Kent Hughes Butts

Director, National Security Issues Branch, Center for Strategic Leadership, US Army War College

Global Conflict Transformation: Lessons from the Field

The Center for Strategic Leadership (CSL) of the United States Army War College has been involved with the concept of environmental security since 1993. In that time, CSL has partnered with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), think tanks, foreign countries, NATO, the Department's of State, Defense, and the Environmental Protection Agency among others to conduct research games, simulations, roundtables and symposia to explore the relationship between environmental issues and security. These activities have been used to reach out across the former Iron Curtain to create multilateral cooperation and new alliances, create a venue of cooperation between nuclear states that have fought several bitter wars over borders, and address the underlying conditions that rob struggling governments of their legitimacy and encourage the spread of extremist ideology. When environmental issues affect the security of nations we refer to them as environmental security issues. The majority of these issues are related to natural resources. Our research has identified three contributions environmental security makes as an explanatory variable in the security field: the relationship between resources and environmental issues and conflict; serving as confidence building measures to build peace among countries or groups of people; and identifying threats to human security that rob governments of legitimacy and lead to instability. This paper will share lessons learned by CSL and suggestions for overcoming barriers to the application of spirituality to resource conflict transformation (Wolf 2009).

A coalescing of trends is increasing the importance of resource management and environmental security issues and promoting the legitimacy of broadening security concepts to include cultural and social variables in creative approaches to problem solving and policymaking. Since Thomas Malthus penned, "The power of population is infinitely greater than the power of the earth to produce subsistence for man," (Malthus 1798) cycles of concern for resource scarcity and degradation have occurred, most recently in the Club of Rome Report of 1972, the OPEC Oil Embargo of 1973-74, and the current peak oil debate. While one could assume that either the economics of higher prices or new technology would once again provide solutions to the resource scarcity issue, the two countries that between them will

soon contain one half of the world's population (India, China) are reaching economic maturity, and pushing the levels of resource consumption to unsustainable levels. Thus, as the world population moves rapidly from 6 to 9 billion (Population Action International 2009), the globalization of communication invites comparison between the lifestyles of countries and puts increasing pressure on developing country governments to provide the affluence of the West, with the resulting increases in per capita rates of resource consumption. Environmental factors complicate the situation by degrading renewable resources, shifting geographical patterns of occurrence, and changing disease vectors. Magnifying tensions from these and other variables are ongoing changes in climatic conditions that are, among other manifestations, melting strategically important glaciers and disrupting the seasonal flow of water (Military Advisory Board 2007).

The term security as applied by the field of security studies traditionally dealt with force on force military issues or the underlying conditions necessary for a country to build and sustain a military force (Waltz 1991). Over the years other variables were seen to affect this relationship, first, economic and then other issues that affect stability and lead to the use of military forces; this in turn gave rise to the concept of preventive defense and proactively using all of the elements of national power to prevent conflict. While both the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations included environmental issues in their National Security Strategies, it was not until the Clinton administration of the late 1990s that environmental security became an active component of US foreign, developmental assistance, and defense policy at the strategic level. While there was little interest either among the military, or in the security studies, NGO, or environmental communities in seeing the military take an active role in environmental issues, pressing foreign policy problems of the Clinton administration (Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti) often had their roots in unattended environmental issues.

Solving these issues typically required more of the military than simply providing security for the development community. In spite of the decade-long cautions of the academic and environmental community about "militarizing the environment" the poorly resourced development and diplomatic elements of power often benefited from having the US military, or host nation military forces, address those environmental issues that could lead to instability or conflict. As a result, environmental security became an element of operational level military engagement plans and tactical or local level efforts to resolve or prevent conflict, such as the provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) of Iraq and Afghanistan.

By the end of the George W. Bush administration, environmental security was embedded in Combatant Command Theater Security Cooperation Plans and Stability Operations doctrine, and successful, civil-military, multilateral confidence building conferences, workshops and train the trainer sessions that used environmental issues to promote cooperation and prevent resource related tensions had been held on every continent. Nevertheless, barriers exist to the successful application of this concept.

In our efforts to reflect upon the relationship between rationality and spirituality in helping to promote peace and use environmental issues to prevent or overcome conflict, we have gained certain insights as to when this relationship is beneficial and when it is not. First, it is important to understand that **spirituality reflects the social and cultural values of the community** in which the problem is being addressed. Quite often these values differ between countries, between regions, and between villages. Success in applying elements of spirituality should begin by mapping the limits of those related cultural values. We have found that the US Peace Corps, religious organizations and other NGOs provide an invaluable source of understanding of the shared cultural norms extent within a country, region or village and determining where the application of a particular cultural norm is apropos.

Second, at a strategic level one quite often finds a problem of **ethnocentricity** and the projection of the cultural values of the strategic or security planners in one country upon the countries or regions in which their plans are to be undertaken. A close analogy for this problem may be found in the development community, where many failed or marginally successful developmental projects have focused almost exclusively on the economic dimensions and the amount of money to be contributed by donors to the relative exclusion of regional, social (cultural) and environmental veracities that are essential if one is to achieve sustainable development. Contributing factors to this phenomenon in the United States are: the frequent rotation of regional desk officers and their limited experience serving in foreign countries; the recent tendency to describe the United States as the only Superpower; the relative homogeneity of culture across the country; and the limited interest in or traveled to foreign countries on the part of the US population.

Third, we have a problem of **uncommon terminology** that renders many terms abstract for the uninformed reader and undermines efforts to sell the importance of the concept. This begins with the term security where decades have passed with scholars successfully filling the pages of peer-reviewed

journals with well reasoned arguments as to whether an issue is a security issue are not. In spite of a common approach to environmental security on the part of the US interagency community for over 15 years (Harnish 2009), a great number of articles on environmental security began with words to the effect of, "there is no common definition of environmental security." Thus, instead of reiterating and building upon a concept, looking for lessons learned and seeking to refine its application, the term may be dismissed as unclear and replaced with a new term, such as sustainable security, that must toil in the vineyards for many years before it can be determined whether it will be accepted and applied, or find itself with a limited audience, or be similarly dismissed for lack of clarity.

Peace terminology is particularly convoluted and over defined. Newly confirmed policy makers wrestling with the impact of foreign affairs issues upon the policy maker's designated portfolio receive complex policy recommendations in one-page summaries. They must deal with terms such as environmental peacemaking, peace building, peace operations, peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and peace engineering (Conka 2002, Vesilind 2005). This plethora of similar terminology is itself a barrier to gaining widespread institutional support for a concept and the necessary resources to ensure its successful application.

Organizational cooperation is absolutely essential to achieve success in the underfunded area of developmental assistance and conflict prevention. At lower levels, a Country Team at an embassy for example, interagency cooperation is common and reflects the leadership and close supervision of a Chief of Mission. A fine example is the close cooperation between the US and Philippine militaries and the USAID Mission in Manila to address clean water and other underlying conditions that terrorists were attempting to exploit on Jolo and Basilan Islands; that cooperation led to the reestablishment of governmental legitimacy and the marginalization of the terrorist movement. At a regional or operational level interagency cooperation has been exceptional between the Department of State Environmental Hubs and the US Combatant Commands. A noteworthy example was the civil-military Seismic Disaster Preparedness Conference for the South Asian states that brought together, Pakistan, India, and China to share best practices and develop plans for future cooperation.

At a strategic level, such as the interagency community in Washington, DC, competition for scarce budgetary resources often leads to stereotyping, zero sum game thinking, and attempts to portray one

organization as having exclusive responsibility for a given role or mission. Such behavior discourages the type of top-down leadership and inclusive strategic documentation that should direct lower echelons at operational and embassy levels to synchronize their activities and leverage each agency's resources for the common purpose of deterring conflict and building peace. Fortunately each new administration creates a range of strategic documents such as the National Security Strategy, the Quadrennial Defense Review, and the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review that offer the opportunity to promote new concepts. USAID was quite successful in promoting development as a security vehicle in the 2002 and 2006 National Security Strategies; so much so, that the foreign affairs community was soon speaking of the levers of foreign-policy as The Three D's (diplomacy, development, and defense). African missionaries use a similar strategy by associating Christian values with the trappings of the animist culture to create converts.

Recognize the vulnerability of normative concepts. We have found there is a natural resistance on the part of organizations and people involved in hard security activities to embracing a soft security role or mission. This is true for civilians in the security community as well as the military. Suggesting that using spirituality to overcome conflict or promote cooperation on resource issues may seem normative and unrelated to the common principles of negotiation. Therefore we have found it useful to identify key stakeholders and power sources, those organizations or people whose support is absolutely essential to successfully inculcating a new concept. Any strategy to promote a new and creative approach to problem solving, should have as one of its components a plan to win over those the organizations or leaders. In addition, efforts to promote such a new strategic concept should clearly associate it with successfully achieving traditional diplomatic or security objectives. Failure to do so may lead to its dismissal as an unrealistic idea.

Policy makers are vulnerable to **reductionist thinking**; "if water does not lead to interstate conflict then it can be dismissed as a security issue." Even though the chief benefit of water resources in regional stability may be confidence building and peacemaking, the United Nations, USAID and Department of State frequently draw attention to resource related issues by emphasizing their role in violent conflict (Melnyk 2007, Harnish 2009). This is true because officials have proved more likely to take action to stop violent conflict than to undertake peacemaking. While it is important to be honest in explaining the cause-and-effect relationship of environmental issues, such as climate change migrants, one must be

aware that those who oppose a change in policy often seize upon evenhanded appraisals to diminish their importance (Dabelko 2009). During the recent Bush administration, CSL stressed the importance of environmental security to addressing the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit and were, thus, able to maintain the use of environmental security as an engagement vehicle for the Combatant Commands (Butts 2004).

This paper did not seek to be all-inclusive, but to present several variables that we have found critical to success in promoting environmental security, and in particular, its role in addressing human security, and serving as a confidence building measure, to the national security community.

Butts, Kent Hughes, and Curtis Turner. 2004. Addressing Transnational Threats in South Asia: Environmental Security and Counter Terrorism, *Issue Paper*, Center for Strategic Leadership, Carlisle Barracks, PA

Conca, Ken and Geoffrey D. Dabelko. (Editors). 2003. *Environmental Peacemaking.* Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, DC

Dabelko, Geoffrey D., 19 August 2009, Planning for climate change: the security community's precautionary principle, An editorial comment, *Climate Change* (2009)96:13-21. Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, DC

Harnish, Reno. L. 2009. Information Memorandum for the Secretary, Subject: Environmental Security, United States Department of State, Washington, DC

Malthus, T.R.1798. An essay on the principle of population as it affects the future improvement of mankind. Facsimile reprint in 1926 for J. Johnson. London: Macmillan & Co.

Military Advisory Board. 2007. *National Security and the Threat of Climate Change,* Center for Naval Analysis, Alexandria, VA.

Melnyk, Mary. 2007. Cover Letter From, *Singapore's Illegal Timber Trade and the US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement,* United States Agency for International Development. Washington DC

Population Action International. 2009. *Population and Climate Change*. (Working Paper). Washington DC.

Vesilind, Aarne, P. 2005. *Peace Engineering: When Personal Values and Engineering Careers Converge*. Lakeshore Press, New Hampshire

Walt, Stephen M., 1991. The Renaissance of Security Studies, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (June, 1991), pp. 211-239.

Wolf, Aaron, T. 2009. The Enlightenment Rift and Peacebuilding: Rationality, Spirituality, and Shared Waters, Theme Paper for Pathways to Peace: Defining Community in the Age of Globalism.

.