Climate Change, Social Stress and Violent Conflict
State of the Art and Research Needs
International Conference, KlimaCampus, Hamburg University, 19/20. November 2009

Abstract

Climate Change in the environmental conflict debate

M. Julia Trombetta
Delft University of Technology, Netherlands

Discourses about environmental conflict are largely the result of the framing and the transformation of the linkage between global environmental change and security. While the first attempts to link environmental change with security were made by peace movements and critical scholars in the attempt to promote a non confrontational approach to security and different sets of security practices, subsequent research tended to assume the existence of a causal link between environmental degradation and violent conflict (Homer-Dixon, 1991, 1994).

This framing is the result of the application of the dominant discourse about what counts as security within International Relations, or as Walt puts it, "the "study of the threat, use, and control of military force" (1991, 212). This perspective has contributed to an emphasis on violence and to a division in the focus of research between violent conflict and resource management. It has also led to a marginalization of climate change and to a focus on developing countries.

The first part of the paper provides a genealogy of the environmental conflict discourse and emphasises the place that climate change had in it. It shows how the initial interest for conflict induced by climate change was replaced by a focus on resource scarcity and outlines the drivers of the renewed interest for the implications of climate change.

Drawing on this analysis and adopting the theory of securitization (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998; Wæver, 1995) but challenging it with a more contextualized approach, the second part of the paper considers the impact that the environmental conflict discourse had on the transformation of security practices, which shifted from an approach based on dealing with emergency toward a more proactive and preventive one that focuses on resilience.

References

Buzan, B., Wæver, O., & Wilde, J. d. (1998). Security: A New Framework for Analysis. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Pub.

Homer-Dixon, T. F. (1991). On the Threshold: Environmental Changes as Causes of Conflict. International Security, 16(2), 76-116.

Homer-Dixon, T. F. (1994). Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict. International Security, 19(1), 5-40.

Wæver, O. (1995). Securitization and Desecuritization. In R. D. Lipschutz (Ed.), On Security. New York: Columbia University Press.

Walt, S. M. (1991). The Renaissance of Security Studies. International Studies Quarterly, 35(2), 211-239.