


**COLIN H. KAHL**



**STATES, SCARCITY,  
AND  
CIVIL STRIFE  
IN THE  
DEVELOPING WORLD**

# ***Environmental Insecurity***

**“Sustainable development is a compelling moral and humanitarian issue. But sustainable development is also a security imperative. Poverty, destruction of the environment and despair are destroyers of people, of societies, of nations, a cause of instability as an unholy trinity than can destabilize countries and destabilize entire regions.”**

**Secretary of State Colin Powell, July 2002**

**“Globalization has exposed us to new challenges and changed the way old challenges touch our interests and values, while also greatly enhancing our capacity to respond. Examples include:**

***. . . Environmental destruction, whether caused by human behavior or cataclysmic mega-disasters such as floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, or tsunamis. Problems of this scope may overwhelm the capacity of local authorities to respond, and may even overtax national militaries, requiring a larger international response.”***

**National Security Strategy, March 2006**

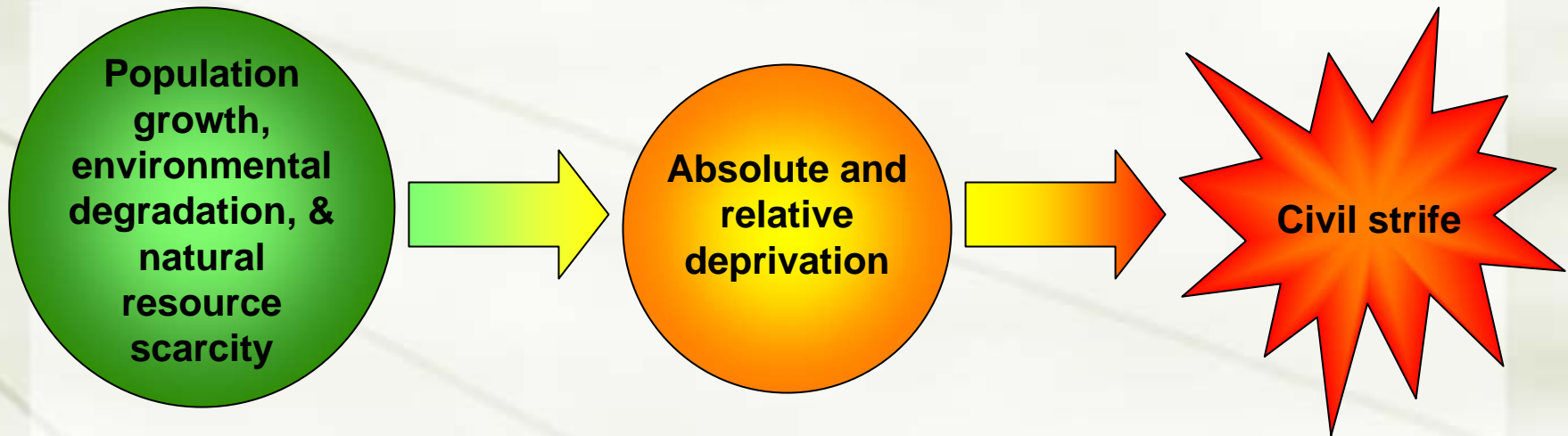


# ***Neo-Malthusian Hypotheses***

# *The Deprivation Hypothesis*

## □ The argument

- Population and environmental pressures contribute to falling wages, unemployment, and landlessness, thereby increasing poverty and inequality.
- Widespread deprivation leads to frustration, grievances, and increases the risks of collective violence.



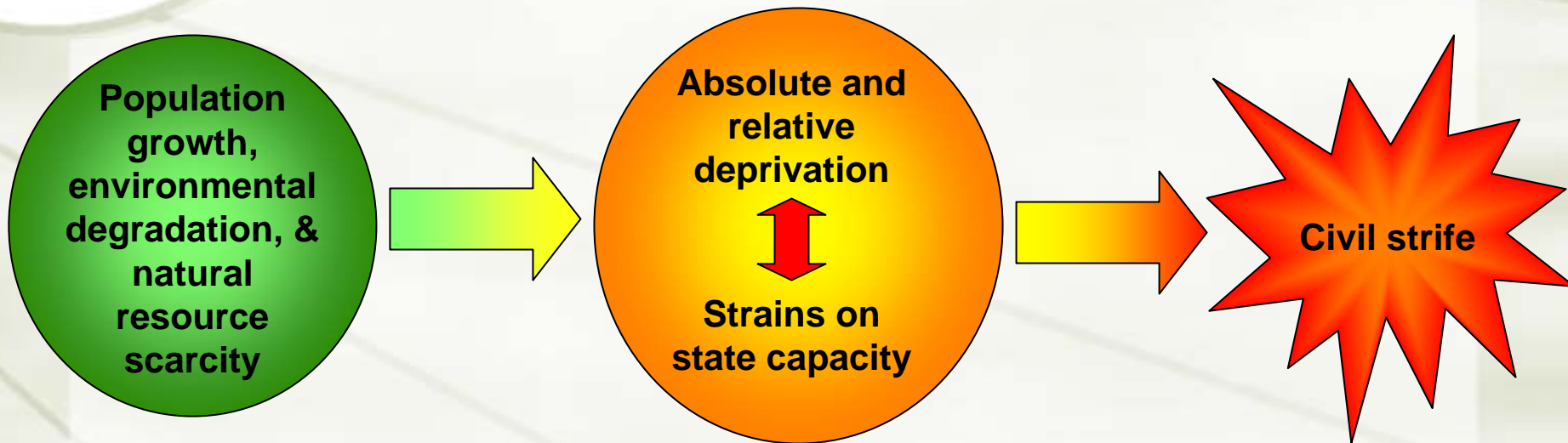
## □ Criticisms

- It ignores collective action problems.
- It disregards the critical role played by the state.

# *The State Failure Hypothesis*

## □ The argument

- Population and environmental pressures increase grievances and demands on the state for costly investments while simultaneously undermining state capacity and legitimacy.
- Weakening state authority opens up “political space” for violence.



## □ Criticisms

- It misses key causal dynamics.
- It fails to systematically incorporate intervening variables.

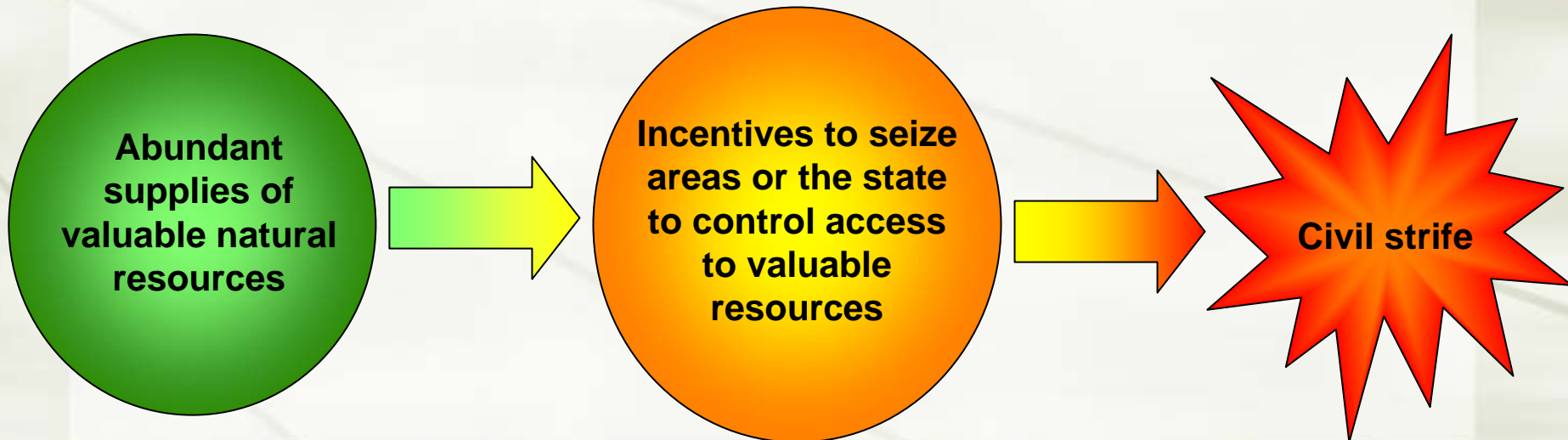


# ***The Challenge from Neoclassical Economics***

# *The Honey Pot Hypothesis*

## □ The argument

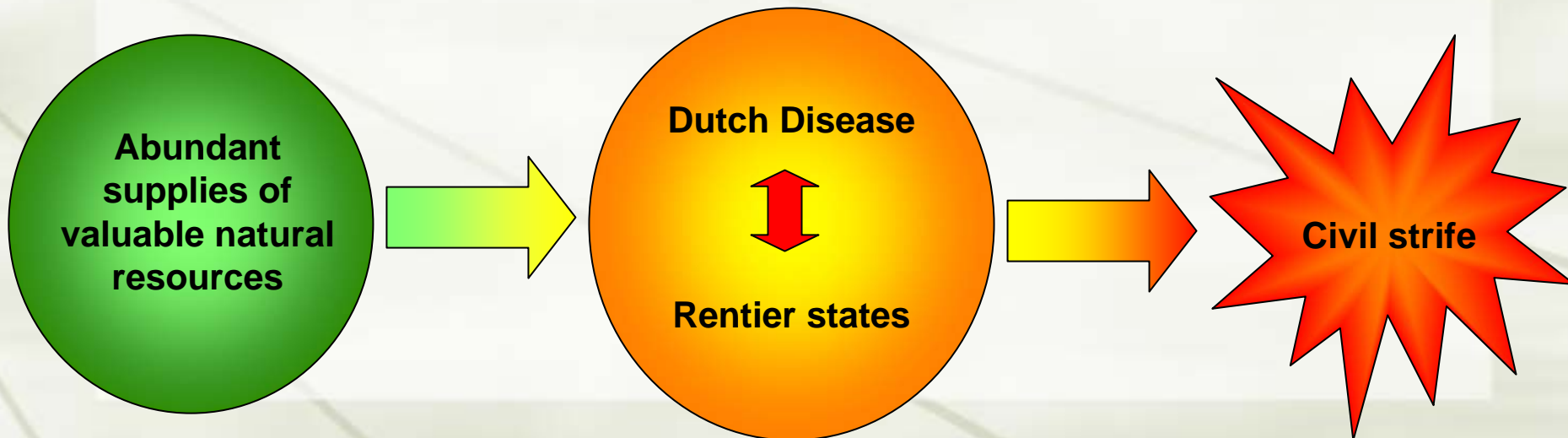
- Rebel groups are encouraged to form and fight over abundant supplies of valuable natural resources (e.g., oil, diamonds, copper, coltan, timber).
- Thus, resource related conflict is driven by abundance and greed rather than scarcity and grievance.



# ***The Resource Curse Hypothesis***

## ❑ **The argument**

- “Dutch Disease”: Dependence on natural resources makes countries vulnerable to price volatility and produces crowd-out effects that hurt long-term economic development.
- “Rentier states”: State control of abundant supplies of valuable resources contributes to corrupt, authoritarian governments.
- Weak authoritarian governments are prime targets for rebellion.







## ***Evaluating the Debate***

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## □ **Scarcity vs. abundance**

- Scarcity and abundance can both occur simultaneously at different levels of analysis. Locally abundant resources are only worth fighting over if they are globally scarce.
- Abundance (of a particular resource) can produce scarcities (of other resources), meaning that the pathologies of “rival” approaches may interact.
- The developmental pathologies of the resource curse and those emerging from scarcity can both occur and interact with one another within the same country over time. Dependence at time “t” can make a country vulnerable to instability at time “t+1” before it finally adapts at time “t+2.”

# ***Evaluating the Debate (cont.)***

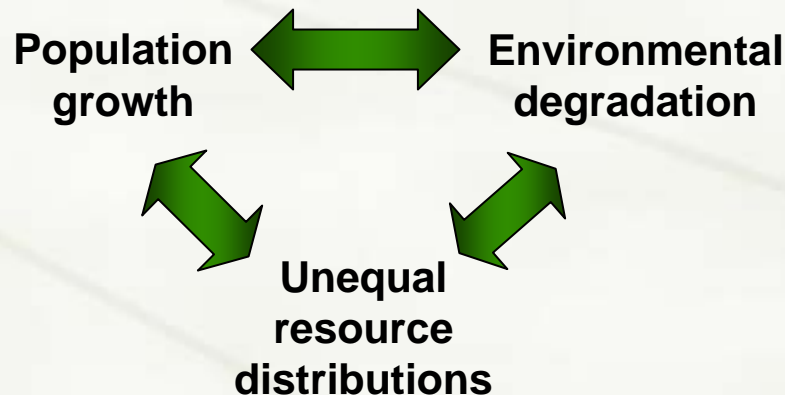
## **□ Different resources, different risks**

- Scarcity-driven conflicts are much more likely to occur with diffuse renewable resources, because these resources are essential to the daily survival of millions living in rural parts of the developing world.
- Abundance-driven conflicts are much more likely to occur in the context of nonrenewable mineral resources, especially oil.
  - These resources are much more valuable per unit of volume and tend to be concentrated, making them more “lootable.”
  - These resource contribute to capital-intensive (as opposed to labor-intensive) industries, contributing to Dutch Disease effects.
  - These resources are typically controlled by the state, contributing to rentier state dynamics.

# ***Evaluating the Debate (cont.)***

## **□ The importance of resource distribution**

- Scarcity is not solely, or even primarily, a “natural” phenomenon; it is a “natural-social” phenomenon.
- Unequal distributions of natural resources, and unequal ability to purchase these resources, contributes to “scarcity” experienced by disadvantaged segments of the population.



- The key is to consider the interaction of all three components.

# ***Evaluating the Debate (cont.)***

## **□ The importance of intervening variables**

➤ Demographic and environmental pressures are neither universally necessary nor wholly sufficient to produce civil strife.

➤ Important intervening variables include:

- State capacity
- Social and technological ingenuity
- The nature of political institutions
- The collective action potential of conflict groups

} Partially endogenous



***Implications for International Security in  
the 21st Century***

# ***Implications for International Security in the 21st Century***

- ❑ **Demographic and environmental pressures will grow in the decades ahead.**
  - Population pressures
  - Unsustainable consumption
  - Poverty and inequality
  - Climate change
- ❑ **This will probably increase the risk of civil strife in the world's *least* developed nations.**

# ***Implications for International Security in the 21st Century (cont.)***

- ❑ Developmental and environmental policy-makers will have to come up with creative solutions to the different pathologies created by scarcity, abundance, and their interaction.**
- ❑ However, these solutions should not be crafted in a social and political vacuum. Natural resource distribution, as well as the nature of social and political systems, will directly impact the prospects for civil strife in coming years.**



# ***Implications for International Security in the 21st Century (cont.)***

- ❑ **Some policy directions to reduce risks of demographic and environmentally induced conflicts:**
  - Encourage economic diversification to reduce dependence and vulnerability to shocks.
  - Encourage natural resource transparency and anti-corruption measures.
  - Provide direct assistance to build the capacity of both local and central governments to monitor and manage vital resources.
  - Encourage more equitable distributions of natural resources essential for basic survival and create enforceable property rights that create incentives for individuals and firms to sustainably manage resources.
  - Continue to provide family planning, public health, and educational assistance.
  - Encourage stable, organic, and effective democratic institutions and the growth of cross-cutting civil societies.