PEACE, CULTURE, AND ETHICS: RECENT HISTORY OF CONSERVATION VALUES IN PEACE AND WAR

Arthur H. Westing

Westing Associates in Environment, Security, and Education, USA

Keywords: peace, culture, ethics, societal interactions, human environment, military section, wartime, peacetime, international armed conflicts, non-international armed conflicts

Contents

Summary

Examined here is the worldwide evolution of environmental values during the second half of the twentieth century, both in the civil and military sectors of society. It was not until the 1970s that the ever more obviously deteriorating global biosphere led human society throughout the world to unite in its expression of newly-reinforced environmental values. This became manifested most clearly through the adoption of several major environmental protection treaties. Then came the growing worldwide awareness of the massive environmental destruction associated with the Second Indochina War. The 1980s were witness to modestly strengthened expressions of environmental values, to be followed during the 1990s by somewhat of a retrenchment, and with those environmental values now being subordinated to social values in the narrow sense.

In a substantial number of nations, both rich and poor, military sectors are obligated to conform to domestic environmental protection legislation on an equal basis with civil sectors, at least during times of peace. Indeed, military sectors have been establishing

environmental protection programs in recent times at rates quite comparable to those of the civil sectors. The values associated with international warfare are largely expressed by the law of war (international humanitarian law). This body of law began during the 1970s to incorporate widely adopted environmental constraints, both directly and indirectly. On the other hand, the infusion of environmental values into the pursuit of non-international warfare is not yet as clear-cut as is the case with international warfare.

As global demands on the natural resources and sink capacities of the human environment continue to rise in the years to come, it appears likely that questions of environmental ethics will become ever more prominent throughout the world. Tangible manifestations of such environmental values in both the civil and military sectors can thus be expected to continue to appear.

1. Basic Parameters

1.1 Scope of this Study

The major question dealt with here is the worldwide evolution of environmental values during the second half of the twentieth century. To summarize, the post-Second World War era in modern history has been characterized especially by: huge increases in human numbers; by spectacular scientific and technological advances; by a retrogression in social conditions for ever-increasing numbers of countries and people; by an unrelenting attachment by countries to their national sovereignty; by an abiding reliance as a last resort on armed conflict with deadly and destructive intent for dispute resolution, both between and within countries; and—most important of all—by a deteriorating human environment owing to flagrantly non-sustainable exploitation of the world's major renewable natural resources and sink capacities.

Human society is readily divisible into its civil and military sectors, each with its unique demands on the human environment. Thus, a central focus of this study is a comparison of the worldwide evolution of environmental values in those two sectors of society during the period in question. Although the military sector represents only a relatively small fraction of global society by various standard demographic and economic measures, its influence is all-pervasive and its potential for environmental impact is profound. At least 85 percent of all sovereign states, and 100 percent of all the major ones, maintain substantial armed forces on a permanent basis. Although a state of war remains a never-ending condition for humankind as a whole, individual countries are at any one time either at peace or at war. Environmental values are also considered here under both peacetime and wartime conditions.

1.2 Societal Interactions

Human society has segregated itself into large numbers of groups—both formal and informal—on the basis of racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, political, geographical, and other grounds. The relatively permanent formal groupings, the sovereign states, currently number somewhat fewer than 200, whereas the informal groupings number in the thousands, with their coherence and permanence varying widely. Many of the

informal groups are contained within a sovereign state, but many others overlap the world's national boundaries.

The inevitably numerous conflicts between and among the many human groupings, both formal and informal, are in the vast majority of instances settled amicably, or at least non-violently. On the other hand, for a relatively small number of those numerous conflicts, settlement is attempted by violent means, that is to say, by armed conflict (warfare). Thus, throughout at least the twentieth century, several dozen wars, each typically of at least several years' duration, are always in progress somewhere or other in the world. Some of these wars are between two or more of the almost 200 sovereign states, but the greater fraction of them in recent decades has been between the government of a sovereign state and an informal group within it.

1.3 The Human Environment

Humankind has recognized its dependence on the natural environment throughout the many millennia of its existence. The resulting appreciation of nature through the long sweep of human history remains evident to a greater or lesser extent everywhere in the world, in both traditional and modern societies. Some scholars have even suggested that an appreciation of nature is an innate (genetically determined) characteristic of *Homo sapiens*. On the other hand, the ever multiplying advances in science and technology during the twentieth century, together with the ever-increasing fraction of the global population living in urban centers and thus away from direct contact with nature, may have tended to weaken that long-standing recognition of the inexorable dependence of humankind on its environment and the natural resources and natural sinks it supplies.

In the years following the worldwide euphoria resulting from the end of the Second World War, it slowly became evident to an increasing number of scientists—and, in time, also to the general public and policy-makers—that the renewable natural resources and natural sink capacities of the world were beginning to be utilized at rates beyond sustainability. It is clear that these non-sustainable uses of the human environment resulted from the growing demands of ever-increasing numbers of humans, coupled with their ever more nearly ubiquitous desire to attain an adequate, if not profligate, standard of living. Complicating this overall imbalance was a growing awareness that a relatively small fraction of the human population—primarily that one-fifth living in the developed (industrialized) countries— was arrogating to itself a substantially disproportionate fraction of the world's natural resources and sink capacities. Expressed in more concrete terms, the increasingly non-sustainable uses of the human environment began to result ever more conspicuously: in the degradation of agricultural soils; in the loss of forests, especially tropical forests; in a decline in marine fishes; in the build-up of so-called greenhouse gases in the atmosphere; and in the loss and fragmentation of natural habitat of all sorts, the last coupled with a vastly accelerated rate of extinction of plant and animal species (i.e. of losses in biodiversity).

2. Recent History

2.1. The Years following the Second World War (1940s–1960s)

Despite well over 50 million fatalities and awesome levels of material destruction and environmental disruption, the Second World War led to no serious attempts to abolish armed conflict per se as an acceptable human enterprise. Nonetheless, some of the wartime excesses practiced especially by the Axis powers did crystallize worldwide attention on questions of human rights and related humanitarian issues, both on the battlefield and off. Several of the most important expressions of this newly developed or heightened social concern by much of the world community were:

1. The 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (UNTS 1021);
2. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNGA Resolution 217[III]A), subsequently in large part translated into two formal treaties, the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (UNTS 14531) and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UNTS 14668);
3. The four 1949 Geneva Conventions Relative to Humanitarian Conduct in Times of War (UNTS 970-973); and
4. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (UNTS 2545) plus its 1967 Protocol (UNTS 8791).

Indeed, despite a continuing background of armed conflicts of greater or lesser ferocity, the decades since the Second World War have given rise to a substantial further catalog of expressions of reinforced social values, as made evident by a host of aspirational United Nations General Assembly resolutions and various formal multilateral treaties. But it is important to note that none of those highly commendable and widely-embraced advances and refinements of social values by the countries of the world included environmental concerns. The lesson here seems to be that a threshold of recognizable atrocity or disaster (and a rather high threshold at that) must be crossed before human society is moved to formulating and acting on a new or expanded cultural norm. Such overt stimulus did not occur again until the Second Indochina War. As an aside, the one comparable excess of the First World War, the employment of chemical weapons, led to the universally welcomed 1925 Geneva Protocol on Chemical and Bacteriological Warfare (LNTS 2138).

-
-
-

TO ACCESS ALL THE **13 PAGES** OF THIS CHAPTER,
Visit: http://www.eolss.net/Eolss-sampleAllChapter.aspx

Bibliography

Dycus S. (1996). *National Defense and the Environment*, 286 pp. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England. [This provides a critical analysis of the infusion of environmental considerations into United States Department of Defense peacetime policies and actions.]

Goldblat J. (1994). *Arms Control: A Guide to Negotiations and Agreements*, 772 pp. London: Sage Publications. [This is the definitive analysis and compendium of international arms control and disarmament instruments.]

NATO (1996). *Environmental Guidelines for the Military Sector*, 54 pp. Brussels: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society. [This offers environmental guidelines applicable to any armed forces in peacetime.]

Passmore J. (1980). *Man's Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions*. 2nd edn., 227 pp. London: Duckworth. [This provides a masterful survey of the development of environmental norms and values through the full sweep of Western history.]

Schmitt M. N. (1997). Green war: an assessment of the environmental law of international armed conflict. *Yale Journal of International Law* **22**(1), 100–109. [This provides an extraordinarily thorough analysis of its subject from a military perspective.]

Schrijver N. (1997). *Sovereignty over Natural Resources: Balancing Rights and Duties*, 452 pp. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. [This provides the definitive study of the emerging controversy between human rights and environmental conservation, including sustainable development.]

Tolba M. K. and El-Kholy O. A., eds. (1992). *World Environment 1972–1992: Two Decades of Challenge*, 884 pp. London: Chapman and Hall. [This provides a multi-dimensional examination on behalf of UNEP of evolving environmental problems and opportunities between the Stockholm and Rio de Janeiro environmental conferences.]

Tolba M. K. and Rummel-Bulska I. (1998). *Global Environmental Diplomacy: Negotiating Environmental Agreements for the World, 1973–1992*, 212 pp. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. [This offers a rare first-hand account by the key participant of how international environmental instruments are actually negotiated to a successful conclusion.]

UNEP (1996). *Register of International Treaties and other Agreements in the Field of the Environment*, 474 pp. Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme. [This provides summary information, as well as the states parties, for 216 international environmental instruments dating from 1921 to 1995.]

US Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard (1995). *Commander's Handbook on the Law of Naval Operations*, 3rd ed., 113 pp. Washington, DC: US Department of the Navy, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. [This provides the official text of the first environmental constraints to be incorporated into the rules of engagement of any armed force.]

Weiss E. B., Magraw D. B., and Szasz P. C. (1992). *International Environmental Law: Basic Instruments and References*, 749 pp. Ardsley-on-Hudson, NY: Transnational Publishers. [This provides an annotated compendium of the major international environmental instruments.]

Westing A. H. (1980). *Warfare in a Fragile World: Military Impact on the Human Environment*, 249 pp. London: Taylor & Francis. [This is the definitive study of the military impact on each of the major global biomes during both war and peace in comparison with the civil impact.]

Westing A. H. (1997). Environmental protection from wartime damage: the role of international law. *Conflict and the Environment* (ed. N.P. Gleditsch), pp 535–553. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers. [This provides an examination of the law of war as it applies to environmental disruption, with special reference to several recent armed conflicts, both international and non-international; an analysis is also provided of national factors conducive to the acceptance of wartime environmental constraints.]

Westing A. H. ed. (1988). *Cultural Norms, War and the Environment*, 177 pp. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [This multi-authored volume is unique in its examination of cultural norms and societal values in relation to the environmental dimensions of armed conflict.]

Biographical Sketch

Arthur H. Westing trained as a forest ecologist (Yale University, M.F., 1954, Ph.D., 1959). He served as a combat officer in the United States Marine Corps from 1950 to 1952, has been a Research Forester with the United States Forest Service, and has taught forestry, ecology, and conservation at several colleges and universities. From 1983 to 1990, Westing directed the United Nations Environment Programme project on "Peace, Security, and the Environment," a position which took him to many countries throughout the world. He is the author of numerous publications in that subject area. Westing has been on the faculty of the European Peace University since 1989. Among the organizations that have recognized his achievements are the New York Academy of Sciences, the Government of Bulgaria, and the United Nations. Westing was named a "Peace Messenger" by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in 1987, and in 1990 became one of the 500 individuals worldwide to have been appointed to the United Nations Environment Programme "Global 500 Roll of Honour." Since 1990 he has been a Consultant in Environmental Security, providing his services to several branches of the United Nations, to the International Committee of the Red Cross, to the Government of Eritrea, to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank), to the World Conservation Union (IUCN), and to various other national and international agencies. He is also a member of, or advisor to, a number of environmental non-governmental organizations and scholarly journals.