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The Environment, Peace and Security: The Nexus

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Abstract: The article set out to find answers to two main questions. First, to find out if there is a link or relationship between the environment and peace and security? And, second, to ascertain the impacts of environmental crises on human life and progress? These two questions were answered. In the first case, the paper found out that there is a credible link between the environment and peace and security. In environments where there are conflicts and crises, it was found out that there is usually a lack or an absence of peace and security. In such environments where wars and conflicts are ongoing, it was found out that there are also adverse effects on the environment itself, such as soil, water and air pollution from the discharge of ammunition and bombs for instance. In the second case, the paper found out that environmental crises has a negative impact on human lives and stifles progress. In environments with poor sanitation and in an unhygienic state, human creativity and ingenuity is held back and insecurity blossoms. The paper ended with several recommendations among which is the creation or development of more binding environmental treaties with the aim of securing, protecting and preserving our environment for future generations to enjoy it in peace and security.

Keywords: environmental security, peace and security, green theory, international relations.

Introduction

Before the 1980s, the focus of international politics, has been on the processes and outcomes of high politics matters. The state and its pursuit for power and the maintenance of its survival has been the key interest for realists and neo-realists alike. On the other hand, liberalists have focused on the need for global cooperation -

to establish international organisations where states can come together peacefully and address global issues.

With the publication of two important works - the field of environmental security was 'born' - these were the Brundtland report (1987) and Richard Ullman's work: *redefining security* (1983). These two works

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made clear that as humanity we have just one home (the earth) and it is more than an obligation to take of it. Today, issues such as climate change and global warming are realities confirmed by scientists. The effects of some of our life styles and life choices have had adverse reactions on our planet. Also, environmental pollution, in Africa and elsewhere can lead to various diseases such as ischemic heart disease, lung cancer, stroke etc. (WHO, 2025; Shetty et al, 2023).

John Vogler, Garrett Hardin and Matthew Paterson have been among the key researchers seriously involved in seeking ways to understand, and promote means to protect our atmosphere and environment. Vogler (2011) has laid an exclamation mark of importance on the Hardian thesis famously known as the *Tragedy of the Commons*, advancing that without a clean, happy and

protected environment, our (humanity) time will be short-lived, uncomfortable, destitutive and will leave us with a constant sense of the need to work for a global pure and clean, ecosystem. There seems, it would appear, that there is no coordinated effort on the part of global leaders of all political leanings and persuasions to be sincerely assistive on this issue. Noting that several environmental conferences have collapsed, most notably several of the Conference on the Parties (CoPs) including the Kyoto meeting in 1997 (Paterson, 2013).

This paper seeks therefore, to find an answer to two main questions: Is there a link between the environment and peace and security? and what does the literature say concerning environmental crises and their impact on human life and progress?

I. The Existence of Peace and Security

Peace and security in International Relations is a unique and important area of study. It has been the work and focus of several researchers and scholars for many centuries to find out ways or a way by which humanity may live in permanent peace and security (Galtung, 1969). It has been put forth elsewhere by the current author that without peace and security in our world, humanity will not progress very far (Biao, 2021). Crises, wars and conflicts have a way of inflicting chaos and injury to the psyche of mankind (Gbaya, 2015). Peace and security therefore, begins with each individual. If a serious decision is made by the majority of mankind to be peaceful and not let their lower

urges rule them, then there would be much positive change in our world today.

One only needs to browse the web and check in on the news to know that our world is far from attaining peace and security. The Russia - Ukraine war, Isreal-Hamas war, the Sudan crisis and other intra-state crises around the world all point to the fact that collectively mankind has not yet understood what many ancient philosophers spoke of, that is, attaining a higher consciousness. Peace and security is not elusive. It is attainable only if and when humans seize to emphasise differences between themselves.

II. Theoretical Framework

This paper uses the Green theory of International Relations as explicated by Paterson (2015). Green theory lays an emphasis on the environment and its need to be protected and preserved for future generations. It also brings environmental discussions and concerns into international politics. One of the crucial and emerging clean and safe environmental defenders is Greta Thunberg – this young Swedish environmentalist and her peers who are pushing for a clean ecosystem, if not for them, but their children; seem to be disappointed in the current commitment globally to a clean and environmentally friendly and safe world. Green theory places an emphasis – albeit a soft one on the need for every being to be responsible and take care of their immediate environment to achieve what these theorists believe is the ‘Adamic state of the world or earth’ (Hardin, 1968). Garrett Hardin has put forth some decades back arguments, still relevant today, that the main cause of environmental degradation, is the freedom at which the civilian and states of the day are allowed to damage and litter, pollute and endanger; land, water resources and fresh air (Hardin, 1968).

Green theory as explicated and espoused by Paterson and others is a uniquely unavoidable theory of international or inter-

state relations and has a great prescriptive power. Deutsche Welle a German international broadcaster presented a documentary on climate change. In it they showed how several human activities such as the pollution and the emission of green house gases done by several giant Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) are having adverse effects on our planet and for life in it (DW, 2023).

Green theory makes a revisit of the key topics of International Relations. The classical issues of power politics, global governance, global justice, gender politics and the pertinent one - the search for peace and security all take a new shape and form in light of the ecological challenge. Green theory also warns that the way states access natural resources needs to be revisited and refined in order to protect our environment.

What is more, wars and crises inflict environmental damage to our ecosystem. For example, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has found that the war in Ukraine has severely damaged the Black Sea, with chemical pollution and loose mines endangering marine life (CEIP, 2025). Thus, this paper uses the Green Theory framework to explore the connection between the environment and peace and security.

III. Can Peace and Security Exist in a Disorderly Environment?

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Many have been the scholars and philosophers who have been searching and looking for a way for humanity to exist in peace and security. As far back as 1795, Immanuel Kant proposed that to achieve a state of perpetual peace among states, there should be a sort of federation where civility and discipline should dictate things (Kant, 1795). He did not, however, suggest that a world government should be formed. Apart from Kant, in more recent times several scholars have been racking their brains to understand just why inter and intra-state wars and crises occur. Michael Sheehan (2011), for example, has argued that contemporary warfare is not a straightforward issue and is difficult to define. He also thinks that it is a form of politics, albeit a brutal one. Other scholars such as Laurie Nathan (2012) have advanced that peace and security seems difficult to come by because there is no basic consensus about its veritable benefits. Thus, several conflicts have been fought as scholars argue for natural resources and political power (Gbaya, 2015).

Environmental security has become a major issue in International Relations especially with the effects of globalisation where the world is more connected than at any other period in memory. Vogler (2011) informs us that the effects of the second world war were so devastating to the environment. There was pollution of the atmosphere, of water resources, and of the sea (Vogler, 2011). Thus, there is a clear link between environmental pollution and disturbance of

peace and security. Deutsche Welle showed in a 2023 documentary on climate change just how environmental pollution is making lives unlivable and unhealthy for many humans and even animals (DW, 2023). The pollution of the sea and air by some MNCs shows just how some segments of humanity have still not fully understood the need for a healthy and vibrant ecosystem.

Disorderly environments are ones in which there is severe pollution and toxins. In these type of environments, there is usually very little chance for peace and security to be fully enjoyed (DW, 2023; Shetty et al, 2023). Disorderly environments are also ones in which wars are ongoing. If we understand peace and security as the presence of orderly living and the absence of apprehension (Galtung, 1969) then we see that when there is chaos in our environments people tend to seek out a way from such melee.

The proof that peace and security is absent or inconspicuous in environments which are disorderly, that is, troubled by wars, conflicts or crises or their effects which as we have seen could be environmental pollution and degradation (WHO, 2025; Shetty et al, 2023), is in the serious and sometimes immediate responses to such disorderliness by various sectors of society. For example, after the serious environmental destruction after the second world war (1939-1945), a new organisation was formed so as to prevent future wars from re-occurring (Vogler, 2011). This organisation is the United Nations formed in 1945. And this intergovernmental

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body has an agency which serves to cater for the environment - the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Also, it also worth mentioning that in disorderly environments - such as ones where wars are ongoing and there is a complete neglect for the surrounding environment, food security is at risk (Thomas and Evans, 2011). Thus, scholars, researchers and political actors seemingly look for ways to correct what is seen to be a wrong - that is disorder.

What is more, in a effort to protect our environment and preserve it for future generations, there have been several agreements and arrangements to preserve and protect our environment such as the Copenhagen climate conference of the parties in 2009, the 2002 world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg and

the 1997 Kyoto protocol (Vogler, 2011). There have been several other CoPs and environmental security arrangements some being more successful than others.

In sum, when one considers peace and security as a state of mind and affairs where there is considerable freedom to pursue various human activities in calm and without fear, it can be argued that in disorderly environments - where there is severe pollution, war and an intentional neglect of the environment, peace and security is usually absent or low in such places. It should be pointed out also that the way various states exploit natural resources needs to be revisited as there have been reports of oil spills for example, which have had adverse effects on marine life (Shetty et al, 2023).

III.i. The Impact of Environmental Crises on Human Life and Progress

Waltz (1991) argued that states are the most important unit in international affairs. He put forth that there are no other groups such as international organisations which can take the important place of the state. Thus, while we live in an anarchic international system (Donnelly, 2013), states have somewhat agreed to come together to accept the importance of preserving our environment for future generations. We then see that several states in the Global North especially have pledged to reduce their negative imprints on our environment. It is not however clear how sincere they are in these commitments. For example, the United States of America which is considered a major emitter of green house gases (CNN, 2025) under the President Trump administration, has withdrawn from

the Paris Agreement - a forum which has its members committed to limit global warming to 1.5 degree celsius (CNN, 2025). Thus, we have a situation where some of the biggest climate polluters are not willing to make necessary adjustments to secure our environment.

Paterson (2015) and Hardin (1968) have argued that we need strict rules on how we use and exploit our environments. These rules need to be followed through by states and civil society. Paterson (2015) also presents the bio-environmentalist position which is bent on making humans live in harmony with nature in order to get more enjoyment from our time on earth. According to bio-environmentalists, when humans see and

accept that we need to respect nature, then we will make environmental security progress.

The effects of climate change, such as warmer temperatures, the depletion of the ozone layer and the disruption of the normal workings of nature tend to have an impact on human life and progress (Vogler, 2011; Paterson, 2015). Humanity constantly seeks advancement. We have made great advancements in science and technology and in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and in other domains as well. Yet it is evident that we live and work within an environment. This environment we must respect and protect or we will reap the consequences. As such, we have several environmental organisations such as Green Peace, Sierra Club and The Nature Conservancy that are working to make clear and evident to all humans that environmental pollution and destruction has direct negative impact on human lives.

Today, because of the development of nuclear weapons, humanity has within its hands that potential to destroy the earth. The Cold War (1945-1989) which was a period of great tension as the United States of America and the Soviet Union were in an arms race. These realities and many others need to press upon our consciousness that as the most advanced creatures on earth, it is our role to do what is in our power to ensure we do not harm our environment and suffer much later.

What then can be done to preserve our environment? First, it is imperative that states listen attentively to scientists and researchers in the field of environmental science. Too often these voices are ignored or their work neglected. Second, there needs to be a clear understanding that wars, conflicts and crises are anti-environment and cause sometimes

unforeseen damages to our environment. For example, some scientists are calling the effects of the war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza strip an ecocide (UNEP, 2024). They say the bombings and attacks have damaged the soil, water and air in that region of the world. Thus, there is a water and sanitation crisis, water scarcity and disease outbreak due to the war (UNEP, 2024).

In all the above, it is arguable that some states and individuals do not see and understand the need to protect and secure our environment. In effect, the war in Ukraine has brought about serious environmental damage to that country, while also leaving many without food and clean water (CEIP, 2025). To be sure, if the leaders of many countries come together and realise how important our entire environment is, not just a section of it, there will be a move towards concrete environmental security action.

Third, there needs to be environmental education at the basic levels of society. It is pitiable, for instance, that in several areas in Africa, for example, the common environment is treated as no man's business and many persons deliberately pollute it. What is more, the environment is treated as though it is not our main provider by many individuals and even states and corporations. Our clothes, food and water come from our environment. It is thus imperative that as many people as possible are informed and educated about the need to respect the environment.

Finally, it is important that environmental workers are treated with respect. The green theory of International Relations presents the need to act as humans in such a way so as not to degrade our environment (Paterson, 2015;

Hardin, 1968). We should at best leave the environment as nature provided or seek to make it better for future generations to come. Thus, states and individuals should support

and encourage environmental workers as they are doing admirable work in the name of environmental security and peace.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

Environmental security in International Relations has been the work of several researchers for many decades (Paterson, 2015; Vogler, 2011; Shetty et al, 2023; Ullman, 1983). Just how our common environment can be protected and preserved has led to the establishment and formation of several environmental organisations. Humanity is gradually becoming aware of the need to respect and harness its environment, although there is still a lot of work to be done in order to make everyone environment-conscious as it were. Today, because of the desire to enrich oneself, several businesses destroy nature and overexploit it. An example is the deforestation in the name of commercial agriculture (DW, 2023). The human attitude towards the environment is truly in need of refinement and polishing.

What then is the relationship between the environment and peace and security? It is no secret that the chief reason of the creation of many intergovernmental organisations and regional organisations is to find lasting and even permanent ways to attain global peace and security. As such, organisations such as the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union and regional organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have within them departments that strive and research for ways humanity may avoid wars, crises and

conflicts. Yet, not very many are talking about the effect of insecurity upon our environment. This paper has found out that there is credible link between the environment and peace and security. Not only do crises and conflicts create psychological trauma and tension for those affected by the conflict (Sheehan, 2011), large scale armed conflicts such as the Congolese conflicts, Islamist insurgencies in the Maghreb/Sahel and the Ethiopian civil conflict to list a few - create serious sanitation and health crises for those affected by the conflicts (UNEP, 2024). What is more, when there is a lack of peace and security a certain lawlessness occurs. Thus, when there are riots or violent protests such as the 2021 United States of America capitol attack (ABC news, 2025) or 2025 Kenyan protests (CNN, 2025) we saw wanton destruction of public property and air pollution from the tear gas fired by the defence forces.

The paper also found out that there is still no sincere appreciation and respect of the environment by the larger group of states and individuals. Peace and security is not just the absence of war and conflict. It is also the presence of order and respected laws. Many large MNCs overexploit the natural resources of the earth and usually this has negative effects on the lives of those within that environment. Peace and security could be said to be present in an environment which allows

humans to evolve, work and learn in peace and stability. As such, when the environment is grossly polluted - whether it be the air, the soil, water or food sources, this negatively affects human life and produces insecurity.

If there is no desire from the larger portion of humanity to demonstrate a high level of environmental consciousness - that is, to see that without a care for our environment

we cannot live in peace and security. Then, we will still have a long way to go before we as humanity attain a state of considerable happiness and tranquility. Our environment is where we live, play and work daily. If it is devoid of peace and security, that is, if it is unhygienic, polluted and disregarded there will be many discomforts and this could grow into many other ills for its inhabitants.

IV.i. Recommendations

IV.i.i. More Binding Environmental Treaties

Treaties are agreements states and other relevant parties declare to uphold and follow. There have been several treaties in the history of international politics. Famous among them have been the 1919 Versailles treaty which ended the first world war (1914 -1918), by imposing harsh penalties on Germany. Also, there was the treaty of Westphalia in 1648 which brought an end to the Thirty years' war. To be sure, several treaties in international relations have failed to hold as it were. As such, as we have discussed above, one of the world's great powers - the United States of America (McNeil, 2019), under President Donald Trump has reneged on the Paris Agreement - which is a major environmental

treaty. Other states which have not ratified the Paris Agreement include Yemen, Iran and Libya.

Consequently, if states and other relevant actors, do not see the pressing need to cooperate with nature and respect once and for all our common environment, then, peace and security will still be out of reach. Thus, more binding treaties on the environment need to be designed and enforced. States and relevant actors should be made to accept the role of environmental protector, by laying bare the benefits of a serene environment - which is majorly the establishment of peace and security.

IV.i.ii. Encouragement of Environmental Activism

A few years ago, when the Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg became known for her bold defence of the environment, several sectors of global society

were taken aback. She was a young woman who was not afraid to speak to the various world leaders especially those in the Global North and explain to them that their activities

towards the environment is creating an unrest for our ecosystem and endangering human lives including our peace and security. Another famous and important environmental activist is Sir David Attenborough. This broadcaster and naturalist has spent the larger part of his life, encouraging governments and individuals of the need to conserve as it were our environment. These environmental activists serve as educators and guides. They are listened to and because of their activism, some states and individuals have decided to adjust their behaviours and actions toward our environment.

There should therefore be an encouragement of environmental activism in various states around the world. The health of our planet is very important. Wars, conflicts, natural resource overexploitation, environmental pollution of soil, water, air and food sources and the effects of global warming present to us the need to adjust immediately our attitude toward our environment. A peaceful and secure environment is one with little or no pollution, war and chaos, and this is what several environmentalists have dedicated their lives to teaching humanity.

IV.i.iii.Revisit Ancient Ways of Environmental Preservation

“I do not know what weapons World War III will be fought with, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones”. These were words attributed to Albert Einstein the famous theoretical physicist. In it we find several warnings to humanity if we wish to live in peace and security. Our environment must be respected. The way states have exploited the environment in order to develop nuclear weapons and the way natural resources are being overexploited in the name of business, is truly appalling. In the quotation above, Einstein is predicting that with the several states which have nuclear arsenals and states

like North Korea and Iran that seem to be developing their nuclear weapons with the near-future possibility of using them! we may get to a point that when and if these nuclear weapons are used, our environment will be decimated, and humanity will suffer the worse.

As such, this paper recommends that researchers and political actors and other relevant socio-political actors look back into ancient literature to see how they managed and cared for their environments in order to avoid catastrophes and pass unto to us the world in which we live in today.

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