmental cooperation to occur. However, I would argue that the process is much more dialectical in nature. Environmental issues can be important entry points for conversation between adversaries and can also comprise a valuable exit strategy from intractable deadlocks because of the issues' global appeal. However, they cannot be taken in strategic isolation and are usually not sufficient conditions for conflict resolution.

The key to a constructive environmental peacebuilding approach is to dispense with linear causality and instead consider the conflict de-escalation process as a nonlinear and complex series of feedback loops. Recognizing common environmental threats leads to positive exchanges and trust-building gestures. Often, focusing on common environmental harms (or aversions) is psychologically more successful at producing cooperative outcomes than focusing on common interests, which may instead lead to competitive behavior.

Overcoming the label of low politics

Skeptics may still argue that cooperation on environmental issues between adversaries would be relegated to low politics and might not lead to a larger resolution of the conflict. In this view, environmental conservation would, at best, be a means of diplomatic maneuvering between mid-level bureaucrats, and, at worst, a tool of cooptation by the influential members of a polity. Such Realist critics of functionalism point to examples of cooperation on water resources between adversarial states like India and Pakistan, or Jordan and Israel, that did not translate into broader reconciliation (Lowi, 1995). Thus it could be argued that water and environmental issues are not important enough in global politics to play an instrumental role. However, a more positive view of the case might reveal that water resources are so important that even firm adversaries must show some semblance of cooperation over them.

Furthermore, the instrumental impact of environmental issues in building peace must be considered over longer time horizons. The process by which environmental issues can play a positive role in peacebuilding is premised on a series of steps:

a) Sharing a unified information base about a mutual environmental threat;
b) Recognizing the importance of cooperation to alleviating that threat;
c) Making a cognitive connection and developing trust due to environmental cooperation;
d) Continuing interactions due to environmental necessity;
e) Clarifying misunderstandings as a result of continued interactions; and
f) De-escalating conflict and building peace.

Given the necessity of certain environmental resources and the growing realization that environmental issues require integrated solutions across borders, the likelihood of using environmental issues in peacebuilding has increased in recent years. A growing commitment to "bioregionalism"—defining ecological management by natural delineations such as watersheds and biomes rather than arbitrary national borders—has led to numerous joint environmental commissions between countries and jurisdictions all over the world. This has played out in various ways at international forums where bioregionalism and common environmental sensitivities have transcended traditional notions of state sovereignty. Regional environmental action plans—such as those in the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, and the Red Sea—are examples in this regard.

Aquatic management arrangements provide instructive insights regarding environmental peacebuilding. One of the earliest contributions to the development of the study of environmental peacebuilding was Peter Haas's work on the context of the Mediterranean Action Plan (Haas, 1992). However, since marine systems are not inhabited by people, their strategic role in peacebuilding is quite different from terrestrial peace parks. The distributive and conflictual aspects of aquatic systems are only apparent when fisheries or navigation rights are at issue. Otherwise, the ecosystem services that are provided by the aquatic system are best managed through cooperative means.[3] In the case of the Red Sea marine peace park between Israel, Jordan, and Egypt, the term "peace park" has been used to describe a joint conservation management regime for ecosystem services. However, the establishment of the peace park has not really led to a reduction of tensions among all the players, and its subsequent implementation has been limited. Nevertheless, conversations with researchers and park managers in Jordan, Israel, and Egypt reveal that they enjoy a continuing camaraderie.[4] There is also a recognition that as political disputes are resolved, trust will be much easier to establish between governments due to the preexisting environmental cooperation (Ali and Chiota, 2005). While we are a long way from having global governance of environmental issues, we are clearly moving in the direction of giving environmental protection that directly impacts human lives and livelihoods the same moral ascendancy as "human rights."

Peace Parks as Exemplars?

Now that we have the explored the broader vision of environmental peacebuilding, let us consider the ways in which this vision could be implemented. Conservation of environmental resources at various levels often requires the establishment of protected areas of land. Land conservation can be contentious due to property rights concerns and the historical misuse of such measures to depopulate areas or cause demographic shifts. Historians have directly linked the establishment of some U.S. national parks to adverse policies towards Native Americans (Spence, 1999). Similarly, some wildlife conservation

[3] Ecological economists are developing the primacy of valuing ecosystem services collaboratively (see Daly and Farley, 2004). While many neoclassical economists often disparage this approach as being too normative and not following "rational choice models," it is gaining increasing attention in policy circles, especially in Europe.

[4] Personal communication with various environmental officials in the Aqaba Special Economic Zone, Jordan, the Egyptian Sharm-al-Sheikh authority, and Friends of the Earth-Middle East (Tel Aviv and Amman), at a meeting of the University of the Middle East project, Toledo, Spain (http://www.ume.org).

zones in South Africa were also linked to misappropriation of land from indigenous Africans (Beinart and Coates, 1995). Most recently, tension between large environmental organizations—such as Conservation International, the World Wildlife Fund, and the Nature Conservancy—and indigenous rights groups (particularly in South America) has been growing, accompanied by accusations of corporate cooptation in the name of conservation (Chapin, 2004).[5] However, all of these critiques pertain to the management and implementation of conservation plans, rather than the concept of conservation itself.

There can, of course, be varying degrees of conservation and heightened local involvement in decisions between areas to address these concerns, but the broader vision of bioregionally-based environmental protection remains constructive. The notion of transboundary protected areas (TBPA) or transfrontier conservation area (TFCA) developed independently of their potential instrumental use in conflict mitigation. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) played an important role in moving this concept forward and established a task force within the World Commission on Protected Areas for this purpose. In 2001, the task force prepared a monograph that moved the idea one step forward with the suggestion that such TBPA areas be used for peace and cooperation, giving a renewed connotation to the term "peace park" (Sandwith et al., 2001).

Previously, the term "peace park" had been used to describe memorials such as the one in Nagasaki, Japan, as well as the establishment of conservation zones for ecotourism and sustainable livelihoods. The establishment of the Peace Parks Foundation in South Africa by Dr. Anton Rupert in 1997 to promote regional cooperation (primarily in ecologically based tourism) gave greater impetus to the peace parks movement. It is important to note, however, that some scholars prefer a definition of peace parks that does not limit them to adjoining border zones but rather includes any zone that has endured conflict. As Gerardo Budowski (2003) of the University of Peace has argued, the border definition might exclude island states and other remote areas where conflicts might be fought.

Using conservation as a direct means of conflict resolution, however, challenges conventional assumptions about the secondary role of environmental issues in conflict resolution. For example, peace parks are being actively pursued in Korea and Kashmir, two high-conflict areas. Since 1986, the Siachen glacier in Kashmir has been a battleground for India and Pakistan. More than 100 million people depend on the meltwater of the Himalayan glaciers raising the human security dimensions of this issue in both adversarial countries (Ali, 2005). Anticipating water shortages requires studying the glaciers' retreat as a result of climatic changes. Given the importance of this work, the Kashmir park planners have focused on using science as a peacebuilding tool.

Using the Antarctic model of science as a common good, geologists and hydrologists from India and Pakistan, with help from colleagues at the National Science Foundation in

[5] See also the response by various environmental groups and readers to this article in the February 2005 issue of *Worldwatch*.

the United States and Italy, have appealed for access to this region.[6] Environmentalists and mountaineers have joined forces to use this opportunity to establish a conservation zone. The Indian prime minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, gave the idea its most significant political support during his visit to Siachen in June 2005, during which he publicly remarked that the territory could become a "peace mountain." Strategies for de-escalating the Siachen conflict continue, including a project supported by Sandia National Labs in New Mexico involving Pakistani and Indian military officials.[7] There is thus cautious optimism that conservation efforts are catalyzing consensus on this issue.

In the Korean case, the demilitarized zone (DMZ) has become a default sanctuary for wildlife since the conflict has prevented there is no development activity in the area. Several conservation biologists have suggested using the region's high biodiversity to develop a conflict resolution strategy between the two countries. An organization called the DMZ Forum, established in the United States in 1998, has lobbied for this proposal's inclusion in the six-party talks. Media magnate Ted Turner has popularized this effort, most recently during his visit to both North and South Korea in August 2005. He told the media that in his conservations with North Korean leaders, they were receptive to the idea but felt "preoccupied with the six-party talks"—an indication that the initiative is still seen as external to the talks' core negotiations.[8] While this may give credence to Realist assertions that environmental issues will likely be consequences, rather than constituents, of peace agreements, they certainly provide a means of building trust and transforming the collective psyche of conflicting parties (van Vugt, 2000).

Conclusion: Policy options beyond boundaries

When dealing with matters as emotive as environmental protection and conflict mitigation, one can't help but feel a sense of urgency and advocacy for a phenomenon that holds promise in harmonizing these two worthy goals. However, policymakers must constantly balance their allegiance to various constituencies, some of whom may consider conservation as an inherently low priority compared to peacebuilding. Peace parks and other environmental-peacemaking efforts offer potential win-win solutions to such policy quandaries. The major concern in undertaking such efforts is avoiding micro-conflicts in conservation efforts themselves. In particular, the historical dispossession of land for conservation and the cooptation of environmental measures to create enclaves that disconnect communities need to be cautiously considered. These are, of course, questions of proper implementation rather than a critique of the idea of peace parks themselves. For proper implementation, the peace park effort must first undergo a phase of local review and transparency. A clear process is particularly important in conflict settings to avoid the spread of conspiracy theories that can lead to suspicion and rumor-mongering, which often spoil even the most sincere efforts.

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[6] The Karakoram science-for-peace expedition, led by John Shroder and Michael Bishop of the University of Nebraska, was profiled in *Science* magazine, August 26, 2005, p. 1309.

[7] The Sandia project is titled "Demilitarization of Siachen," and involves former Indian and Pakistani military officials. The peace park idea is a central part of the proposal. Personal communication via email with Brigadier (retd.) Gurmeet Singh, visiting scholar at Sandia, National Labs, August 29, 2005.

[8] Ted Turner's interview with *Korea Times*, August 17, 2005.

In addition, the military should be considered a facilitator rather than a hindrance. Demilitarization might not be the first step, but transforming the military into a ranger force could assuage security and employment concerns while accomplishing conservation tasks. If the conflict has caused environmental damage, the military can certainly play an important role in the clean-up effort. For example, the United Nations Environment Programme's post-conflict assessment unit is gaining traction, conducting environmental clean-up efforts after high-profile conflicts in the Balkans, the Middle East, and East Africa.[9]

The positive economic impact of peace park formulation is often quantifiable, based on the potential for increased tourism as well as the willingness of donors to invest in such a program. Integrated planning for peace parks must include a clear assessment of livelihoods and how those would be sustainable through the development of a peace park. The incorporation of conservation provisions and access to peace park areas through visa waivers or on-site processing of visas for the conservation zones can also be proposed.

Once these multiple factors are collectively considered, policy success is more likely. As with many complex interactions of human behavior and the environment, we must not expect instant solutions. Such expectations can consequently lead to instant dismissals of otherwise worthwhile policies that have not been given time to mature. Peace parks constitute a new vision for addressing global conflicts and hence will proceed through growing pains before reaching cognitive acceptance and practical results. However, there is substantive theoretical backing for their efficacy as well as emerging applied examples of their success, which we should view with optimism.

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[9] See the web site for the post-conflict assessment unit for reports produced by these projects: http://postconflict.unep.ch/

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