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Environmental Security, Intrastate and Inter-State Wars: A Prospective Analysis

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Abstract

Wars have been and continue to be part of human culture, in spite of the various international frameworks to prevent them. While the reasons for conflict are varied, this article focuses on the growing role of environmental factors in fueling both internal and external conflicts. The article categorises environmental threats into two main areas: resource issues (scarcity, abundance, and sharing) and climate change. It examines how these threats can impact human security, state security, and ultimately lead to war The overexploitation of limited resources, particularly in areas with rapid population growth and poor governance, is likely to spark or intensify internal conflicts. While abundant resources can support economic development, mismanagement, corruption, and ethnic tensions can turn them into sources of conflict. Sharing resources across borders without fair agreements continues to be a cause of conflict between nations. Climate change exacerbates these problems by reducing the availability and quality of resources, making it harder for governments to protect their citizens and maintain peace. Essentially, the article argues that environmental factors are increasingly important in understanding the roots of conflict and that addressing these issues is crucial for preventing future wars.

Keywords: Environment, resources, exploitation, State, threats, climate change, war

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Introduction

In order to better appreciate international security and/or peace, it is important to understand and analyse the context of wars globally, regionally, and nationally. Although wars are a *"collective killing for some collective purpose"* (Keegan 1998:72), they are inherently costly ventures that have historically left trails of destruction of property and lives. However, wars continue to be waged because, unfortunately, violence is part of international politics (Wight, 2019). As aptly observed by Kekes (2010:202), *"war is a permanent adversity"* that *"has been and continues to be a ubiquitous feature of the human condition"*. Indeed, some scholars have opined that war has not only become a *"habit that most human societies have acquired and become deeply attached to*" (Williams 2018:177) but has also become a *"deeply ingrained cultural practice"* (Coker 2014, *cited in* Williams 2018:177). Like Malinowski (1941:523) said, *"the problem of what war is as a cultural phenomenon naturally falls into the constituent issues of the biological determinants of war, its political effects, and its cultural constructiveness"*. So like culture, wars are bound to persist into the foreseeable future, with only gradual changes in causation and execution.

Persistence of wars and their apparent domestication into 'human nature' and 'culture' has neither been due to a lack of will, nor can it be explained by lack of deliberate attempts to prevent or end them. Various attempts and measures have been tried over the course of history especially after major wars. The end of World War I, for example, saw the establishment of the League of Nations (LoN) with the optimistic objective of "acceptance of obligations not to resort to war" but rather to pursue attainment of international peace and security through "promotion of international co-operation" and furtherance of "just and honourable relations between nations" (United Nations 2022a). The optimism fell flat with the breakout of World War II. Not even its successor, the United Nations (UN), has succeeded in being a vehicle for bringing an end to wars, be they interstate or intrastate. As the UN stands aloof in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war with only occasional non-enforceable pronouncements, for example, there is little doubt that international frameworks for eliminating present and future wars are likely to remain wanting especially where altercations involve global powers. The utility of the mainly state-centric international frameworks in the prevention and elimination of future wars wanes even more in the face of the increasing involvement of non-state actors in contemporary conflicts such as terrorism. The world should thus prepare to live with wars, but where possible, nip them in the bud if their causation is anticipated in time and amenable to resolution. The challenging question, however, is: what will cause future wars?

It is not possible to predict with pinpoint accuracy when and what will cause the next war(s) because the international security landscape, and threats therein, are highly dynamic. The ever–changing interstate relations and interests nature of makes it difficult to make war predictions with certainty. The difficulty in definitive prediction of causes of future wars does not, however mean there is a complete absence of pointers to the nature and possible causes of future wars. The imperative to plan for future wars necessitates scientific-based prediction of the threats, the limitations notwithstanding. Like the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence (2018:11) observed during the future security trends analysis, *"the only certainty about the future is its inherent uncertainty, yet we must prepare"*. States must continuously endeavour to predict what constitutes threats to their existence in order to prevent, mitigate or appropriately prepare to neutralise them. The threat spectrum on which states must focus has progressively widened from the traditional security threats that focused on military threats to territorial integrity to incorporate human security threats as articulated in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report (UNDP 1994) as well as the ever emerging new threats conceptualised under the Copenhagen school of thought, where threats are constructed through a "speech act" (Mcdonald, 2008:565; Nyman, 2018; Trombetta, 2008:588).

The focus of contemporary and future threats therefore transcends the traditional military threats to include transnational security concerns like human and drug trafficking, demographic pressures, epidemics, natural disasters, resource scarcity, and environmental degradation (Biswas, 2011; Brauch, 2011:63; Miller, 2001:19; Ullman, 1983:133). The different environmental security threat variables do not always play out individually but rather closely interplay to bring about or exacerbate a given conflict episode. Regardless of their nature, environmental threats have etched their place in contemporary and future threats of concern to human, state, and international security discourses. Any human, national, and international security threat analysis would be incomplete without covering the environmental security threat terrain.

The Concept of Environmental Security

Whereas there were no major definitional contestations on the traditional security concept, which focused on securing the territorial integrity of states against mainly external military threats, the adoption of differing referent objects associated with the widening and deepening of elements that constitute security has brought ambiguity to the definition of the concept. 'Environmental security' is one of those elements of the widened security concept that has defied a common definition by

scholars and practitioners. Graeger (1996:109), for example, avers *"It seems virtually impossible to agree on an unambiguous definition of environmental security,"* an observation that Levy (1995:37) traces to the basic fact that both its constituent words ""*environment*' and '*security*' *are flexible enough to mean almost anything one wishes."* This is in agreement with Homer-Dixon who attributes the definitional ambiguity to the fact that *"the environment-security theme encompasses an almost unmanageable array of sub issues especially if we define 'security' broadly to include human, physical, social, and economic well-being"* (Homer-Dixon, 2001:4).

Despite the ambiguities in a conclusive definition, there are enduring areas of agreement on environment-security nexus across the literature. The areas of convergence include, being a key component of human security; increasing significance of environmental-borne threats to human, national, and global security as population pressure mounts; the need for sustainable utilisation, protection and maintenance of natural systems on which humanity is dependent; the unpredictable fluid trans-border nature of most threats, thus requiring joint control approaches; and the centrality of resources and climate change in environmental security discourse (Coldicott & O'Brien 2012:73; Dalby, 2018:531; Koff and Maganda, 2016:655; UNDP 1994:24-25). Understanding the interplay between environmental resources, climate change, and security is the gateway to appreciating how environmentally-borne threats may fuel conflicts and wars.

Environmental Resources interplay with Security

Historically, natural resources have often found themselves at the center of driving human survival, development, and conflict. The unmistakable footprint of natural resources in conflicts can be traced pre-medieval times, when humankind had to skillfully survive and live off natural resources within hostile environments, through the times of imperial wars driven by quest for natural resources to the present times where contestations over resources still abound. The interplay between environmental resources and security is perhaps more pronounced in the post Westphalia state arrangement. Modern states have a social contract with their citizenry to guarantee not only their security from external aggression but also to provide conducive environments for human development and security. To effectively deliver on the social contract, states strive to sustainably harness all resources at their disposal, including natural resources within their jurisdiction, in order to build their economic and military power. Availability of environmental resources thus gives a base from which a state can spring to guarantee stability and socio-economic transformation. This is however not always the case as instability and lack of development have been documented amongst

both resource abundant and resource constrained states (Le Billion 2001; United States Institute of Peace, 2007: 8-9). Resource constraints and resource abundance thus remain potential drivers of future intra and inter-state wars.

Resource Constraints and Provocation of Future Wars

Humanity abhors and always tries to innovate ways around all forms of scarcity of what they hold dear. An attempt at effective utilisation and preservation of scarce resources has thus come to be part of man's enduring aspiration. When Mahatma Gandhi, for example, said that the "earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not for every man's greed" (Schumacher, 1973, cited in Kazuya, 2001:309), he imputed the need for responsible and sustainable utilisation of natural resources if scarcity and related dire effects are to be avoided. His famous quote can, however, remain valid only if there is no population pressure on the resources or if the pressure is mitigated by technologically–led harnessing of the resources. Unfortunately, technological advancement and its use in natural resource exploitation continue to lag way behind population growth, especially in the Global South. The exponentially increasing world population is estimated to reach 8 billion by 22 November 2022, with the technologically challenged sub Saharan Africa expected to record disproportionately higher rates, and contribute more than 50% of new growth by 2050 (UN 2022 b). Population growth is on the a background of a fixed land mass (and resources therein) and is thus bound to occasion resource scarcity, especially in the Global South states. The scarcity is likely to be on both non-renewable resources and also on other resources such as land. This is likely to set the ground work for potential future conflicts and wars.

The potential role of resource constraints translating into future wars is better appreciated through the Greed and Grievance model (Collier and Hoeffler, 2000: 2004) of explaining civil conflict. The basic theoretical proposition of the model is that civil wars are caused by grievances on the part of a group against a political system. The grievance of a group that perceives itself as deprived of goods and conditions of life is exploited by greedy, ambitious leaders who see pushing the group into a civil war as an opportunity to satiate their economic motives through primary commodity predation. Although the model may not be exhaustive in explaining the causes of all civil wars, there are examples across the world and in different times that attest to its utility. Resource scarcity–related migration from El Salvador to Honduras has, for example, been cited as the underlying factor in the 1969 'soccer war (Durham, 1979, cited in Maxwell and Reuveny, 2000: 303). Similarly, the over fifty–year-long Philippines 'peasant insurgences' have been linked to high population

growth, displacement of peasants from their land, deforestation, and land grabbing by the military and elites (Hawes, 1990; Kahl, 2006, cited in Dowd, 2009: 430). In Africa, water and land scarcity have been linked to conflicts in Ethiopia and Darfur, while land scarcity in Rwanda has been cited as one of the underlying factors behind the 1990 genocide (Evans, 2010: 7). In Uganda, although there has not been any direct linkage of resource scarcity to full–blown civil wars, population pressure on land and exploitation of natural resources like minerals have been associated with community tensions remains a potential driver of ethnic cleavages, rivalries, and conflicts (Rugadya, 2009; 2020). A similar ethnic-laden land conflict that has claimed lives and seen the internal displacement of over 6000 people still rages on in Apaa, Northern Uganda, with no end in sight (Kobusingye, Mathijs, and Han. 2017). These land conflicts, which are a reflection of what is likely to happen across the country if the land tenure system is not revised, have the potential to ignite widespread civil strife as the population pressure continues to build. Water resources are increasingly becoming an issue of contention. Constricted access to grazing resources, including fresh water in the Karamoja region has been the main driver of inter-clan violent cattle raids, including cross–border raids and associated small arms trafficking to sustain the practice (Ocan and Ocan 1994; Mkutu, 2007). The raids and arms trafficking across the porous borders pose, and will continue to pose both intrastate and interstate security threats if not jointly addressed by the affected states. Besides, the trafficked arms may be used to fuel other civil conflicts by aggrieved sections of society that opt for armed confrontation to settle their actual or perceived marginalisation over resources.

Other explanations of how resource scarcity may lead to future wars have been advanced. Homer-Dixon (2001:5), while recognizing that resource scarcity has the potential of fueling civil strife in agreement with Collier and Hoeffler's model, further identifies other four plausible ways of scarcity–induced conflicts, namely: disputes arising from local environmental degradation; ethnic clashes arising from scarcity–induced social migration and deepened social cleavages arising therefrom; scarcity–induced interstate war over resources like water; and North-South conflicts, over, failure to mitigate or compensate for global environmental problems. However, Homer-Dixon rightly observes that interstate wars over scarcity and North-South conflicts are least likely to be provoked by a scarcity of resources. This is partly because modern interstate wars are quite costly, with most states opting for amicable conflict resolution methods such as diplomacy. Furthermore, the likelihood of North-South conflict is quite remote given the power disparities and interdependencies among states in the two divides. Resource scarcity

driven wars and conflicts are thus likely to remain a major a driver of intra-state wars in the Global South since all the requisite ingredients are available, especially population pressure on both renewable and non-renewable resources. Even where there is no full flare–up of intrastate 'war', the underlying reality that scarcity compromises the state's delivery of basic goods that constitute human security should not be lost. Anything that infringes on an individual's freedom from fear and want is an attack on human security and should be construed as a 'war' for those affected. Furthermore, whereas resource scarcity conflicts are largely intrastate and remain largely a problem in the Global South, resource abundance– related conflicts have the potential to manifesting into both intrastate and interstate wars, including in the Global North.

Resource Abundance and fomenting of Future Wars

A strong economy is the building block for elements of national power, including the military. The presence of an abundance of natural resources should ordinarily be a blessing, as their exploitation can contribute to socio-economic development and building a strong military that is able to guarantee security. Indeed, some resource rich–countries like Botswana and Norway have successfully exploited and used their natural resources to further social and economic development (Koubi et al,. 2014; Limi, 2007; Mehlum, Moene, and Torvik, 2006: 3; Ploeg, 2011: 366). Not all resource endowed countries have however realised the inherent benefits. In countries like Angola, Venezuela, Mexico, and Nigeria. The resources have instead turned out to be what scholars have baptised the "resource curse" or "Dutch disease" that is characterised by less than expected economic growth, underdevelopment and armed conflicts (Atkinson and Hamilton 2003; Hammond 2011; Mehlum, Moene and Torvik 2006; Ploeg 2011; Ploeg and Poelhekke 2009). The resource curse, however is not always entirely attributable to resource abundance. The documented factors that fuel the Dutch disease include poor governance structures and policies, poor human resources, the inability to diversify revenue sources, and underlying ethnic tensions (Amundsen, 2014; El-Anshasy, Mohaddes, and Nugent, 2015; Koubi et al,. 2014; Mehlum, Moene and Torvik, 2006; Mikesell, 1997: 198-199; Morelli and Rohner, 2015; Ploeg, 2011).

Institutionalised good governance practices that are all inclusive, intolerant of corruption are, in particular, critical to averting a resource curse, even in communities with ethnic divisions (Morelli and Rohner, 2015: 33) and are thus vital for avoiding resource abundance–related conflicts. The poor governance policies in countries like Nigeria (Wats 2004) and Benin (Morelli and Rohner 2015) have thus been largely blamed for their resource curse, while Botswana, Canada, Australia, and Norway with good

governance practices have escaped the curse (Cabrales and Esther Hauk 2011; Mehlum, Moene, and Torvik, 2006). In as in as long as natural resource–rich countries continue to have governance problems, lack strong institutional frameworks for exploiting the resources, fail to diversify revenue sources and fail to translate the resources into social economic development, the likelihood of future conflicts, especially civil strife, remains a valid possibility. This does not mean interstate war(s), including a North-South confrontation is not a possibility. Various combat 'intervention' missions by western powers into resource rich countries have been linked to the quest for natural resources. The United States intervention in Iraq is one such war that some scholars assert was driven by the long desire to control the rich hydrocarbon resources of central Asia and the Middle East (Thakurta, 2003: 145-146; Thomas, 2006: 97). The possibility of future interstate wars against resource endowed countries of the Global South is thus not far-fetched. Uganda, with newly confirmed vast quantities of commercially viable oil, needs to draw lessons, avoid the oil curse trappings, and remain cognizant of possibility of interstate wars or proxy wars of powerful states seeking a share of the oil resource. The oil–related threat(s) to Uganda, should they come to pass, may equally arise from the fact that it is a shared resource.

Shared Resources and fomenting of Future Wars

The distribution of natural resources does not always follow states' territorial boundaries. Shared natural resources encompass those that are shared between two or more states, such as river systems, enclosed and semi-enclosed seas, mountain chains, forests or areas of special conservation interest, migratory species, and the international commons (Burchi 1985: 640). Exploitation of trans-boundary resources poses peculiar challenges ranging from equitable harnessing of the resource to difficulties in arriving at joint exploitation among the different sovereign states and the trans-migratory nature of some of the resources, like fish, among others.

One of the classical examples of the difficulties of exploitation of a shared resource is the utilisation of the Nile River which traverses ten African countries that are highly reliant on it for their socio-economic development through agriculture, power generation, and tourism. This important economic lifeline has been a source of tension and low–intensity conflict between Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt for most of the 20th century (Swain, 2010: 687). Various attempts to harmonise equitable use of the Nile waters, such as the 1999 Nile Basin Initiative with a "shared vision of achieving sustainable socio-economic development through the equitable use of and benefit from the common Nile Basin water resources" (Küng

2003: 6), and the subsequent 2010 Cooperative Framework Agreement that was envisaged to replace the 1929 agreement which gave exclusive rights to Egypt over the waters (Asiedu, 2018: 2; Gebreluel, 2014: 31), have not waned. The ongoing construction of the Great Renaissance Dam, intended by Ethiopia to support its economic transformation, has brought Egypt and Ethiopia closer to an all-out war, only kept at bay by a flurry of regional and international diplomatic mediations (Gebreluel, 2014: 31). The pointers to sustained tensions lie in the fact that all the Nile Basin countries are experiencing rapid population growth and the pressure to improve the socio-economic status of their populations, which inevitably necessitates harnessing of River Nile waters for irrigation and power generation, among others. As long as each of the Nile Basin countries has a legitimate reason to exploit the resource and consensus for equitable sharing is not built, the question can only be when and not whether future war(s) will be fought over the Nile waters.

Related to the Nile River is Lake Victoria, its source, which is a shared resource between the three Eastern African countries of Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania. The lake does not only serve as a transport waterway between the three countries but is also rich in biological marine species, especially fish. Fish has been a source of conflict among fishermen from the different countries with the peak reaching when there was open contestation between Uganda and Kenya over a 0.2–hectare island of Migingo in 2007. The conflict, which flared and involved intervention at level of East African Legislative Assembly and calls by Kenyan legislators to table it before the UN Security Council (Glaser et al,. 2019), almost brought the two countries to war. It is yet to be definitively resolved and serves as a reminder that a fishing–related conflict that has the potential to flare into an intestate war among members of the same regional economic block is a future possibility.

Shared resource conflicts are not limited to Africa. A total of 1,831 interstate events between 1946 and 1999 that concerned water have been documented (Michael and Amit 2009, 77). Water has, for example, been a cause of political tensions between Indians and Bangladeshis. In the 1960s, in an effort to flush silt away from Calcutta seaport, India built a barrage at Farakka, which diverted a portion of the Ganges flow away from its course into Bangladesh, it did not only bring the two neighboring countries to near war but the reduced flow from upstream resulted in a number of adverse human security consequences in Bangladesh. These included degraded surface and groundwater, impeded navigation, increased salinity, degraded fisheries which endangered water supplies and public health (Wolf, 2007: 455). Similar water-related conflicts have played out between Arabs and Israelis. Cooley (1984: 3) observes that the constant struggle for the waters of the Jordan, Litani,

Orontes, Yarmuk, and other life-giving Middle East rivers was a principal cause of the 1967 Arab-Israel war, and the water question still remains at the center of the Arab-Israel conflicts. The USA and Mexico have equally repeatedly come into "distribution and pollution generated" conflicts over the use of the Colorado and Rio Grande rivers (Haftendorn, 2000: 59). Shared water resource conflicts are thus global and the exponentially increasing population will continue to strain this finite resource and fuel both intra and interstate conflicts. The situation is likely to be aggravated by global warming and the attendant climate change.

Climate change and likelihood of fomenting future wars

Climate security, defined by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as "change of climate that is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods" (UNFCCC 2022), has become a multidimensional global security crisis, putting extreme stress on all societal systems (Jones and Sullivan 2020:i).

The German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU) identifies four constellations through which climate change is likely to induce social destabilisation and lead to or exacerbate conflict, namely: degradation of fresh water resources, decline in food production, increase in storm and flood disasters, and climate-induced migrations (WBGU 2008: 2-3). The WBGU (2008: 3) further identifies world hotspots for climate–induced or accelerated conflicts to include: North Africa (fueled by increasing drought, population explosion, food insecurity and poor political systems); Sahel region (drought, water scarcity and food insecurity exacerbating existing conflicts); Central Asia (glacier retreat worsening water and agricultural distribution problems in an already conflict prone region); India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (glacier retreat from Himalayas, changes in annual monsoon, increased cyclones worsening social crises in a region bedeviled by inter-state conflicts, Islamism and unstable governments); and the Caribbean (increased frequency of devastating hurricanes). In all these predicted incidents, people's livelihoods will be adversely affected.

Climate change has been linked to an increased risk of violent conflicts through direct effects on people's livelihoods by reducing access to quality natural resources, and, indirectly, by undermining the capacity of states to act in ways that promote human security and peace (Barnett and Adger, 2007: 640). It particularly threatens the essential ingredients of good health, namely clean air, safe drinking water, nutritious food supply and safe shelter, and is projected to cause about 250,000 additional

deaths per year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea, and heat stress alone between 2030 and 2050 (World Health organisation, 2022). The non-resilient health systems of the Global South countries will be hardest hit. Ultimately, though climate change may not necessarily be the prime cause of most violent conflicts, there is no doubt that its devastating effect on human livelihoods is bound to exacerbate any existing conflicts. As aptly captured in the United States Quadrennial Defence Review Report (2014: 8), climate change effects are and will remain "threat multipliers that will aggravate stressors abroad such as poverty, environmental degradation, political instability, and social tensions–conditions that can enable terrorist activity and other forms of violence."

Conclusion

In a security terrain characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, prediction of what will cause the next interstate or intrastate war cannot be done with pinpoint precision. However, there is a traceable shifting of the spectrum of threats from the purely traditional ones, and environmental threats are among the top contenders for dominating the future security threat terrain. Non-technologically informed exploitation of natural resources on the background of exponentially increasing population pressure, especially among the Global South states, is bound to occasion resource scarcity and attendant community tensions, ethnic cleavages, land and fresh water disputes aggravated by immigrations, as well as the actual or perceived inability of governments to provide social services to their populace. These tensions have, especially when exploited by 'greed' driven elites, the potential to igniting a spectrum of future conflicts ranging from direct effects on human security to civil wars. Resource abundance, while critical for driving socio-economic development, is one another likely igniter of future intrastate and interstate wars if the resources are harnessed within frameworks of poor governance structures, poor human resource, underlying ethnic tensions, and an inability to diversify revenue sources. The possibility of interstate wars among resource–sharing states due to actual or perceived inequitable access remains a future possibility. Climate–change influenced destabilisations such as degradation of fresh water resources, declining food security, increased disasters, diseases, and related mortality, all of which directly impact human security are also threat multipliers with the potential to initiate and exacerbate civil wars. The role of environmental threats in future intrastate and interstate wars is thus not whether they will be contributory but rather to what extent, since they have potential for both igniting and exacerbating conflicts that are already playing out. Even when they are not the direct causes, environmental threats are bound to be a constant feature of future conflicts.

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