

REVIEWS

Environmental Peacemaking, Ken Conca & Geoffrey D. Dabelko (Eds.), 2002, Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press.

Dedicated to Government-Level Solutions: Can Peace Be Made Through Resource Treaties?

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In the opening chapter of this interesting, challenging book, Ken Conca states that the evidence linking resource scarcity and conflict is not clear. In fact, some important officials, particularly from the southern hemisphere, simply deny that resource shortages have ever caused any conflicts. This is because the conflicts that are cited—and Conca does not, of course, deny that conflicts exist—often or always are “overdetermined,” meaning that the regions usually have so many problems that sorting out which problem really led to the conflict is difficult, or even impossible.

Perhaps strangely, then, the editors proceed to “turn the question on its head” and search for the conditions that might lead from environmental cooperation to peace. One really must wonder if this noble strategy can work. Logically, if conflict is multidetermined, with resource scarcity as one possible cause with an undetermined effect size, why should anyone think that resolving resource conflicts would have any substantial effect on peacemaking? Indeed, the editors list several preconditions for this that would seem to further dash the hopes of anyone except the most sanguine observer. To wit: “Environmental peacemaking ... must create minimum levels of trust, transparency, and cooperative gain among governments that are strongly influenced by a zero-sum logic of national security ... and it must lay the foundation for transforming the national-security state itself” (p. 10). To

which this reviewer was forced to mutter under his breath, “and part the oceans, perhaps, and move Mt. Everest to Chicago?”

Six chapters in the book describe environmental peacemaking efforts in the Baltics, South Asia, the Aral Sea Basin, southern Africa, the Caspian Sea, and the U.S.–Mexican border. For the most part, the discussion is tough sledding for many psychologists, larded as it is with the terminology of political science. However, if terms such as *post-Westphalian pathway*, *building state capacity*, *local civil-society mobilizations*, and *functionalism* (no, not that one) are part of your vocabulary, this could be the book for you.

Other psychologists may wander in a wilderness of discourse that never seems to touch down on anything remotely psychological, by which I mean any consideration of individuals or small groups. Certainly the question may be asked whether environmental peacemaking needs to consider the psychological level. The mantra among some environmental psychologists is that every resource-use decision ultimately is an individual one, even if that person is a head of state or part of a peasant group that is slashing and burning. Yet one would be hard put to see even a trace of psychology in this volume; it is all about “states.”

These criticisms being expressed, one must take a deep breath and wish these applied political scientists well. They are on a grand mission in a dark, dense, and unrelenting forest. They have a utopian vision but are trying hard to ground it in the harsh reality such that, whether or not conflict stems from resource shortages, making peace through environmental agreements is a noble cause that, unfortunately, will probably occupy them for centuries and centuries to come.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Robert Gifford is a professor of psychology and environmental studies at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, a Fellow of the American Psychological Association and the Canadian Psychological Association, and the author of three editions of *Environmental Psychology: Principles and Practice*. Dr. Gifford is also the editor of the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, has served as president of the American Psychological Association’s Population and Environment Division, and is the current president of the Environmental Psychology division of the International Association of Applied Psychology.