

Reconceptualisation of Security Strategies and Political Processes

Nils Meyer-Ohlendorf

This note is based on a presentation given at the Bonn International Centre for Conversion (BICC) in September 2007, and discusses in brief whether security strategies integrate environmental aspects and to what extent. In this note, pertinent issues will be approached through the cases of the United States, the United Nations and the EU.

United States

Driven by the 9/11 attacks, the **2002 National Security Strategy** focuses on the War on Terror and emphasises a narrow military response to the threat of terror, e.g. through improved homeland defences (creation of a department of homeland security), law enforcement, intelligence, and “vigorous” efforts to cut off terrorist financing. Although focusing on these aspects of fighting terror, the strategy also contains a wider response and underlines the security implication of poverty and bad governance. As an additional precondition for security, the strategy refers to the importance of economic development and environmental protection:

- “We will promote economic growth through free markets and free trade **and integrate environmental concerns into trade policies**. Economic growth should be accompanied by global efforts to **stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations** associated with this growth, containing them at a level that prevents dangerous human interference with the global climate. Our overall objective is to reduce America’s greenhouse gas emissions in relation to the size of our economy by cutting such emissions per unit of economic activity by 18 percent over the next 10 years, or by the year 2012. Our strategies for attaining this goal will be to co-operate with the UNFCCC and make agreements with key industries regarding renewable energies as well as nuclear energy, research and development assistance (although this undertaking will be in the frame of economic policies quite detailed).”
- “In reference **to energy security** the US will continue to build alliances with partners and friends to fight terrorism. In addressing regional conflicts with partners the US will deliver greater developmental assistance.”

As an up-date and revision of the 2002 strategy, the US launched **a new National Security Strategy in 2006** which predominately rests on two pillars, (1) the promotion of freedom, justice, human dignity and democracy and (2) international co-operation. In addition; the 2006 strategy makes explicit reference to Energy Security and Climate Change as a security concern. The enhancement of energy security together with clean development is prospected in the ‘NSS 2006’, for example, through a Pacific partnership with Asia, intended to focus on clean development and Climate Change matters. Furthermore, a priority is placed on a comprehensive energy strategy to reduce the reliance of the US on foreign energy sources. A diversification of energy sources could alleviate the ‘petroleum curse’ or

the tendency for oil revenues to foster corruption and prevent economic growth and political reform in some oil-producing states. However, in the context of energy security, Climate Change is not mentioned. In this respect, the 'NSS 2006' is less explicit on Climate Change than the 'NSS 2002' was.

Although the US security strategies make remarkably detailed reference to the environment and climate change in comparison to other national security strategies, such the UK or South Africa, the strategies fail to outline concrete measures designed to address environmental aspects of conflict prevention. Accordingly, the CNA report on national security and the threat of climate change recommends that "the national security consequences of climate change should be fully integrated into national security and national defense strategies. The National Security Strategy should directly address the threat of climate change to our national security interests".¹ In addition, it is recommended that "National Security Strategy should include appropriate guidance to military planners to assess risks to current and future missions caused by projected climate change". At the political level, the report recommends that "the U.S. should become a more constructive partner with the international community to help build and execute a plan to prevent destabilizing effects from climate change, including setting targets for long term reductions in greenhouse gas emissions".

United Nations

In April 2007, the **Security Council** held the first ever debate on the impacts of Climate Change on security. The UK government, which initiated the one-day debate, argued that global warming must be seen as a global security issue as well as an environmental one. It drew support from some governments, but others, including China and leading members of the G77 group of developing countries, disputed whether the security council has the mandate to debate climate change. To some extent, discussions referred to the security implications of climate change, including adaptation needs, but were often only a reiteration of position in the context of UNFCCC negotiations.

In 2004, the UN gathered the **High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Changes**. Its report integrates the threat of 'environmental degradation' to one of the six clusters of threats but contained very little guidance on how security threats caused by environmental degradation could be adequately addressed. In addition, the 2005 summit reviewing the MDG made no reference to the environment when elaborating on security issues, even though MDG 7 is dedicated to environmental sustainability.

At the operational level, **UNDP** created the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) "*to enhance UNDP's efforts for sustainable development, working with partners to reduce the incidence and impact of disasters and violent conflicts, and to establish the solid foundations for peace and recovery from crisis, thereby advancing the UN Millennium*

¹ Under the chairmanship of General Sullivan, 11 retired Generals and Admirals produced this report which is available at <http://securityandclimate.cna.org/report/National%20Security%20and%20the%20Threat%20of%20Climate%20Change.pdf>

Development Goals on poverty reduction.” It is interesting to observe that the main objective of the BCPR is to connect the development work of UNDP to both conflict prevention/recovery and disaster reduction/recovery. Yet, violent conflict and environmental issues do not seem to be considered simultaneously.

The Post-Conflict & Disaster Management Branch (PCDMB) extends **UNEP's** work in areas of the world where, on the one hand, the environment is impacted by conflicts and disasters, or where, on the other hand, the environment is a factor in contributing to conflicts and disaster impacts.

PCDMB describes its five (5) core areas of operations as follows:

- Conducting environmental assessments
- Mitigating environmental risk
- Strengthening institutions for environmental governance
- Integrating environmental considerations in reconstruction
- Strengthening international and regional environmental co-operation

The PCDMB is one of the most concrete activities of the UN on environmental security. The Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment for Sudan provides an example for the PCDMB's work: “The linkages between conflict and environment in Sudan are twofold. On one hand, the country's long history of conflict has had significant impacts on its environment. Indirect impacts such as population displacement, lack of governance, conflict-related resource exploitation and underinvestment in sustainable development have been the most severe consequences to date. On the other hand, environmental issues have been and continue to be contributing causes of conflict. Competition over oil and gas reserves, Nile waters and timber, as well as land use issues related to agricultural land, are important causative factors in the instigation and perpetuation of conflict in Sudan.” Although relatively concrete, the Sudan Assessment also illustrates that the PCDMB's work has not always made specific recommendations on which measures should be taken when addressing the root environmental causes of the country's numerous conflicts.

EU

The **2003 European Security Strategy** (ESS) does not stress the issue of terrorism, but rather affirms that: *“In much of the developing world poverty and disease cause untold suffering and give rise to pressing security concerns. Almost 3 billion people, half of the world's population, live on less than 2 Euro a day. 45 million die each year of hunger and malnutrition.”* Security is understood as being a precondition to development. Nevertheless, the key threats identified next are terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, the general failure of the state and organised crime. The ESS recognises that none of the new threats are purely military, and each needs to be tackled by a mixture of both civilian and military instruments spanning the wide range of both development and security instruments in the framework of EU external action. Even so, the general definition of security remains very broad in the ESS, the strategic objectives (key threats and response) seemingly refer to a narrow and traditional conception of security threats as mainly being man made.

In addition, the **Commission's Communication on Conflict Prevention** addresses the relation between conflict/stability and environmental factors. According to this Communication, structural stability is promoted through:

- sustainable economic development
- democracy and respect of human rights
- viable political structures
- **a healthy environment**
- social conditions
- the capacity to manage change without resorting to conflict
- addressing the root causes of instability

Furthermore, the **Country Strategy Papers** (CSPs) play an important role in ensuring a coordinated approach to conflict prevention. In practice this means that when CSPs are prepared, risk factors are systematically checked. For that purpose, the Commission's geographical services are using **conflict indicators**. Those indicators look at issues such as the balance of political and economic power, the control of the security forces, the ethnic composition of the government for ethnically-divided countries, **the potential degradation of environmental resources** and so forth."

EU policies on environmental security have evolved over recent years. This evolution includes various 'soft' instruments, such as EU's Aceh policies in addressing illegal logging that has financed the conflict, the EU's work in the Congo in combating illegal trade in gold and diamonds (Kimberley process), and Palestine, where water projects are under way. However, relevant EU strategies do not foresee a comprehensive and consistent response to the challenges of environmental security. EU policies with implications for environmental security are generally part of development policies and / or specific projects.

Conclusions

Environmental Security has gained importance in the current political discourse. The discussions in the Security Council and some detailed reference to the links between security and the environment give testimony for this development. In general terms, it is recognised in relevant strategies that environmental and security can be interrelated. However, none of the strategies or processes in question provide concrete guidance on how their broad security objectives, which often make reference to the relevance of environmental degradation, can be made operational. There are various reasons for the lack of concrete guidance. Besides the nascent state of the debate, there is a limited understanding in security circles on environmental issues and vice versa. This gap in understanding needs to be bridged through improved communication. A constant and possibly formalised dialogue between security and environment experts could help remedy these shortcomings. Despite its shortcomings and limited success, the EU Cardiff Process on the integration of environmental aspects into other policy areas could provide valuable lessons for an improved integration of environmental issues into security policies. The existing links between environmental

degradation and security should provide sufficient stimulus to engage in a fruitful exchange of ideas on how to make objectives of environmental security more operational.