



## *Environment and Security Policy*

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U.S. foreign policy and national security policies have significant domestic and international environmental impacts, and the increasingly precarious state of the global environment presents important new challenges to U.S. national interests. Day-to-day military operations, together with arms production, testing,

deployment, and trade, are resource intensive and ecologically damaging. Although such activities are subject to growing environment-related legal and political constraints, most peacetime military activities and foreign operations are still not subjected to rigorous periodic environmental assessment.

International environmental conditions have numerous implications for U.S. foreign policy interests and security goals. For example:

### Key Points

- Environmental issues present challenges to U.S. foreign and security interests that U.S. security institutions are not suited to address.
- Environmental issues demonstrate that security policymaking cannot be effectively separated from other areas of foreign policy.
- Environmental issues are not integrated into U.S. foreign and security policymaking.

- Scarcity of natural resources and the degradation of natural environments by human overexploitation may contribute to social and political instability in strategically important regions like the Middle East, North Africa, and East, Central, and South Asia.

- Environmental degradation is often associated with rapid population growth, famine, migration, and state failure and collapse in some lesser-developed and formerly communist countries. Such outcomes frequently yield requests for U.S. assistance and intervention.

- The physical, economic, and social security of U.S. citizens is threatened by many environmental issues such as ozone layer depletion, species extinction and overexploitation, radioactive and chemical contamination, ocean pollution, and climate change.

These environment-security linkages illustrate only a few of the many ways that environmental issues may impinge upon U.S. security through direct and/or indirect contributions to social and political instability around the globe. Environmental issues rarely directly cause violent conflict or political instability. They are best viewed as potential contributing factors. Because of their indirect links to instability, environmental factors have often been underestimated in foreign and security policymaking circles. While the impacts of environmental factors should not be overestimated in policymaking, they cannot be dismissed either. Underestimating the significance of environmental issues also risks missing opportunities to use environ-

mental factors as a means to achieve other U.S. foreign policy goals, such as regional stability and security, international development, and increased trade.

Security policy cannot be formulated—nor its environmental components assessed—separately from U.S. foreign policies concerning international trade, economic development, foreign assistance, human rights, and the need for more sustainable development. Recent controversies over the effectiveness and adverse social and environmental effects of U.S.-backed IMF restructuring programs illustrate this point. Yet the institutional legacies of the cold war era have resulted in a kind of balkanization of foreign and security policymaking across the federal bureaucracy, leaving the U.S. State Department unable (or unwilling) to integrate security policy with contemporary concerns for sustainable development, democratization, and human rights protection.

A growing body of evidence in academic and policy circles supports the contention that environmental degradation can contribute to social and political instability. Despite this, environmental issues have not been integrated into U.S. foreign and security policymaking. Recent efforts—many of them spearheaded by Vice President Gore—to foster interest within foreign policymaking organizations have raised awareness of environmental issues within policymaking communities. But increased awareness has so far resulted in few changes in policy or resource allocation. Moreover, like former Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs Timothy Wirth, many early champions of linking environmental and security issues have left government.

Small, newly established environment-related programs exist in a wide array of U.S. foreign and security policymaking organizations, including the State Department, Department of Defense (DOD), Department of Energy (DOE), and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). But the information and analyses produced in these programs—many created at Gore's behest—have neither a large audience nor a significant impact within policymaking circles. Lack of integration into the policymaking structure makes the future prognosis for institutionalized interest in environmental issues within foreign and security policy uncertain after Gore's tenure in the executive branch. Nor have the programs embarked on education campaigns aimed at convincing skeptics in the executive branch, in Congress, and among the American public. Instead, program administrators tend to avoid congressional scrutiny in fear of being defunded by a Congress hostile to most international and environmental programs.

There are no systematic requirements or attempts to assess the global, regional, and localized environmental impacts of U.S. foreign policy or to discern the environmental benefits and costs of U.S. policies. Limited environmental assessment is performed for a small fraction of specific defense and foreign assistance projects.

The office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Environmental Security is charged with bringing DOD into compliance with many U.S. environmental standards. It is not tasked, however, with assessing the environmental impacts of DOD spending and activities. Nearly its entire budget (over \$4 billion annually) is spent domestically for environmental cleanup operations and personnel safety at military installations. U.S. overseas military bases are not required by law to meet U.S. environmental standards (or environmental impact statement requirements), and DOD is not required to clean up these installations when Americans leave them. Because detailed information regarding U.S. military activities is often classified, it remains impossible for those outside DOD to discern overall environmental impacts.

The State Department's Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES) is charged with coordinating and formulating foreign policy in global environment, science, and technology issues. Yet it does no environmental assessment of U.S. foreign policy or spending. Its connections to other areas of U.S. policy and other State Department bodies remain tenuous, and its annual budget (less than \$3 million) hardly makes it a major player in foreign policy circles. As a result, the State Department, the official coordinator and formulator of U.S. foreign policy, still has no functioning mechanism for cross-organizational communication, information transfer, and assessment of the environmental impacts and needs of most U.S. foreign policy.

Existing environment-related programs within the State Department, CIA, and DOE remain small, underfunded, and without clear organizational authority and responsibility. The same is true of the EPA's Office of International Affairs and its environmental security initiatives, as well as of DOD's international cooperation programs. All remain understaffed, some languishing for months with personnel vacancies. Their programs and information generally remain peripheral to the central missions of their larger organizations. Individual environmental programs, such as international environmental policy workshops and training programs or individual cleanup operations, are organized on ad hoc bases and grafted to existing institutions. Even their narrowly defined missions remain underfunded, often authorized less money than executive branch officials have promised to international partners.

The State Department's recent environmental initiative, organized under Global Affairs in the OES, attempts to draw greater attention within the department to inter-related problems like environmental issues, population growth, scientific cooperation, and migration. Yet the State Department's Environmental Diplomacy

report addresses strictly environmental issues—not the connections of these issues to other areas of policy. The State Department is currently touting a related system of “regional environmental hubs” located in U.S. embassies around the world. Yet the hubs are being constructed without the additional resources needed in the field offices and without new personnel practices designed to attract career-minded civil servants with the relevant environmental, scientific, and technical expertise.

The small environment-focused programs within the foreign and security policymaking bureaucracy have only nominal connections to each other or to other U.S. government bodies with environmental expertise—e.g., the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the EPA. At best, cross-agency cooperation is ad hoc, organized for specific projects or in response to short-term needs, such as preparation for international environmental negotiations. Although U.S. international development policies—as pursued through the Treasury Department and the IMF—as well as the trade policies fostered by the U.S. Trade Representative all have immense environmental impacts, they are uncoordinated with many U.S. foreign environmental and security policies. In addition, the relatively successful interagency cooperation on a few environmental security projects in formerly communist countries remains uncoordinated with the much larger DOD and DOE assistance programs for nuclear materials protection and management in these same countries.

Because most environmental program offices are not charged with determining environmental effects of the policies of the organization within which they operate, only limited attempts have been made to bring U.S. foreign and security activities into compliance with domestic and international environmental law and regulations.

Foreign and security policymakers continue to miss opportunities to build political and economic cooperation among antagonists in the Middle East and Central Asia regarding scarce resources such as fresh water. These policymakers offer only tiny, token aid programs to assist states and citizens of formerly communist countries in combating environmental threats to human health, though they dedicate significant efforts to ensuring that U.S. energy corporations have access to resources in the same region. U.S. assistance that improves human health and citizen access to environmental information and decisionmaking could help to build state legitimacy and enhance stability in many fledgling democracies.

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## Key Problems

- The extent of environmental damage resulting from U.S. foreign and security policy is unknown, because U.S. foreign and security policy lacks environmental assessment mechanisms.
  - Existing environment-related programs within foreign policymaking organizations remain small, underfunded, and without clear organizational authority and responsibility.
  - Failure to integrate environmental issues into U.S. foreign policymaking harms U.S. interests and impinges on international stability and security.
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If environmental issues are to be taken seriously within U.S. foreign and security policy, both policymakers and the American public require accurate information about the costs and environmental impacts of U.S. policies. Officials must conduct regular, and transparent assessments of the environmental impacts of U.S. policies. Congress should authorize such assessments—or at

least not prohibit them. Environmental impacts and cost estimates should be assessed for all peacetime military activities, including domestic and international operations, spending practices, and military production. Such assessments could integrate environmental concern and standards into all DOD programs, instead of rendering them solely the concern of “environmental” programs and personnel. Defense spending is publicly debated without compromising secrecy, so the costs and environmental impacts of military activities could be assessed in relatively transparent processes as well. Furthermore, environ-

mental impacts should be part of a comprehensive review of the costs and benefits of U.S. arms export policies and practices.

Security policy cannot be formulated or assessed in the absence of other U.S. foreign policies on development, trade, democratization, and sustainable development. Policies concerning international development, trade liberalization, and women’s health, education, and reproductive choices have tremendous implications for both environmental quality and international stability and security. Environmental assessments of U.S. foreign policies could reveal where U.S. policies encourage environmentally unsustainable practices and increase environmental scarcities and inequalities.

The small environment-focused programs in the DOD, CIA, and State Department will never succeed in accomplishing even the limited goals of information collection and dissemination without adequate resources. For example, the valiant efforts by DOD’s environmental security division to steer U.S. military operations both at home and abroad in more environmentally sensitive directions cannot overcome

the program’s chronic shortage of funding and staff resources and the indifference of top military and congressional officials. Both executive branch administrators and the Congress must dedicate the financial, intellectual, and political resources required to integrate analysis of environmental issues and factors into U.S. foreign and security policymaking and scenario planning.

For environmental concern and assessment to be effectively integrated into U.S. foreign and security policy, greater resources must be allocated to the government’s centers of environmental, technical, and foreign policy expertise: the EPA and the State Department. The EPA’s international affairs programs and the State Department’s OES initiatives must be better funded and given greater assessment and policymaking capabilities and authority if environmental issues are to impact traditional U.S. foreign policies. The EPA must be allowed a greater voice in U.S. international activities and policies, and the State Department must take more advantage of outside expertise, in addition to expanding its own environmental and technical expert resources. State Department officials’ current interest in improving their scientific and technical capacities must be explicitly linked to their need for more environmental expertise.

If environmental issues and analysis are to be given higher priority in foreign and security policymaking circles, incentives for environment-related career building and program development must be institutionalized in the EPA, DOD, CIA, DOE, and State. Various programs’ responsibilities require clarification and strengthening, along with more access to high-level policymakers. This requires changing personnel practices, such as recruitment and promotion, as well as institutionalizing education and ensuring that information regarding environmental factors is distributed to policymaking organizations. Civil servants must be encouraged to explore and analyze the connections of environmental issues to U.S. foreign and security policies. They must be rewarded, rather than punished, for doing so. Such analysis would afford U.S. policymakers more opportunities to anticipate crises (such as state collapse, violent conflict, and mass migration) and to avoid criticisms that U.S. foreign and security policies are working at cross-purposes: creating, rather than reducing, political, economic, and social instability.

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## Key Recommendations

- The U.S. should conduct regular, transparent assessments of the environmental impacts of U.S. foreign and security policy.
- The government should dedicate the financial, intellectual, and political resources required to integrate analysis of environmental issues and factors into U.S. foreign and security policymaking.
- Washington should institutionalize incentives for career building and program development within foreign and security policymaking institutions, clarifying lines of authority and responsibility.

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# Sources for More Information

## Organizations

### Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN)

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### Environmental Change and Security Project

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## Publications

Robert S. Chen, W. Christopher Lenhardt, and Kara F. Alkire, *Consequences of Environmental Change—Political, Economic and Social: Proceedings of the Environmental Flash Points Workshop*, November 12-14, 1997, sponsored by Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) Environment Center.

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John Lindsay-Poland and Nick Morgan, "Overseas Military Bases and Environment," *Foreign Policy In Focus*, vol. 3, no. 15, 1998.

## World Wide Web

### Directorate of Intelligence

<http://www.odci.gov/cia/di>

### Office of the Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Environmental Security (DOD)

<http://www.acq.osd.mil/ens/>

### U. S. EPA, Office of International Affairs:

<http://www.epa.gov/oia/>

### U. S. State Department, Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs

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