

## Environmental Security: A View From Europe

Since the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro—and the founding of the Environmental Change and Security Project in 1994—much has changed, but unfortunately, not much for the better. At Rio, the world community signed up for a new economic model based on justice for all—including the world’s poor—that would ensure sustainable development of both industrialized and less-industrialized nations. As Cold War tensions faded, a new field emerged that stretched the traditional definition of insecurity to encompass “soft” or “human” security issues like environmental degradation and scarcity of vital natural resources. While this redefinition gained credence in the 1990s within the foreign policy, development, and even defense communities, it is not widely recognized or precisely delineated. And since September 11, the overwhelming focus on homeland defense and the war on terrorism has almost completely eclipsed broader definitions of security.

In 2004, the United States allotted \$36 billion for homeland security (Department of

Homeland Security, n.d.) and more than *ten times* that for the military (Center for Defense Information, n.d.). Billions more have been spent by the rest of the “coalition of the willing” on the Iraq war. Contrast that with the \$11.3 billion the United States spends on foreign aid each year (USAID, 2003) and the \$54 billion to \$62 billion needed annually to cut poverty in half by 2015 (Devarajan, Miller, & Swanson, 2002). Clearly, the new model of development—one that could ensure environmental security—has been put on the back burner by the hostilities in Iraq and the war on terrorism. Certain civil liberties in coalition countries have also been shoved aside by these wars, via the United States’ Patriot Act and the United Kingdom’s Anti-terrorism, Crime, and Security Act 2001. How can we go to war in the name of democracy and simultaneously encroach on our own (and foreigners’) democratic rights? Despite these “wars,” we have not achieved even limited security in the Middle East.

How do we get back on track? We must reinvigorate the comprehensive—and reject the exclusively militaristic—definition of security. Ten years after Rio, the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg augmented several positive efforts towards sustainable development. The developed countries agreed to give more aid to developing countries, especially the least developed countries in Africa (via the Monterrey Commitments).<sup>1</sup> The members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) agreed to help poor countries meet the UN’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs; OECD, 2001). The Doha trade round is inching towards more equity in the global trading system.<sup>2</sup> All of these steps will provide more aid and assistance to those countries suffering from extreme poverty

MARGARET BRUSASCO-MACKENZIE

Margaret Brusasco-Mackenzie, LLM, is currently a member of the Green Globe Network, a group of U.K. experts on sustainable development. Most of her professional life was spent in the European Commission, notably as head of International Affairs, Environment Directorate General. She has taught in universities in the United Kingdom, Lesotho, and Belgium.

and deprivation. But what about the environment? If we take stock of the last dozen years, has the health of the planet improved, and what steps can we take to ensure that this development assistance is sustainable for the economy and the Earth?

## The Diagnosis

The world's population more than doubled from 1950 to 1998, and in the last 10 years it has increased by about 14 percent to reach a staggering 6.4 billion (United Nations Population Division, 2003). Optimistic projections peak in 2050 at 9 billion, an increase of 50 percent despite notable strides in family planning and the uncertain effects of HIV/AIDS (Population Reference Bureau, 2004). This unprecedented population growth has directly pressured land resources by increasing and intensifying agricultural use of marginal land, subjecting it to damaging overuse, such as excessive irrigation. Although 20th century inventions revolutionized agricultural productivity, 831 million people across the world remain hungry and malnourished (United Nations Development Programme, 2004). During the first half of the 21st century, many areas of the globe are expected to suffer heavy losses of cropland due to degradation, soil erosion, and climate change. About two billion hectares of soil—equal to 15 percent of the Earth's land cover—is already degraded (World Resources Institute [WRI], 2000). Between 1984 and 1998, the world's grain harvest fell behind population growth, with output dropping by 9 percent, or 0.7 percent yearly (Brown, Gardner, & Halweil, 1999). The prognosis is disheartening; there are so many more mouths to feed, but less to feed them.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (2003) predicts that developing countries will be forced to steadily increase their food imports. Unable to meet rising demands for food, countries will suffer greater poverty, declining health, higher infant mortality, and increased migration. As agriculturalists encroach on pastoralists in Africa, land use disputes can contribute to

violent conflict.<sup>3</sup> So can migration, as in Chad, where incoming refugees competed with locals for scarce land resources (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2004). Deforestation exacerbates the competition for livelihoods; forest cover has declined by 2.4 percent since 1990, despite our pledges at Rio to reverse this trend (WRI, 2000).

Water stress is even more life-threatening than degraded land resources. By the mid-1990s, 80 countries, representing 40 percent of the world's population, suffered serious water shortages (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2002). By 2025, two-thirds of the entire world could experience moderate to severe water stress (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2002). Eighteen percent, or 1.1 billion people, currently lack access to safe drinking water, and 2.4 billion do not have adequate sanitation, mostly in Africa and Asia. Unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation transmit deadly waterborne diseases like malaria (1.2 million deaths/year) and diarrhea (1.8 million deaths/year); 90 percent of the victims are children under five (World Health Organization, 2004).

The news is not all bad, however: in the past decade, people with access to improved water supplies increased from 4.1 billion (79 percent) in 1990 to 4.9 billion (82 percent) in 2000, largely due to better national water policies, river basin cooperation, and more coordinated donor policies (UNEP, 2002). River basin cooperation may have also prevented conflict; scarce water resources can be a source of tension, but, as demonstrated by the Nile Basin Initiative, agreements to manage basins can improve relations.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, the oceans are not improving. Pressure on the coastal zones constantly increases: more than 40 percent of the world's population now lives within 100 kilometers of the coast (WRI, 2000). Twenty-eight percent of the world's most important fisheries are depleted or overexploited, putting at risk the one billion people who rely on fish as their primary protein source. Overfishing by locals and by worldwide fleets "vacuuming the seas" can lead



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to conflicts; the UN recorded more than 100 disputes over fish in 1997 (Brown, Gardner, & Halweil, 1999).

In addition, global climate change could exacerbate the negative effects of all of these problems, increasing desertification, land degradation, coral reef dieback, and flooding and other extreme weather events (UNEP, 2002). And despite the naysayers, climate change becomes more and more likely; in 2004, scientists at Hawaii's Mauna Loa Observatory announced that carbon dioxide had reached record-high levels after growing at an accelerated pace during the previous year (Associated Press, 2004).

In all, despite some scattered improvements, the environment has grown more fragile almost everywhere, as the world's population continues to increase and the AIDS pandemic devastates the most economically active age group in many African countries.

The stage is set for increased poverty and misery. If we continue with business as usual, conflicts over resources can only become more severe. Even before we factor in the ethnic and social conflicts, youth unemployment, and social disintegration that make parts of Asia, South America, and the Middle East rich breeding grounds for terrorism, we can diagnose the patient with a dangerous case of environmental insecurity. The ethnic cleansing in Darfur is a perfect example. Militias have killed thousands of people, chasing 1.65 million from their homes to risk death from starvation and dirty water (United Nations, 2004). Why? Can it be partly because the region may have oil deposits that the central government wishes to exploit?

### The Cure

The promise of the mid-1990s, when many governments, NGOs, and some enlightened businesses supported the goals of environmental security and sustainable development, has faded in the face of more proximate, pressing security concerns after September 11. The war on terrorism has preempted the international agenda and diverted attention and funds away from con-

structive political processes designed to assist developing countries achieve a better quality of life, like the Monterrey Commitments, MDGs, Johannesburg, and the Doha round. So what positive action is being taken?

### United Nations

In 2001, Kofi Annan defined four burning issues that must be confronted in order to achieve a world in which terrorism cannot flourish: poverty, HIV/AIDS, conflict prevention, and sustainability (United Nations, 2001). To further this work, he charged a High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change with examining not only the traditional "high" foreign policy concerns (war and peace and the UN's role), but also addressing these "soft" security issues.<sup>5</sup> Although the highest levels of the UN have validated environmental security and are prepared to address it, these admirable efforts are hampered by the persistence of institutional barriers to cross-agency cooperation and anemic exercise of political will by member governments, not to mention the usual chronic lack of funds.<sup>6</sup>

### European Union

The European Union continues to take some progressive steps towards curing the human-induced stresses plaguing our planet. What is it doing to protect us from the long-term threats posed by environmental degradation and unsustainable development, and where should it focus during the next 10 years?

"With the introduction of the euro, the biggest enlargement in the history of European integration, and the adoption of a Constitution for Europe, we have united a continent once riven by conflicts, both military and ideological," announced President Romano Prodi (European Commission, 2004a). "What we have achieved is a Union that promises opportunities and security for its people and a strong voice worldwide. Our proposals are concrete, cost-effective, and timely: now the EU has to live up to its promises." That, of course, is the difficult bit.

The EU is heading in the right direction, at least according to its stated principles. The European Community was formed to prevent conflict, build a joint economy, and improve its citizens' quality of life. The European Constitution, signed in October 2004, encourages peace, security, and a sustainable economy, not only for Europe but also the world: "The Union shall work for sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress, and with a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment... It shall contribute to peace, security, [and] the sustainable development of the Earth" (Title I, article I-3).

In addition, the EU's recently adopted security strategy, titled *A secure Europe in a better world* (2003), recognizes that security is essential for development and acknowledges the roles played by environmental factors in cycles of conflict:

Security is a precondition of development. Conflict not only destroys infrastructure, including social infrastructure; it also encourages criminality, deters investment and makes normal economic activity impossible. A number of countries and regions are caught in a cycle of conflict, insecurity and poverty. Competition for natural resources—notably water—which will be aggravated by global warming over the next decades, is likely to create further turbulence and migratory movements in various regions. (pages 2-3).

Besides acknowledging the problems of environmental insecurity in Europe and worldwide, the EU pledges to use its policies—and its resources—to address the world's crises. "As a union of 25 states with over 450 million people producing a quarter of the world's Gross National Product (GNP), and with a wide range of instruments at its disposal, the European Union is inevitably a global player....Europe should be ready to share in the

responsibility for global security and in building a better world" (2003, page 1).

But Europe must get its own house in order first. The EU Strategy for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2001 and currently being updated, requires integrating environment into its policies (e.g., trade, aid, fisheries, and agriculture): "[I]n the long term, economic growth, social cohesion, and environmental protection must go hand in hand" (Commission of the European Communities, 2001, page 2). In the recent Doha round negotiations, the EU made concessions that should make the market for developing countries' agricultural exports freer and fairer (European Commission, 2004b). The EU must do more to eliminate damaging subsidies, particularly in agriculture, in order to ensure environmental security at home and abroad. And more is being done: the fisheries policy, for example, is undergoing a thorough overhaul to make it less destructive not only within EU waters, but also worldwide (Commission of the European Communities, 2001).

The EU is the world's largest donor of official development assistance, contributing more than half of OECD's total aid—\$29.9 billion out of \$58.3 billion in 2002 (OECD, 2003). It has made considerable efforts to upgrade its development policy, although several Member States are struggling to increase their contribution. The EU also brought forward at Johannesburg two initiatives on water and energy supply that seek to ensure greater security for the developing world, and I hope the new commission will take them forward energetically. The EU's Water for Life initiative has made progress, drawing up plans for four regions and establishing a special water facility with an initial grant of 500 million euro in summer 2004.<sup>7</sup>

The EU should promote environmental security throughout Europe, including its direct neighbors. While the old saw asserts that Europe is an economic giant but a political pygmy, the new Member States and the new European Constitution offer the opportunity for the EU to become a much stronger force for peace and security worldwide.

## United States

Will the United States complement these efforts? Its role is pivotal, and suffice it to say that Americans have had quite enough of Europeans telling them what they should do (and we are well aware that we cannot do it without you). Fortunately, plenty of Americans continue to push the cause of environmental security (for example, see Jared Diamond's commentary in this issue). Yale's John Lewis Gaddis has characterized the current administration's strategy as hegemony, preemption, and unilateralism (PBS, 2003). According to the distinguished 9/11 Commission, we need cooperation, enlightened aid (particularly for Muslim countries), and a return to multilateralism (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 2004). The United States should deploy such strategies, as it did at the end of World War II and during the Cold War. But this time, it should also ensure that they are sustainable, taking into account all of Kofi Annan's burning issues, to ensure a more complete security at all levels: global, national, human, and environmental. John F. Kennedy's

words ring as true today as in 1960: "Today our concern must be with that future. For the world is changing. The old era is ending. The old ways will not do."<sup>8</sup>

## Conclusion

When ECSP was launched in 1994, we could reasonably have predicted that we would be much closer to achieving environmental security (and sustainable development) than we are today. While the developed countries may have adopted some good strategies at home, they have mostly missed the opportunity offered by the post-Rio consensus to promote sustainability and equity worldwide. We have sown the wind, and now we reap the whirlwind (and other extreme weather events!). Terrorism can only thrive when the majority of the world's population lacks the basic necessities of life: clean water, enough food, fertile land, and forests. We have the tools to achieve the MDGs and equity for all. Their environmental security is our security, so we must challenge all our governments to implement the aid, trade, and domestic policies so urgently needed to create a just world.

## Notes

1. For more information on the Monterrey Commitments, see [http://www.worldbank.org/prospects/gdf2003/gdf\\_ch06\\_web.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/prospects/gdf2003/gdf_ch06_web.pdf).

2. For the current status of the Doha round, see the International Institute for Sustainable Development's Doha Round Briefing Series at [http://www.iisd.org/trade/wto/doha\\_briefing.asp](http://www.iisd.org/trade/wto/doha_briefing.asp), and also the World Trade Organization's overview of current agricultural negotiations at [http://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/agric\\_e/negoti\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/agric_e/negoti_e.htm).

3. See, e.g., "DRC: IRIN Focus on Hema-Lendu conflict" (1999).

4. See "Water, Conflict, and Cooperation" by Alexander Carius, Geoffrey Dabelko, and Aaron T. Wolf in this issue for more on shared water resources.

5. For more on the High-Level Panel, see "The United Nations and Environmental Security: Recommendations for the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change" in this issue.

6. The United States contributed 22 percent of the



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UN's regular budget for 2003, whereas the European Union contributed 38 percent and Japan 20 percent (European Union, 2004a).

7. For more information on the Water for Life initiative, see [http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/water-initiative/index\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/water-initiative/index_en.html).

8. For a transcript and recording of Senator John F. Kennedy accepting the Democratic Party nomination for the Presidency of the United States (July 15, 1960), see <http://www.jfklibrary.org/j071560.htm>

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