



Panel: What should Governments do now?

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General remarks

(1) Environmental security does not rank high on the agenda of security policy decision makers today. Attention to environmental security probably peaked at the turn of the millennium but has disappeared from the screens since 9/11. The fight against terrorism has, to some extent, monopolized the attention of the security policy community today.

This does not mean that nothing is being done with regard to environmental security. Numerous activities and projects are developed on a bilateral basis, or at multilateral level within the framework of OSCE, NATO or other security related structures. But, generally speaking, debate on this issue has been lacking. Debates would be necessary at policy level, with regard to the further development of the concept of environmental security and with regard to the response of traditional security actors to environmental challenges.

(2) The relationship between the environment and security is multi-dimensional. Any attempt at defining this relationship must take into account this complexity. Environment and security interact at three levels: the environment is of importance to individuals, to States, and to wider communities (of the regional or global kinds). This multi-dimensional relationship calls for a broadening of our common understanding of security. Environmental security is in fact very much linked to the concept of human security.

On the other hand, one must thread carefully when assessing the relationship between the environment and security. Adding the environment to the realm of security policy runs the risk of overstressing the concept of security and stripping it of any specific meaning. And counting the environment among security interests grants a special, high profile to this issue and entails the risk of preventing it from being openly and widely discussed. Issues seen as core national security interests are, in general, not the object of open debates.

Thus, when discussing environmental security, a broad notion of security should be adopted so as to include all stakeholders, i.e. individuals, States as well as wider communities. On the other hand, one should focus on those environmental aspects which threaten to trigger collective and violent conflicts, directly or indirectly. Such an approach does not entail a widening of the content of the security concept as such. It rather puts an additional focus on the environment as a potential cause of violent conflicts, but also on the effects of such conflicts on the environment. In fact, it enhances our awareness of the interaction between the environment and security.

(3) Environmental factors have never been a sufficient and immediate cause for the collective use of violence. Those factors interact with a number of other political, economic, social, and cultural considerations. Talking about environmental conflicts thus refers to only one aspect of a critical social constellation which may lead to violent conflicts. A point in case is the issue of fresh water, probably the most visible and most widely discussed security-related environmental issue. The issue of access to fresh water has never been, in itself, the cause of an armed conflict. Even in arid zones where States are extremely dependent on external water supplies, a balance - albeit a precarious one - has been struck between threat and cooperation. There is no automatic spiral towards violence.

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The probability of violent conflicts linked to environmental issues rises with the perception of environmental scarcity resulting from an unfair repartition and appropriation of resources, in other words from discrimination. Often, this can be traced to the disappearance of traditional mechanisms of mediation and conflict resolution as a result from modernization, and to the fact that these traditional mechanisms are not replaced by alternative legal and state structures. Environmental conflicts are typically a problem of countries in development or transition. This situation stresses the need to promote the establishment of effective democratic state structures and institutions capable of dealing with disputes.

What should governments do?

The environment ranks high on the agenda of Swiss Government and enjoys a rather privileged standing in the new Swiss Constitution, adopted in 1999. For instance, the mandate given by this Constitution to the Federal Government with regard to Foreign relations (Art. 54) includes environmental considerations: "The Confederation shall strive to preserve the independence of Switzerland and its welfare; it shall, in particular, contribute to alleviate need and poverty in the world, and to promote respect for human rights, democracy, the peaceful coexistence of nations, and the preservation of natural resources."

As a result, environmental considerations also play an important role in the foreign and security policy of Switzerland. What kind of measures does the Swiss government adopt in this policy area? In line with my earlier remarks on the need to focus on the environment as a potential cause of conflict, we may identify measures aimed at preventing a conflict (i.e. establishing mechanisms and instruments to deal with disputes over resources); measures to be taken during a conflict (to protect the environment) and measures to be implemented following a conflict (to alleviate environmental damages).

(1) Prevention of Conflict: It is commonplace to state that States should be doing more in the field of conflict prevention – yet this is as valid as ever. Resources devoted to the prevention of conflicts are a far better investment than resources spent on ending a violent conflict and rebuilding society and environment afterwards. Further researches about the interrelationship between environment and conflict would certainly be useful in order to guide decision makers in this regard. I can only but encourage those researchers that have presented some of their works during this conference to continue in their endeavor.

Conflict prevention is a strong component of Swiss Foreign Policy in general. Strengthening the rule of law, promoting human and minority rights and establishing effective judicial systems are priorities of Swiss Foreign Policy and are regarded as crucial aspects of good governance. Effective access to mechanisms and institutions where differing interests may be presented and reconciled is an important element to prevent a dispute to turn into a violent conflict.

(2) During an armed conflict: The destructive potential of modern means of warfare represents a threat to the environment of a magnitude unprecedented in the history of humanity. This has been internationally recognized and inter alia enshrined into the body of International Humanitarian Law (e.g. rules for the protection of the environment in armed conflicts are to be found in the First Additional Protocol of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts). The Provisions of the Rome Statute of 1998 incorporate some of these prohibitions and The International Criminal Court (ICC) accordingly defines as war crimes the intentional launch of "an attack in the knowledge, such an attack will cause incidental [...], widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment which could be clearly excessive in relation to the concrete and direct overall military advantage anticipated"(Art. 8 c, Para 2).

It is therefore of utmost importance, and a central governmental task, to promote the compliance with and to develop further the rules of International Humanitarian Law. However, three important remarks are to be made with regard to IHL: Firstly, neither the 1st 1977 Protocol nor the Rome Statute are universally ratified - promoting the ratification of these instruments are permanent priorities of Swiss Foreign Policy. Secondly, provisions of IHL relating to the protection of the environment are, as a general rule, only applicable to

international armed conflicts - comparable provisions are lacking for internal armed conflicts. And, thirdly, the integration of the IHL standards into military training and education is central to the respect of humanitarian norms. This consideration explains why Switzerland has been successful in including IHL as a specific area of international cooperation within the framework of Partnership of Peace. In the view of Switzerland the Partnership for Peace Program with its focus on military cooperation is an important tool to convey IHL norms to the military.

(3) Alleviating environmental damage: As far environmental security policy goes, this is probably the domain that has witnessed the most far-reaching developments. Two areas of extensive international cooperation can illustrate that point: the cleaning-up of cold war legacies and humanitarian demining.

With the end of the Cold War, new cooperative patterns materialized and led to the development of new security related institutional frameworks such as the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and/or to the enlargement of existing structures like NATO and EU. The Euro-Atlantic community rapidly became aware of the huge environmental threats emanating from contaminated military exercise grounds, decommissioned nuclear submarines or large stocks of old ammunition, in the former Soviet Union in particular. Take the example of chemical weapons: Russia, who is party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, an international disarmament treaty that entered into force in 1997 and has laid the ground for a universal and verifiable ban on chemical weapons, is under the obligation to destroy and dispose of more than 40'000 metric tons of highly toxic chemicals. To fulfill this task in accordance with strict environmental rules is a challenging endeavor, and the international community has set up programs to provide assistance to Russia, international efforts that are today coordinated under the umbrella of the G8. Switzerland takes part in this international effort with its own projects and contributions.

Mechanisms have also been set up within the framework of the PfP (and its Trust Fund) or of the OSCE to provide assistance to countries of the former Soviet block in the destruction of conventional ammunitions. Following the end of the cold war and the downsizing of their armed forces, many countries of the former Soviet block found themselves with huge stockpiles of conventional ammunitions, yet did not have the means to destroy them. Many of these stockpiles have deteriorated over time, to the point where today they pose a threat to both the environment and citizens living in their vicinity. PfP and OSCE programs are now either underway or under development to address this issue.

Another case in point is that of antipersonnel landmines. Nobody knows how many landmines remain to be cleared as a result from ancient or recent conflicts. Previous estimates of up to 100 million landmines have been widely challenged and any firm estimate can be little more than speculation. Similarly, the total number of victims is difficult to assess with any degree of certainty. What is obvious is that antipersonnel landmines continue to claim human victims, both during and after conflict, many of them civilians. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), for example, a network of more than 1,400 NGOs, reported deaths and injuries from landmines and UXO (unexploded ordonnances) in 65 countries last year.

The landmine threat goes far beyond the killing and maiming of thousands of individuals each year. The social, economic and environmental impact of these weapons is prolonged and often severe. For example, the loss of fertile agricultural land and of access to water points has a severe negative impact on rural communities. A significant Swiss initiative in the area of humanitarian demining was the creation of the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) a couple of years ago. Originally created to provide UN programs in general and the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in particular with the necessary management and conceptional tools, the GICHD has matured into an independent institution supported by 18 governments and with an international mandate to support the implementation of the Ottawa Convention.

Progress has been witnessed on other fronts. In 2003, State parties to the 1980 Convention on certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) negotiated a fifth Additional protocol to this Treaty. This Additional protocol addresses the issue of explosive remnant of wars, and requires that

parties to an armed conflict clear all unexploded munitions that threaten civilians, peacekeepers and humanitarian workers once the fighting is over.

Role of international cooperation

UN

Switzerland has played a leading role in the process within UNEP aimed at strengthening the system of international environmental governance (IEG) by chairing several working groups and helping to finalize the recommendations adopted by the Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Environment Ministers Forum. The aim should now be to ensure the implementation of these recommendations via a UN GA resolution and to support and foster the implementation process.

NATO/PfP:

Reference has already been made to CCMS (Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society) earlier during the Conference. Another important instrument offering interesting possibilities for governments to cooperate in the field of environmental security is the Trust Fund mechanism of the PfP. Several important projects in the field of destruction and disposal of arms, ammunition or mines, or the clean-up of former military bases have been developed in this framework. Switzerland is financially contributing to several projects: the destruction of conventional ammunition in Albania, the civil conversion of a military site in Georgia and the destruction of mines in Serbia-Montenegro.

OSCE

With its human dimension, the OSCE has been the first European security framework to take into account aspects of individual security, and this as early as the 1970s. Environmental security is part of its comprehensive approach to security. The fact that the OSCE encourages and provides support towards the setting up of functioning legal and political systems, as well as its role in promoting mutual trust and confidence, makes it a platform of choice for addressing with renewed energy environmental issues and challenges. Because of its field presence in many countries of transition it seems predestined to play a major role in the field of environmental security. This role was strengthened by the adoption, at the Maastricht Ministerial Meeting of December 2003, of a specific document on the "Strategy of the OSCE regarding the economic and environmental dimension". This document identifies the current challenges and threats and defines three specific axes of action for the OSCE: good governance, sustainable development and environment. As effective measures in the area of environment, it proposes notably to intensify dialogue and exchange of information, to strengthen cooperation between states, to foster better cooperation with specialized agencies (UN, FAO, WMO, etc.), to strengthen national legislation and institutions, to conduct regular evaluation of the environmental situation, to identify and monitor environmental threats, to provide support to the ratification of international legal instruments and to foster environmental education.

A positive example of the role of the OSCE in environmental security is the "Environment and Security Initiative", developed together with UNDP and UNEP. This initiative aims at promoting peaceful resolution of conflicts by facilitating meetings, drafting legal instruments, supporting access to media and enabling involvement of civil society. The focus of this initiative is on South Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

The OSCE has also a key role to play in the destructions of surplus stocks of conventional weapons and ammunitions in the Euro-Atlantic area. The OSCE has set up specific mechanisms to this effect, and is now bound to play a central role in this endeavor.

Concluding remarks

First, with respect to environmental conflicts, the role of **legal and civilian institutions** cannot be overemphasized. The fact that environmental tensions accumulate and result in conflicts with potential violent outcomes is very often owed to a lack of adequate cooperative structures.

Second, to successfully address environmental conflicts, we need a **constructive partnership involving government, business, NGOs, and the public**. As environmental aspects are embedded in a set of other critical social, economic, and political issues, these problems cannot be addressed only in selected fields of political exchange such as purely through traditional diplomacy or technical development assistance projects.

Third, a conceptual approach needs to be worked out to **analyze environmental conflicts**, which takes into account the complex situation in which such conflicts occur. The approach should incorporate the variety of factors which constitute the framework in which environmental conflicts may turn violent. At the same time, it should also allow to focus on the environmental issues within this complex field.

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