

15 Critical evaluation of the implementation of the  
concept of environmental security

Case study of the Environment and Security  
Initiative (ENVSEC)

*Judith Nora Hardt*

S. 263–285

aus:

# **Climate Change, Security Risks, and Violent Conflicts**

Essays from Integrated Climate Research  
in Hamburg

Edited by Michael Brzoska and Jürgen Scheffran

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# Table of Contents

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1	Introduction: Research on climate change and security in Hamburg <i>Michael Brzoska and Jürgen Scheffran</i>	1
2	Climate change and weather extremes as risk multipliers Tipping points, cascading events, and societal instability <i>Jürgen Scheffran</i>	19
3	Agrofuel expansion and black resistance in Brazil Energy landscapes as materialized unequal power relations <i>Martina Neuburger, Rafaela Rau, and Tobias Schmitt</i>	49
4	Interaction between wind energy, climate vulnerability, and violent conflict in Northern Kenya <i>Janpeter Schilling and Luise Werland</i>	67
5	The roadmap to energy security in Egypt <i>Mostafa Shaaban</i>	83
6	Water allocation in transboundary river systems in times of climate change <i>P. Michael Link</i>	103
7	Managing water-related vulnerability and resilience of urban communities in the Pearl River Delta <i>Liang Emlyn Yang</i>	121

- 8 Challenges and opportunities for historical irrigated agricultural systems in Mediterranean regions 143  
 Technical, cultural, and environmental assets for sustainable rural development in Ricote (Murcia, Spain)  
*Andrea L. Balbo, José María García Avilés, Johannes Hunink, Francisco Alcón, Juan Esteban Palenzuela Cruz, Julia Martínez-Fernández, Arnald Puy, Juan Miguel Rodríguez Lopez, Katharina Heider, Rodrigo García Abenza, and Jürgen Scheffran*
- 9 Sustainable access to rural and urban land by integrating local perspectives 163  
 The potential of using Information and Communication Technologies  
*Juan Miguel Rodríguez Lopez, Katharina Heider, Andrea L. Balbo and Jürgen Scheffran*
- 10 Drought, flight, conflict: “climate migration” as a driver for conflict? 175  
*Christiane J. Fröhlich*
- 11 Disrupting the knowledge-power politics of human mobility in the context of climate change 195  
 Questioning established categories  
*Sarah Louise Nash*
- 12 Explaining the diversity of resilience in the climate change and security discourse 209  
 Resilience in translation  
*Delf Rothe*
- 13 Climate change and planning for the military 229  
*Michael Brzoska*
- 14 How does path dependence affect the climate change-conflict nexus? 251  
*Jasmin S. A. Link*

15	<b>Critical evaluation of the implementation of the concept of environmental security</b>	263
	Case study of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC)	
	<i>Judith Nora Hardt</i>	
16	<b>The Anthropocene: an opportunity for transdisciplinary and inclusive science?</b>	287
	<i>Andrea L. Balbo, Delf Rothe, and Jürgen Scheffran</i>	
	<b>About the authors</b>	297



# 15 Critical evaluation of the implementation of the concept of environmental security

Case study of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC)

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*Judith Nora Hardt*

## Abstract

*This paper analyzes the theoretical and empirical conceptual approaches to the link between environment and security in order to test their ability to function as guiding concepts in the multiple and complex challenges posed by the Anthropocene. For this purpose, the Critical Environmental Security Studies (CESS) are proposed and further developed in order to bridge the theory-practice gap and inform the literature on the conceptual approach carried out by the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC).*

*The empirical research that attempts to pinpoint and evaluate the dominant conceptual use of environmental security in reference to geopolitics, status quo maintenance, and normative change relies on document analyses of the period from 2001 to 2014 and semi-structured interviews with decision-makers of ENVSEC.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Environmental security, Anthropocene, Environment and Security Initiative, geopolitics, socio-ecological change.*

## Introduction

Since the year 2007, we have observed a strong trend of securitizing environmental phenomena (especially climate change)<sup>1</sup>. These developments in international relations are particularly critically observed by academics working on the subject, as the links between environment and security are still being discussed. The narratives that are generally located in the literature of environmental security embrace different (and partly contrasting) strands and theses. These range from describing resource scarcity or climate change as a cause for conflict (see Homer-Dixon 1994; Gleditsch 2015; Zhang et al. 2007), as an opportunity for peace (Wappner 2013; Matthew 2014), cooperation, and common management (see e. g. Conca, Carius and Dabelko 2005), as an opportunity for development, to the concept of human security<sup>2</sup> (O'Brien, St. Clair and Kristoffersen 2010; Barnett, Mathew and O'Brien 2010; Floyd and Matthew 2013). Furthermore, they are related to the apocalyptic discourse of the destruction of our habitat (Dalby 2013; Burke et al. 2016) and Transformation Studies (Brauch, Oswald Spring and Scheffran 2016).

This last discourse has particularly gained attention driven by the definition of the new geological era of humankind, the Anthropocene<sup>3</sup>. The term was coined in 2002 by Eugene Stoermer and Paul Crutzen and describes how human societies have pushed planet Earth out of its usual ranges of ecological processes. As it puts the basic division of society and nature into question, the acknowledgment of the Anthropocene has been referred to as an “awakening call” (Leinfelder et al. 2012, 13) that will lead to paradigm shifts (see Bennett 2011; Schellnhuber et al. 2004; Hamilton, Bonneuil and Gemenne 2015). The new conceptions of space, time, and human-nature relations carry a fundamental need to re-visit the world we thought we knew.

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<sup>1</sup> The initiation of this trend is often attributed to the publication of the fourth Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report that acknowledged human activity as the major cause of inducing climate change. In the same year, the Peace Prize was awarded to Al Gore and to the IPCC. In addition, the United Nations Security Council for the first time discussed the inclusion of climate change in its mandate (Brauch 2011). Since 2007, the UNSC has conveyed several sessions on climate change and security, during which many representatives of states strongly argued for including climate change among the mandate of the UNSC. The latest session on climate change in July 2018 was titled: “Maintenance of international peace and security. Understanding and addressing climate-related security risks”.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of human security was defined in 1994 in the Human Development Report of the UNDP. Along with the succeeding discussions (see among others CHS 2003) it is based on the pillars of freedom from fear and freedom from want with seven defining and interrelated dimensions – one of which is the environmental dimension termed environmental security. It has been further developed since its first definition and is widely implemented and referred to, mainly in the context of Peace and Conflict Studies and Development Studies.

<sup>3</sup> The Anthropocene enjoys scientific and social acceptance and approval; it is in the process of formalization by the International Union of Geological Sciences.



The answers to the questions of who, what, and how need to be ascertained, and how these concerns are interrelated with ecology has to be re-visited. This is why the conceptual association of environment and security once again appears promising to many academics and practitioners as providing theoretical guidance on how to deal with the extremely threatening dimension of the Anthropocene discourse (see Hardt 2018b). The central claim to link environment and climate change with security is mainly articulated based on hope to identify effective solutions and thereby ensure peace and sustainable futures. In contrast, the critics of environmental security highlight the implications and negative consequences, which are described in the eventual militarization of environmental or climate politics and in the misuse of the agenda for geopolitical interests (see e. g. Floyd 2008; Trombetta 2008). The implementation by different institutions is therefore discussed in the literature as “to be handled with caution”<sup>4</sup>. Another critical evaluation of the empirical use of environmental security is that the mere existence and therefore implementation of the concept is doubted. Most analyses are based on the securitization frame of the Copenhagen School (see Buzan, Weaver, and De Wilde 1989). In other terms, an overview of the research shows that most analyses stop at the very question of whether environmental security stands at its practical inception or not and discusses the evaluation of a future implementation of a defined environmental security concept in practice.

This paper addresses the major questions of the conceptual definition of implemented environmental security projects and of its critical evaluation in the context of the Anthropocene. It therefore focuses on the theory-practice gap and aims to inform theory through the case study analysis of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC). ENVSEC has received little attention from academia and yet has to be seen as bundling some of the most important international organizations into implementing environmental security in practice. ENVSEC is a consortium and was established by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 2002 and 2003. By 2006, the initiative had added the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (which withdrew in 2015) as an associated partner and the Regional Environmental Center (REC) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) as partners. ENVSEC acts in the so-called crisis regions of Central Asia, Southern Caucasus, and Southern and Eastern Europe and presents itself under the guiding theme: “Transforming risk into cooperation.”

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<sup>4</sup> The question of whether the United Nation Security Council should take action in relation to the link between climate change and security remains an important debate in the literature (see e.g. Detraz and Betsill 2009; Cousins 2013; Scott 2015).

The presented research on ENVSEC is based on discourse analysis of 53 reports and documents of ENVSEC, available mostly on the website in addition to some gray literature and semi-structured interviews with ENVSEC decision-makers and staff<sup>5</sup>. The period analyzed extended from 2002 to 2014. The analysis was based on a chronological approach, differentiating three phases to capture the evolution of the concept of environmental security. In addition, an interview analysis was carried out with the aim of confirming and enriching the results of the document analysis.

The paper consists of four sections. In the first section, I introduce the theoretical framework for analysis, which is called Critical Environmental Security Studies (CESS). In the second section, I present ENVSEC in its structure, projects, regional foci, and its definition of environment and security. The critical analysis is carried out in section three, which leads to the conclusions, described in section four. In summary, I show that the central insights of ENVSEC activities can be categorized as a mainstream approach to environmental security and that we must carefully listen to the critical voices that highlight possible dangerous implications.

### Critical Environmental Security Studies (CESS) as a theoretical framework for analysis

The literature on environmental security arose in parallel with the evolution of the concern of global environmental change as a threat and a threatened global environment, with its first reference at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972. The genealogy of environmental security has passed several research phases and is still concerned with discussions about who and what needs to be secured and whether the link of environment and security should/does exist. Deviating from the understanding that environmental security is not to be tied down to one single concept, I established a framework for analysis called Critical Environmental Security Studies (CESS) (Hardt 2018a) that conceives of a loose aggregation of discourses and discussions. CESS is informed by the critical approaches to Security Studies (mainly by the Copenhagen [see Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde (1998)] and the Welsh Schools [see especially Booth (2005; 2007)], as well as some approaches of the Paris School [see Bigo (2010)], such as Green Political Theory and Political Ecology. A central category of CESS is the analytical concept of environmental security. This research tool consists of a questionnaire that focuses on tearing out the central value of protection, priority, and fear (security), and the perception of the human-nature relation (environment).

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<sup>5</sup> Most of the interviews were carried out in the year 2012 during a 3-week research stay at the headquarters of ENVSEC, Geneva, UN Environment. Additional phone interviews were carried out in 2016 and 2018.

## Critical Environmental Security Studies (CESS)

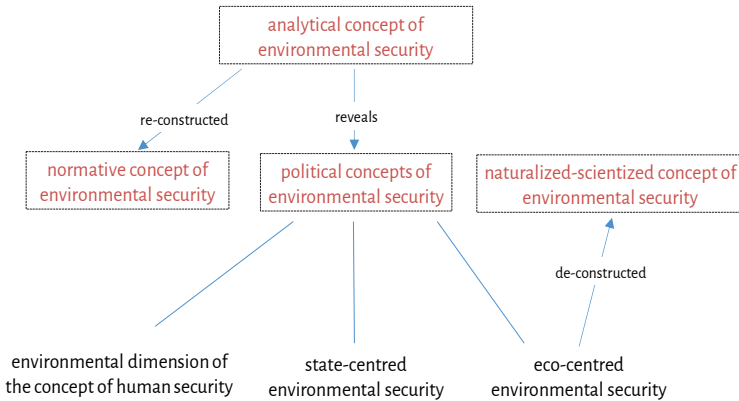


Figure 1: Framework for analysis. Source: Hardt 2018a, 121.

Therefore, it collects questions such as who is to be secured?, what is the threat?, and how is the human-nature relation perceived?, which are then applied to the discourses of environmental security. Discourse is thereby understood as “ways of representing areas of knowledge and social practice” (Fairclough 1992, 3). In Hajer’s (1995, 44) terms, discourses are an “ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given the physical and social realities”.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the critical framework is centrally based on this analytical concept of environmental security, which was applied to an exhaustive literature review (see Hardt 2018a) and has thereby revealed several different conceptual categories of environmental security and three major political concepts that are defined in relation to their referent object.

The first is focused on the state and is mostly concerned with maintaining state security. It makes references to environmental threats in the form of causing conflict, instability, and in pursuing resources or establishing environmental cooperation and is also strongly motivated by the quest for geopolitical interests.

The second is related to the concept of human security and the focus on the individual and more precisely on its environmental dimension. In this context, environmental threats are conceived in relation to an increase in vulnerability, causing conflicts, illnesses, food insecurity, energy poverty, and injustice and as an obstacle for human development in terms of overcoming the North-South divide.

The eco-centered approach is the third concept, which focuses on the environment, and paints the threat discourse of environmental deterioration in reference to Planet Earth and its consequences for the human species. It is strongly informed by the scientific-technical narratives of the Earth System Sciences and the planetary boundaries (Rockström, et al. 2009), which aim at steering human agency on planet Earth “into a safe and just operating space” (Raworth 2012; Hajer et al. 2015). This is why the concept is called the naturalized-scientized concept of environmental security due to the de-construction.

In addition, I propose a fourth concept that presents a normative approach to environmental security and is related to the Anthropocene in the sense of carrying the major concerns of inducing socio-ecological change in the search for pathways of change along the ideals of ethics and safe, sustainable, and just futures for humanity. Therefore, the normative concept of environmental security is to be understood as an ideal type. The difference between this normative concept and the eco-centered concept is that it is not reduced to a scientific-technical narrative of steering the planet back into the Holocene, and that it has a critical political understanding of causes and pathways for change. The causes are not seen in CO<sub>2</sub> production as in the eco-centred environmental security concept but in structural relations such as injustice and human cosmology. The difference between this normative concept and previous work in a similar spirit in the context of environmental security (see Barnett 2001; Barnett, Mathew, and O’Brien 2010; Brauch, Dalby, and Oswald Spring 2011) is that it consists of a blank questionnaire that is to be filled with normative content<sup>6</sup>.

In sum, these four different concepts are used as a possible interpretation, uniting different discourses of environmental security. Bringing these conceptual approaches into a critical analysis in the underlying major goals and concerns (see Table 1), the environmental security concepts are evaluated in relation to the major references of geopolitical interest, status quo maintenance, ethics, and socio-ecological change. Thereby, the analysis shows that all political concepts of environmental security are strongly focused on status quo maintenance, and that the state-centered and the environmental dimensions of human security often receive the criticism of being motivated by geopolitical interests.

In order to bridge the practice-theory gap, CESS is slightly adjusted with regard to the applicability to the case study analysis and to the evaluation of the conceptual implementation of environmental security (see Figure 2). Thereby, the concept of environmental security in practice is directly set in relation to the extreme poles of geopolitics and status quo maintenance and to ethics and socio-ecological transformation.

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<sup>6</sup> In a former paper, I therefore proposed filling the questionnaire with the key pillars of Green Political Theory and Critical Security Studies approaches (Hardt 2018a).

Focus	Normative concept of environmental security	Political concepts of environmental security		
		State-centered environmental security	Environmental dimension of human security	Naturalized environmental security
Formulated goal and concern	humanity	maintenance of the state	empower vulnerable and powerless	nature
Underlying major goals and concern	normative informed process of socio-ecological change	stability of the state system and of the political system of power	stability of the political system of power	steering humanity back into the Holocene to environmental stability
		assumed geopolitical interests		

Table 1: Comparison of the normative concept of environmental security and the political concepts of environmental security. Source: Elaborated by the author based on Hardt 2018a, 122.

Another important specification is that, in contrast to most securitization theorists based on the so-called Copenhagen School approach, who define the successful securitization of an issue in relation to the necessary characteristic “breaking free of rules” and put extraordinary measures in place (see Buzan et al 1998), the analysis focuses on the discursive use of the label security. Furthermore, the securitization process is informed by the so-called Paris School. The leading author Didier Bigo of the Paris School outlines, in the context of how migration politics is slowly turned into security politics, that security is not necessarily defined in relation to urgency and exceptionality but as routinized practices and as a continuum (Bigo 2010). Security thereby is understood in Foucauldian terms as a “technique of government” (Foucault 1994) and it focuses on other “practices, audiences and contexts that enable and constrain the pro-



Figure 2: A heuristic guide for evaluating the implementation of environmental security concepts.

duction of specific forms of governmentality” (C.A.S.E 2006, 457). This stands in contrast to the limited speech act of the Copenhagen School. In the Paris School framework, issues can be viewed as security over time, even institutionalized, even without dramatic moments (be it military interventions or conflicts). For the analysis presented here, both the approaches of the Copenhagen School and the Paris School are understood as complements to securitization. In addition, a successful act of securitization is understood here as the acceptance by some audience affected by the securitization acts in the form of allowing intervention to happen and also as payments for activities that are labeled as (here environmental) security.

## The Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC)

The Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) is a consortium, which, as of September 2019, consists of the following partner organizations: UNEP, UNDP, UNECE, REC, and OSCE. From 2006 until 2015, NATO was an associated partner, having a specific status due to its geopolitical image<sup>7</sup>. The retreat of NATO is very likely related to the Crimea Crisis<sup>8</sup> (ENVSEC IP 2016).

ENVSEC has referred to its multi-agency character as an innovative strength, letting it act as an umbrella or hub and giving it the capacity to bundle responses, knowledge, contacts, and finances. The multi-agency character is at the same time understood as a weakness in the sense that the cooperation and the coordination of the network is difficult, complex, and ultimately expensive to maintain. The association of the different organizations is based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which means that ENVSEC lacks a legal status. As a consequence, the structure is relatively loose and many tasks are shared, such as the post of the Management Board and the Chair, which rotate annually. The only physical location of ENVSEC is the Regional Office of UNEP at the International Environmental House in Geneva, Switzerland, where the Secretariat is hosted. The network of ENVSEC exists in the form of counterparts, consisting of civil society; academia and experts, included as technical and advisory support; and regional officers, which are located in each of the four ENVSEC regions and who are in charge of disseminating information to ENVSEC partners and stakeholders. The stakeholders are the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the Ministries

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to highlight that NATO was involved in ENVSEC with its scientific division called Science for Peace and Security Program (SPS). The military division of NATO was not involved.

<sup>8</sup> The reason for NATO to withdraw was not officially stated. The relation to the Crimea Crisis is a suggestion stated by an ENVSEC decision-maker. Nevertheless, there is an important credibility to this because the four ENVSEC regions lie in the former USSR and close to Russia. The fact that NATO was part of ENVSEC was handled from the beginning with caution in relation to Russia. By September 2019, no trace of NATO as a former associated partner organization is left on the website.

of Environment of the receiving countries. A fundamental principle for ENVSEC is state sovereignty. Therefore, ENVSEC projects are only set up on request and by assigning the accountability of the projects to the states.

Characteristic for ENVSEC is that it relies almost entirely on donor funding and on the contributions of the member organizations, whereby most of the funds come from external donors. This is how the initiative is strongly dependent upon, and also susceptible to, the donors' will and interests in terms of defining ENVSEC's activities and how it operates. Information on the total budget, such as on some donors, is relatively difficult to acquire. As the partner organizations are in charge of the projects – i. e. staff is working only part time for ENVSEC – the assessment is difficult. According to a quote from 2013, ENVSEC had a total budget of US\$ 60 million for its ten years of existence (ENVSEC 2013c, 2).

**ENVSEC donors and their cumulative share for the period 2003 - 2013. Source: (ENVSEC 2013c; ENVSEC 2013a, 11).**

**ENVSEC donors and their share for 2014. Source: ENVSEC website.**

<i>Donor</i>	<i>Share</i>	<i>Donor</i>	<i>Share</i>
Finland	35 %	Finland	30,86 %
Austria	19 %	Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC)	2,74 %
Canada	17 %	Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA)	6,46 %
Belgium	2 %	Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)	16,38 %
Others (Czech Republic, Hungary, Spain, USA)	1 %	UNOPS Austrian Development Agency	0,03 %
Germany	1 %	UNOPS Finland	1,44 %
Italy	2 %	UNOPS Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA)	2,02 %
Norway	3 %	Austrian Development Agency (ADA)	35,66 %
Netherlands	1 %	Government of Switzerland	4,39 %
Sweden	16 %		
Switzerland	1 %		
European Commission	2 %		

Table 2: Overview of ENVSEC donor contributions 2003–2014.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For this article the website <http://ensec.org> was used which became inactive in March 2020; links to related documents were no longer accessible. Some of the ENVSEC documents are available on other websites, e.g. <http://ensec.rec.org>. Where web links are no longer available, reference is given to the title of the cited publications.

<sup>10</sup> This overview is limited because there is a difference between the donors that only contributed to certain projects and donors, such as Finland, that in 2012 contributed 92 % to the ENVSEC Secretariat costs. Furthermore, some donors, such as e.g. Statoil, a major Norwegian oil and gas company and the International Atomic Agency (IAEA) (ENVSEC 2013a, 23) are not mentioned in these overviews provided by the ENVSEC website. Additional information

It can be observed that Finland has been one of the main donors of ENVSEC. In 2014, several donors started to cut back their donations, while Austria and Sweden have increased their share for ENVSEC<sup>11</sup>. The motivation of the donors is described as follows:

Many donors who fund ENVSEC [...] see the environment as a platform for the preservation of peace and strengthening of international security in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter. The promotion of international cooperation and the consolidation of democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms are other dimensions to which ENVSEC contributes.<sup>12</sup>

The organizations involved in ENVSEC are understood to be complying with and serving the interests of their member states. This also reflects the major character of ENVSEC, acting as a tool for state interests that is based on the foundational principle of state sovereignty.

ENVSEC acts in so-called “crisis regions” of Central Asia, Southern Caucasus, as well as Southern and East Europe and has a transboundary focus. It is important to highlight that ENVSEC activities are characterized by focusing on former member states of the USSR, except the Baltic States. This exclusion of the Baltic States is striking and I will come back to this point further below.

Corresponding to the leitmotif “Transforming risks into cooperation,” all focus regions suffer from conflicts such as transboundary environmental problems, water resources, water and air pollution, or uncontrolled population growth. Economic questions, transportation, and energy are also important. The projects are usually implemented for three years, carried out by one partner organization and are categorized into one of the following focus areas: 1. Natural resources and security risk management (a. Natural resources); 2. Hazardous substances and environment and security risk reduction (b. Hazardous substances); 3. Population pressure on environmental security, frozen conflicts, and climate change adaptation (c. Climate change). The expected impact formulated for an ENVSEC project is to either reduce the “risk to security from selected environmental threats” or aid in conflict resolution in relation to shared environmental resources in the ENVSEC regions (ENVSEC 2009).

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missing relates to the donations by the partner organizations. From an overview of the ENVSEC reports, there is very little information on this issue, whereby NATO is described as the providing most funds to ENVSEC (2010c, 62).

<sup>11</sup> Canada, Norway, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Hungary, Czech Republic, Italy, and USA cut back their support long before 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Source: [http://www.envsec.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=63&Itemid=178&lang=en](http://www.envsec.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=63&Itemid=178&lang=en). This link became inactive in March 2020.



## Official presentation of the ENVSEC concept of environmental security

As pointed out before, ENVSEC presents itself according to its overarching theme: “Transforming risk into cooperation” and describes its concept of environmental security as a bi-directional interpretation. The negative link between environment and security stipulates that environmental issues can trigger or aggravate situations of tensions and conflict and therefore can present a risk. The link is described as “destruction and over-exploitation of natural resources and ecosystems”, which may present a threat for the security of communities and nations<sup>13</sup>. Environmental accidents, disasters, or transboundary pollution might also affect the relations between neighboring states in a negative way<sup>14</sup>. The positive interpretation holds that environmental issues and/or risks “can act as a bridge for cross-boundary cooperation” (ENVSEC 2006, 3). The assumption is that the initiation of a process of communication between several parties, groups, and countries contributes to transforming the former existing tensions into better transboundary relations and even leads to long lasting peace and stability.

Three other dimensions of the ENVSEC concept are presented in the ENVSEC Report (2013a, 4). These include a) a regional approach with a transboundary focus; b) a participatory approach to defining problems and solutions with the stakeholders; and c) a multi-level approach uniting local, national, regional, and international levels. Most interesting is the so-called “trademark” of the initiative, which holds that the definition of environment and security issues is participatory and therefore open. As one interview partner (ENVSEC IPO2 2012) stated, “The definition of environment and security is difficult because it has to be seen through the prism of the countries. That is why we tried not to stick too much to the paradigm. It depends on the region, the people.” In spite of this broad definition and despite the fact that many projects have already been implemented, the concept of environmental security still remains unclear and vague in the documents. Apparently, this vagueness also is a main concern of ENVSEC, because even the interview partners were not able to clearly define the connections between environment and security. Some framed this vagueness as a positive and open possibility; but generally, confusion was clearly manifested, as for example in the statement: “Sometimes we do not know ourselves.” At this point I reach the conclusion that in spite of this broadness and confusing con-

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<sup>13</sup> At: [http://www.envsec.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=176&lang=en](http://www.envsec.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=176&lang=en), this website is inactive since March 2020.

<sup>14</sup> At: [http://www.envsec.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=176&lang=en](http://www.envsec.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=176&lang=en), this website is inactive since March 2020.

ment, the ENVSEC concept of environmental security is being implemented and joining many different actors together for a common approach. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that ENVSEC attempts to join several needs and interests of different organizations, countries (donor and receiving), and people under its hub of environmental security implementation.

### Analysis and evaluation of the ENVSEC concept of environmental security

This section attempts to categorize the ENVSEC concept of environmental security. Up front, it is important to highlight that the comparison of the three distinct chronological phases of ENVSEC have shown that the conceptual approach of the initiative has been almost stable throughout its entire existence and applies to all four regions in a very similar way. This result is striking as ENVSEC has changed throughout the years regarding its regional focus, partner institutions, and thematic foci. We can therefore conclude that the approach to environmental security is not an open frame (as claimed), but is instead tied to a fixed meaning. This furthermore supposes that the basic goals, values, and strategies have been (consciously or unconsciously) taken for granted since the creation of ENVSEC and that most of them remain until today. This research result also complies with the statement of the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon, who called ENVSEC a “common denominator to address environment and security challenges” (ENVSEC 2013a, 20). The so-called ENVSEC community, endorsing this mainstream approach, includes the following actors, which (independent from their different interests and backgrounds) to some degree actively participate in, agree to, or benefit from supporting ENVSEC: the partner organizations<sup>15</sup>, all contemporary donors and past donors<sup>16</sup>, and the benefiting countries<sup>17</sup>. This also shows that despite the fact that ENVSEC is not widely known, it has an impressive conceptual reach by working with several actors, countries, and institutions. These include 30 partner countries, over 100 local and international partners, and approximately 170 million people benefited (ENVSEC, 2013b).

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<sup>15</sup> The partner organizations include OSCE, UNDP, UNEP, UNECE, REC, and formerly NATO.

<sup>16</sup> The donors include Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Hungary, Spain, USA, Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and the European Commission.

<sup>17</sup> The countries, which have benefited from ENVSEC projects are Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Kosovo (territory under UN administration), Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

## Evaluation of ENVSEC in CESS

In the search for a clear definition of the ENVSEC environmental security concept, the comparison to the four concepts inherent in CESS proves to be useful. In comparison to the three conceptual approaches to environmental security tied to the referent object, several incompatible and mutually exclusive elements can be detected. In the case of the state-centered environmental security concept, these lie in the fact that solutions of the state-centered concept of environmental security have military character, while the ENVSEC concept excludes any possibility of military measures and has a regional approach.

In comparison to the conceptual approach of eco-centered environmental security, the most significant excluding element of the ENVSEC concept is that the latter does not make any reference to planetary threats or to the scientized technical narrative of the Anthropocene, nor to the basic dimensions of ecology. Instead, ENVSEC's target group is limited to developing countries with a conflict context and with a geographical focus mostly on countries of the former Soviet Union. This is a distinguished and outstanding characteristic of ENVSEC's, as the legacies of the former USSR are described throughout all three phases as structural causes<sup>18</sup>.

The comparison to the environmental dimension of human security provides a fit. The descriptions of the problems and threats as well as the solution presented by ENVSEC's concept and of human security are seemingly identical. The broad concept of security includes issues of traditional security, development, vulnerability, and human rights. Especially the focus on development is an important commonality between the concept of human security and the ENVSEC concept. The same applies to the concepts of environment, as in both cases (in ENVSEC and in human security) it is reduced to a dimension between others. In other words, the environment is not perceived as the living basis for humans and as an unquestionable underlying condition for every human activity. Another congruity is the strong influence of liberal theory. For the ENVSEC concept, such influence can be seen in its categorized basic values, which include diplomacy, economy, peace and democracy, rule of law and good governance. Rationality is also important and especially detectable in the role of scientists within ENVSEC. Education, legal compliance, and information are practiced by ENVSEC, especially in the fourth focus area (d. Information). Interdependence is also a fundamental assumption for ENVSEC performance. In addition,

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<sup>18</sup> It needs to be emphasized that in a publication on its evolution, the references to the USSR are almost entirely absent (see ENVSEC 2013a). The only reference to the USSR in a recent report is that it is responsible for *Mélange*, a toxic rocket fuel component. In the rest of the document, the legacies are attributed to the broader formulation of former political and economic systems (ENVSEC 2013a, 16).

the following basic assumptions of the international systems can be depicted in liberal theory, ENVSEC, and human security: the importance of the governance system of international institutions, the importance of trust, cooperation, and economic development, and the aim to strive for security and prosperity. The congruity of human security and the ENVSEC concept stands in stark contrast to the fact that most of the interviewees have expressed a strong disregard for the concept of human security<sup>19</sup> and the concept is mentioned scarcely in the documents.

The ideal type description of the normative concept does not apply to the ENVSEC concept. This incompatibility will be particularly emphasized in the next section.

*Evaluation of ENVSEC's concept of environmental security: Geopolitics and status quo maintenance vs. normative socio-ecological change*

In spite of the fact that the normative concept of environmental security does not apply to the ENVSEC concept of environmental security, the comparison between the two helps to point to several deficits in ENVSEC when contextualizing its approach in the Anthropocene. Analyzing the main conception of the environment by ENVSEC, a clear focus on natural resources can be observed<sup>20</sup>. At the same time, the environment is seen as a dimension that plays a minor role. This becomes evident in a comparison of the environment with football, music, and school, and the statement that “if people talk about that [environment, football, music, and school], then they can hopefully talk about much serious things” (ENVSEC IPO2 2012). At the same time, the environmental dimension is understood as having the potential of transporting other issues. In other words, the environment serves as a vehicle in terms of dimension and in terms of the established structures of governance.

In the overall analysis, ENVSEC's conception of environment shows that several key premises of the ecological challenge, depicted in natural/climate science and the legal and institutional dimension of global environmental governance either are totally absent or only evoked without major implications. This is surprising as ENVSEC's approach is informed by the description of the environment by natural scientists and heavily relies on an institutional approach. The key characteristics of the ecological challenge (intractability, variability, multi-interdependence, and complexity<sup>21</sup>), as well

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<sup>19</sup> The criticism mostly referred to human security because it is too diffuse and in its definition, forwarded in 1994 in the Human Development Report, only related to one partner organization, the UNDP.

<sup>20</sup> In the ENVSEC Memorandum of Understanding (ENVSEC 2003) the only references to environmental issues are “natural resource management” and natural disasters.

<sup>21</sup> I found only one reference that describes a possible finitude. However, it is concerned with finitude of environmental resources: the “[O]veruse of resources will have long-term consequences that will affect the region long after the oil and gas resources have been used up” (ENVSEC 2008a).

as the mainstream of legal, economic, and political frameworks of global environmental governance (such as the approach of mitigating CO<sub>2</sub>, the principle of polluter pays, the principle of taking into account present and future generations, and the principle of irreversibility), however, are not addressed by ENVSEC. Another important point of criticism is that environmental politics and the structure of global environmental governance are used for other purposes, which vary from the achievement of other political interests to the resolution of conflicts. The concern of tackling the environmental problem seems to be of minor importance.

The geographical scope of ENVSEC is also limited, in that the problems are only addressed in the focus regions themselves. Therefore, the detected causes are limited to the target countries, concentrating and framing the problem at the geographic level and with regard to the history of the state or region. Other external influences and demands (for example, the extraction of resources by wealthy countries) are not taken into account. This can be seen by the fact that external demand or economic resource cycles, for example, in the case of mining or energy issues (e. g. the interest in the extraction and transportation of resources), are only mentioned as presenting an opportunity for economic growth and development or even as a necessity and condition for economic development.

Finally, ENVSEC does not problematize the human-nature dichotomy that is a defining characteristic of the Anthropocene, and does not address the notion of socio-ecological transformation. A central assumption is that the human impact on nature and nature as such are controllable and manageable. That is how ENVSEC ultimately aims at stability, maintenance of the status quo, and balance of the international system, using the environment merely as a dimension and vehicle to secure these.

In addition to this strong focus of status quo maintenance, geopolitical interests also play an important role and even shape the ENVSEC environmental security concept. Before entering into detail, it should be emphasized that the following citations and references (also in form of entire sections titled “Geopolitics”) in the reports of ENVSEC clash with the total absence of reference to them in the descriptions of the conceptual approach, the projects, and the regional focus ENVSEC presents. Therefore, my analysis provides a better insight of whose security lies at the center of attention of ENVSEC, even though it is not explicitly stated in relation to ENVSEC’s environmental security concept.

In a critical geopolitical analysis of ENVSEC, it can be seen that the main geopolitical concern lies with the European Union and its geographical neighborhood. The focus is to secure stability and prosperity beyond the borders of the European Union (ENVSEC 2007, 19) and to make the “neighbors a little less miserable” (ENVSEC IPO2 2012). In other terms, the stability of the European neighborhood is important because this reduces the probability of the emergence of transboundary threats. The

main problem afflicting neighboring countries in that regard is the “security vacuum” and instability that enables criminal networks to gain power (ENVSEC 2007, 92). Another geopolitical concern is the risk of environmental accidents – nuclear or of any other type – which makes allusion mostly to the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986 but also to environmental pollution. ENVSEC’s interest in the direct European geographical neighborhood is also expressed in relation to climate change adaptation, for example with regard to the Ukraine.

Furthermore, the choice of the regions shows a traditional geopolitical focus on natural resource abundance. Among the first documents, the description of Central Asia starts with the enumeration of resource wealth (see ENVSEC webpages, ENVSEC 2002, 17). An interesting trend in the ENVSEC documents is that, especially since 2005, the concern about fossil fuels in Central Asia has been growing. This can be seen in close relation to the “gas crisis of winter 2005–6 when Russia’s Gazprom cut off natural gas supplies to Ukraine” (ENVSEC 2007, 47). In the aftermath of this event, energy became a key issue of national and international politics and even of national security, as is expressed in the following quote: “In a context where fossil fuels are of paramount importance for the global economy, energy policy is a key area in which stakes for both, the environment and security, are very high. The issue of stable energy supply becomes a matter of national security and the center of geopolitical interests” (ENVSEC 2007, 8). The transit route for energy (especially gas) is another geopolitical concern that is repeatedly mentioned in the ENVSEC documents. In fact, the term transit security is applied by ENVSEC and mentioned as a major concern for Eastern Europe. The term transit security is especially interesting, as it has not been manifested so far in literature reviews on environment and security.

Another important energy-related geopolitical concern is that the demand for fossil fuels will grow in the future. In addition, the global competition between China, India, and the United States of America will grow and increase the pressure on the energy market. Central Asia and the Caspian Sea are thereby of high interest for China (ENVSEC 2008a, 25–28). ENVSEC highlights the importance of securing the geographical locations of energy resources. This is of utmost importance because the possible unsustainable use of alternative energy sources “could also intensify resource disputes on local, national, and regional level” (ENVSEC 2008a, 25).

This strong euro-centric focus of ENVSEC indicates that this initiative acts in the interest of the member states of the European Union. The strong focus on energy and the regions chosen by ENVSEC imply that one goal of ENVSEC is to secure energetically interesting resources and the corresponding transport routes. Another indicator of the underlying goal of securing European energy access is that several ENVSEC maps of environment and security issues include in some way or another

geography or infrastructure related to energy<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that ENVSEC regions are geographically congruent with the trajectory of alternative gas pipelines such as the Nabucco pipeline<sup>23</sup>. The strong geopolitical concern for energy provides a new perspective on ENVSEC donors who also might have proper and partly hidden interests in their support. Therefore, one motivation to finance ENVSEC could be to increase the speed with which alternative sources of gas and oil from Central Asia and the Caspian Sea will become accessible. Finland, the major ENVSEC donor, for example, could be interested in preventing the pollution of the Baltic Sea and other possible environmental threats that originate in the neighborhood of Eastern Europe. Another strong geopolitical motivation for Finland to support ENVSEC could be its almost total dependence on Russia as its major supplier of gas and oil (IEA 2012)<sup>24</sup>. The same could apply to Austria, another donor that greatly depends on Russian gas and to the Instrument of Stability of the European Commission (IFS), a donor of ENVSEC since 2012. Indicators for this assumption are the minor concern of the IFS for environmental issues<sup>25</sup> and the fact that the aims of the EU Security Strategy (EU 2008b) and of ENVSEC (2008a) are similar, both referring to the same regions with the major focus on energy security.

Another critical geopolitical analysis shows that ENVSEC is also supposed to contribute in some manner to the war against terrorism. Almost all interviewees cited the events of September 11, 2001, as a decisive driver for the establishment of ENVSEC. While this specific focus and reference is absent in the documents, there are also several references made to terrorism throughout the ENVSEC documents<sup>26</sup>. Another indicator for this is the strategic location of the ENVSEC regions in relation to the adjacent countries Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan. The war in Afghanistan is not mentioned at all in the ENVSEC documents, but Afghanistan and the Middle East are mentioned as unstable regions that increase insecurity (see ENVSEC 2008a, 25–28).

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<sup>22</sup> The maps of Southern Caucasus, for example, include the major transportation route, i. e. the Asia-Europe Corridor.

<sup>23</sup> The Nabucco pipeline was a project that aimed at transporting gas from the Caspian Sea to Europe. Probably due to the geopolitical tensions with Russia in the context of the crisis in the Ukraine, the Nabucco pipeline project is being discussed again, in order to decrease the dependence on Russian gas.

<sup>24</sup> Strong concern over the dependence on Russia and the securing of its energy supply can be deduced from the fact that Finland has put in place an early warning system that allows it to “monitor real time gas flows in Russia and generate early warning of potential disruptions in order to implement contingency plans, switching to the parallel gas pipeline or deploy[ing] emergency response measures” (IEA 2012 19).

<sup>25</sup> See IFS website at: [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sectors/human-rights-and-governance/peace-and-security/instrument-contributing-stability-and-peace\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sectors/human-rights-and-governance/peace-and-security/instrument-contributing-stability-and-peace_en), last accessed 3 March 2020.

<sup>26</sup> One example is that “potential links with international terrorism” are an important concern for the Ferghana Valley (ENVSEC 2002, 26). Another example is the established link between the protection of mountain areas and terrorists and the ensuring of dam safety from terrorist attacks (ENVSEC 2005).

In light of these manifold geopolitical interests documented in ENVSEC reports, the fact that particular regions (such as the Baltic countries) are not included in the ENVSEC regions might be related to the absence of geopolitical interests or the fact that the countries are member states of the EU and of NATO.

In general, a critical geopolitical analysis of ENVSEC shows that the initiative might not only be dedicated to preventing and solving certain types of threats in order to ensure the status quo but that it has a strong additional bias towards geopolitical interests that it perpetuates under the guise of environmental security.

## Conclusion and prospects

The literature on environmental security is still discussing the conceptual existence and/or the future implications, potentials, and risks of the implementation of environmental security. The analysis of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) presented here shows that environmental security has been carried out for more than 16 years in a unified conceptual approach by some of the most important international organizations. A main enriching element of this theory is that the ENVSEC concept of environmental security can be categorized as a common or mainstream interpretation. This stands in contrast to the weakness, which is generally assumed in the literature, that no mainstream of environmental security can be defined and that an accomplished process of securitization has not yet occurred. In other terms, the analysis has shown that in contrast to the criticism in the literature that no concept and agreement exist, there is in fact an important mainstream approach that has been practised by several very important international organizations. In case of ENVSEC, the securitization move has been accepted by its audience through the provision of funds, and the several states and other actors that are actively involved in the projects of ENVSEC.

In criticism of the concept of environmental security, ENVSEC activities appear at first glance to be very diffuse and arbitrary. With the help of the analytical framework Critical Environmental Security (CESS), this analysis revealed a specific conceptual implementation by ENVSEC and furthermore helped to detect several issues that do not fit with the officially communicated image of ENVSEC. The main contradictions are that instead of the communicated basic defining characteristics of a participatory, open definition process, ENVSEC has worked with a concept of environment and security, which remains unaltered across regions, projects, and organizations for its entire existence.

Another research result is that the ENVSEC concept shares most characteristics with the environmental dimension of human security defined in CESS. This is due to the fact that ENVSEC functions in a strictly non-military manner, focused on



peace-building, development, technical expertise, as well as the improvement of resilience and adaptation strategies in developing countries.

Contextualizing ENVSEC's concept and projects in the Anthropocene, I have detected several basic limitations concerning its understanding of the ecological challenge as the environment is seen as a mere dimension of secondary order that can act as a vehicle for hard political concerns like conflict and peace. In addition, ENVSEC does not take into consideration already existing environmental policy and environmental governance regulation and ignores important legal, institutional, political, and scientific dimensions of ecology. Therefore, I conclude that the projects of the ENVSEC Initiative to some extent certainly contribute to the mitigation of some environmental degradation or pollution and raise consciousness and disseminate information about environmental problems. However, I argue that the problems depicted by ENVSEC will not be solved in the long run. Due to their lack of a broader future time perspective and a critical approach of the causes, environmental problems and conflicts are not being solved but instead displaced in space and time (Hardt 2018a, 238). Therefore, this research result complies with the broader criticism of the human security concept that this displacement will neither ensure stability over there nor at home but that it only reinforces the structures that proliferate the ecological challenge and ultimately also the vulnerability of the North (see Ryerson 2010; Newman 2010).

Another important insight is that the ENVSEC concept of environmental security is not only concerned with conflict prevention, peacemaking, and the restoration of environmentally polluted sites but also includes the prevention of trans-border environmental and migratory threats as well as access to and control over natural resources related to energy in specific trans-border locations. The geopolitical dimension is focused on energy security in the sense of lowering the dependence on Russia and achieving transit security for the transport particularly of gas from Central Asia through the Caspian Sea. Another important interest and aim of ENVSEC is to foster political and economic stability in the geographical neighborhood of the European Union. Therefore, a major conclusion is that the ENVSEC concept of environmental security is heavily influenced by geopolitical concerns, which is highly problematic as it undercuts its credibility and proves the critics of the environmental security link right.

This research has focused only on one specific case study. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that the prospects of ENVSEC are not very bright, even though the consortium still exists, Board Meetings take place, and a Memorandum of Understanding that binds the partner organizations together might be revoked/amended (ENVSEC IP 2018). Nevertheless, it seems as though ENVSEC is currently in a frozen state<sup>27</sup>. It remains existent but no projects are being carried out, which is, according to ENVSEC IP (2018), due to the fact that the partner organizations are increasingly focused on

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<sup>27</sup> The webpage of ENVSEC has not been updated since 2016 and is inactive since March 2020.

their own activities related to environment and security. A further in-depth analysis is needed to take stock of these new developments and the possible future scenario of a dissolution of ENVSEC would allow for new conclusions. I propose that a (potential) failure of ENVSEC is more related to how it is institutionally constituted or to other regional interests (that diverge from the former Soviet region) than to its conceptual focus. This assumption is based on the fact that the link between environment and security remains a vibrant concern for each of the organizations involved in ENVSEC.

Apart from these doubts about the future prospects of ENVSEC and from the fact that this paper has focused on a single case study, I want to emphasize that the concerns and criticisms in the literature of the concept of environmental security for functioning “as a cover for the purchasing geopolitical or other strategically powerful interests” (Hardt 2018a, 186) and to enforce the status quo need to be taken seriously. The fact that a mainstream approach to the concept of environmental security exists in practice needs to be further analyzed and verified in relation to other actors and institutions (see e. g. Dellmuth et al. 2017). A vibrant research agenda that stretches between geopolitics, maintaining the status quo, normative socio-ecological change, and human-nature relation lies before us and must be adequately addressed in the context of the Anthropocene in theory and practice.

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