

# The role of biopolitics in environmental security analysis

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Over the past 25 years, my academic and work experiences have involved and intersected with biopolitics, particularly environmental policy, international relations, and ethics. My academic and teaching experience was in political theory and ethics, and my early research interests turned to emerging recombinant DNA issues, involving the complex interaction of biological science, technology and public policy processes. My scholarly contacts included those with similar concerns, and so I joined with a group of scholars creating the Association for Politics and the Life Sciences. Several years later, my interests brought me to work in a federal agency where public policy decisions often raise important ethical choices, and the political and behavioral aspects of the policy process became more evident. My research centered on issues related to environmental protection. This work was also influenced by my professional friendship with Lynton Caldwell, another APLS founder and a remarkable scholar, whose work on environmental politics was internationally recognized. After the implosion of the Soviet Union, teaching environmental policy for the Agency in Eastern Europe renewed my interest in international relations, which had been my undergraduate focus. The topic of environmental security combined all of these interests. This topic gained substantial attention in policy circles, then declined, but is now being discussed again.

“Environmental security” refers to a policy area that considers environmental elements affecting national security. It starts with the observation that environ-

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mental resources and environmental health are closely connected to national interests and well-being, and thereby are intimately connected to national security. (This connection has been disputed on conceptual and policy grounds, but primarily because of political and policy concerns with the expected outcome of the approach).<sup>1,2,3</sup> Achieving environmental security is a critical element in national well-being and even survival. Further, environmental needs and impacts cannot be controlled or contained within national borders, but can move across national boundaries into the international arena, often with dramatic security consequences. Depletion or perceived inadequacies in domestic natural resources, for example, can lead to international policies to compensate. Compensation can then be sought through cooperative, peaceful policies or through coercion, including warfare. Conversely, those holding valuable resources might become targets for aggressive or desperate action.

This is not to claim that key political decisions can be attributed to any single causal factor, but rather that resource concerns can be a driving force.<sup>4</sup> For example, in 1991, Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait was in large part to seek control of their oil production and to gain better access to the Persian Gulf. Egypt’s ongoing concerns about continued access to adequate Nile River waters have created hostilities with up-stream states which are increasing their use and control of the river.

Activities affecting environmental health often have cross-border impacts. Pollution travels, whether by air or water. The more that scientists learn about the movement of pollutants and the intricacies of ecological balance, the clearer it becomes that each nation is at the mercy of the actions of others. Human life depends upon the health of an interlocking set of