

Environmental security and international relations: the case for enclosure

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Abstract. The environment is now an established area of theoretical and empirical work in the field of International Relations, but the central question remains whether existing institutional structures, intellectual and political, are being in some respect transformed by this development. This review article examines the concept of environmental security as a reflection of the centrality of the environmental challenge. This relatively novel perspective on a defining feature of the field tests the domain of discourse and inquiry, and thus has implications for the study of international relations, perhaps to the extent of justifying the enclosure of its key concepts within the environmental perspective.

The influence on international relations of the environmental issue area has been both practical and theoretical; that is to say, it has challenged the behaviour and relative significance of the various political actors, but has also (or as a consequence) challenged the discipline of International Relations. What might have appeared to be a flash in the policy pan some decades ago is now enshrined in the institutional structures of theoretical and practical work in the field, though a question in both respects is whether the institutional structures are in fact up to the challenge, or whether they are being in some respect transformed by it. This review article looks at the concept of environmental security as a reflection of the centrality of the environmental challenge to International Relations: security, a defining feature of the field, is thus wedded to a relatively new and different set of concerns, and hence potentially undermined as a grounding referent. Of course, in this latter respect, the environment is one of a number of alternative perspectives on the concept of security (identity, society, technology, and so on) all of which put a twist in the tale of a post-Cold War world of peace dividends and institution-building. However, the relative novelty and ubiquity of environmental concern makes it worth looking at the literature of the last decade or so which has specifically connected this aspect of world affairs to the notion of security, and hence raised questions of disciplinary (as well as political) importance. The article will consider what counts as, in turn, a 'security' issue, an 'environmental' issue, and an 'international' issue, before drawing some conclusions about the prospect of an 'enclosure' of the discipline by an environmental security concept.

Is everything a security issue?

The answer to this question perhaps depends on how nervous you are, but it is fair

to ask whether including environmental problems under the rubric of security issues is stretching the meaning of the security concept beyond useful recognition. While the notion of 'social security' is not alien, it has seldom been confused with the high politics of inter-state diplomacy. Certainly, including the whole range of social welfare issues within the domain of security concerns would not be helpful to military planners, even if the expansion of their budget was a temptation. Those outside the 'security community' would likewise be troubled by such a prospect, since the military approach to human well-being typically has a 'no pain, no gain' flavour to it. Yet both insiders and outsiders in this respect might agree that there are some things worth securing; the difficulties arise from uncertainty about just what those objects of security are in the post-Cold War world, and what means the ends justify.

To set the scene, the contrast between traditional and more recent critical perspectives on security should be noted. The point of reference for 'security' is in this context already uncertain, in part because of a traditional preoccupation with politico-military notions of security as between states. Here we see the cycle of offensive and defensive postures because security is necessarily relational, or interdependent, leading to the essentially tragic 'security dilemma'¹ arising from state attempts to secure the 'territoriality' or 'impermeability' on which their 'sovereignty' and 'independence' rests.² Mutual fear and suspicion compels states to seek ever more security, 'an effort which proves self-defeating because complete security remains ultimately unobtainable'.³

This traditional notion of national security is readily unseated whenever 'the image of the state as a referent object for security fades'⁴ because a novel source of insecurity, such as global environmental change, is not recognizable. Certainly, 'territoriality' and 'impermeability' go out of the window in the context of trans-boundary environmental change. Yet, shifting the point of reference for security away from the state leaves open the question of which referent might be used, including the environment. While security would normally be conceived of as a human political or psychological requirement, it is not impossible to contemplate moving from an anthropocentric (human-centred) to an ecocentric (environment-centred) perspective in which the global environment becomes the object referent of security. What seems clear is that some referent or locus of security is needed, unless one subscribes to a notion of natural harmony such that security is not an issue. The nation-state, of course, has traditionally been this referent and locus in the context of conflictual international relations, but those associated with 'Critical Security Studies' argue convincingly that the state is in fact a chief source of insecurity, and yet still link security with emancipation and autonomy⁵—these latter being typically provided (for humans) by the state. So the question remains as to whether we have

¹ See, for example, H. Butterfield, *History and Human Relations* (London: Collins, 1951), pp. 19–20; A. Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), pp. 3–24; R. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 66.

² J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 76

³ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁴ B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, 2nd edn. (Hemel Hempstead, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 103.

⁵ K. Booth, 'Security in Anarchy: Utopian Realism in Theory and Practice', *International Affairs*, 67:3 (1991); K. Booth, 'Security and Emancipation', *Review of International Studies*, 17:4 (1991).

a better chance of finding emancipation and autonomy in an environmental perspective on global politics.

The trouble is, we must thus conflate environmental and security concepts, potentially doing violence to both. At this stage in the discussion, the concern is whether including environmental issues overburdens the discrete area of security studies just when it is struggling with self-definition. In this respect there are entirely practical reasons for excluding epiphenomena in the search for conceptual clarity. However, a fullsome conception of security must surely encompass whatever presents us with an apparent sense of insecurity, as environmental change clearly does. A NATO Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society (CCMS)-sponsored pilot study on 'Environment and Security in an International Context' notes in its background statement that with both large-scale and localized environmental problems 'the security dimension is clear' and a 'complete definition of security would include these components'.⁶ We are hence obliged to include environmental concerns in our perspective on security.

On the other hand, Deudney argues that organized violence, the traditional threat and source of insecurity, is not analytically comparable to environmental threats.⁷ Pirages suggests re-examining 'the meaning of security'.⁸ Walker does this by challenging the historically determined discourse on sovereignty, where sovereign states displace any other potential political community (such as an ecologically-determined one) and security is linked unproblematically to the state. He notes that 'the absence of sustained debate about the meaning of security is rather odd' and that attempts 'to articulate alternative accounts of structural violence, common or global security, and so on, necessarily challenge accounts of what passes for common sense'.⁹ Elsewhere, more recently, Litfin has examined sovereignty in the ecological context—an uncomfortable fit to be sure, given the contrast between political and geographical maps of the world.¹⁰ There's the rub: is it unreasonable to consider sovereignty in relation to security? Does this open a can of worms, and permit bringing in awkward counterfactuals such as environmental change? Can we not consider the ecological sources of conflict in relation to our concerns with security, or is this simply 'salami tactics', gradually eroding the clarity and coherence of the old and favoured concept of security?

Is everything an environmental issue?

Having asked what counts as a security issue, and considered the possibility that environmental issues might be included, or even definitional, we may now consider the converse: what counts as 'environmental'? Scarcity of resources has always been

⁶ See the NATO/CCMS web site at <http://www.nato.int/ccms/pilot.htm>

⁷ Deudney, 'The Case Against'; D. Deudney, 'Environmental Security: Muddled Thinking', *Bulletin of The Atomic Scientists*, 47: 3 (April 1991), pp. 22–8.

⁸ D. Pirages, 'Environmental Security and Social Evolution', *International Studies Notes*, 16:1 (1991), p. 8.

⁹ R.B.J. Walker, 'Security, Sovereignty and the Challenge of World Politics', *Alternatives*, 15:1 (1990), p. 8.

¹⁰ K. Litfin, 'Sovereignty in World Ecopolitics', *Mershon International Studies Review*, 41(1997), pp. 167–204; K. Litfin, *The Greening of Sovereignty in World Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

a potential source of violent conflict, but should we then conceive of this in 'environmental' terms just because the scarcity involves a 'natural' resource such as water, for example: are 'Water Wars'¹¹ about failures in environmental management, or really just about the potential for armed violence (incidentally sparked-off by distribution and consumption patterns)? Is a wedding of environment and security issues ill-conceived, from an environmental perspective? This has the makings of a paradigm dispute, and certainly there is something of this in the academic debate.¹²

Perhaps some issues are not made more easily comprehensible by forcing their enclosure in an environmental perspective (even if the connections are apparent), and it may equally be a disservice to environmental politics and scholarship to force upon them an unwanted security discourse. Yet enforcement is not necessarily the pertinent dynamic, since there may already be strong affinities where environmental issues are seeking enhanced status, and security issues are seeking a new home, and both are anyway being viewed through the lens of a recent 'critical turn' in International Relations theory which opens the way for new alternatives. This consequently involves a heady mixture of empirical and theoretical change, which does not enhance clarity. Environmental security necessarily invokes a critical perspective because of the diffused characteristics of the source of insecurity in this case, but it is often treated in terms of the political actor which suffers the insecurity and can thus create demand for responses from traditional authority structures which are thought to be efficacious in providing security (for example, states). The United States now (since 1993) has a Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Environmental Security, and its security agencies (including the CIA, State Department, and so on) are now involved in environmental issues to the extent that the Defence Intelligence Agency has studied the spread of water hyacinth plants in Lake Victoria¹³—the unlikely image of cloak and dagger botany leaps to mind, though in an era of increasing concern with biotechnological risks this may not be so far-fetched. The issue here is whether environmental perspectives on global politics are aided by such affiliations.¹⁴

Among academics there is consequently some debate about the environmental consequences of de-linking security from traditional agendas and political forms.¹⁵ Still, the case for linking environment and security can be made. Norman Myers argues 'that nobody can feel finally secure as long as others are persistently

¹¹ J. Bulloch and A. Darwish, *Water Wars: Coming Conflict in the Middle East* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1993); P. Gleick, 'Water and Conflict: Fresh Water Resources and International Security', *International Security*, 18:1 (1993); M. Lowi, 'Transboundary Resource Disputes and Their Resolution', in D. Deudney and R. Matthew (eds.), *Contested Ground: Security and Conflict in the New Environmental Politics* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 1998).

¹² See the writings of Homer-Dixon, and his critics on the point of method, and the argument by Deudney against linking environment and security, as well as Barnett's recent contribution to this journal which suggests such a link is merely a legitimization of the 'Northern' stat-centric security elite *status quo*. T. Homer-Dixon, 'On the Threshold: Environmental Changes as Causes of Acute Conflict', *International Security*, 16:2 (1991), pp. 76–116; T. Homer-Dixon and M. Levy, 'Environment and Security, Correspondence', *International Security*, 20: 3 (1995), pp. 189–98; M. Levy, 'Is the Environment a National Security Issue?', *International Security*, 20:2 (1995), pp. 35–62; D. Deudney, 'The Case Against Linking Environmental Degradation and National Security', *Millennium*, 19:3 (1990), pp. 461ff; J. Barnett, 'Destabilizing the Environment-Conflict Thesis', *Review of International Studies*, 26:2 (2000), pp. 271–88.

¹³ International Herald Tribune, 10 October 1995.

¹⁴ K. Conca, 'The Environment-Security Trap', *Dissent*, (Summer 1998), pp. 40–45.

¹⁵ Deudney, 'The Case Against'; D. Deudney, 'Muddled Thinking'; K. Conca, 'The Environment-Security Trap'.

insecure'¹⁶ and presents a case for pursuing 'ultimate security' (environmental security). This restates the traditional security dilemma, and it seems facile to posit a 'final' or absolute security, and yet if critical perspectives on the state suggest that the global environment is a better bet as a referent for political organization of all kinds, then it should also shoulder the conceptual burden of security.

If security is a legitimate perspective on the threat of environmental degradation, then environmental security could easily be an alternative account of security—it challenges 'common sense', at least in so far as it distances itself from the traditional state-centric security agenda. The difficulty is precisely that this distance is not always clear, as some treatments of environmental security tend merely to add the environment to the existing list of security concerns by examining environmental aspects of military activity, and more recently identified threats to the state such as migration. This may not adequately reflect the environmental context of security, and we may want to know what benefit to the environmental cause might accrue from its 'securitisation'. Will this not put a 'fragile environment' into the hands of 'powerful security forces'? This raises a question about what, exactly, is being secured, and against what threat: existence,¹⁷ life, ideals, beliefs, territorial integrity, and well-being¹⁸ against war, revolution, civil strife,¹⁹ and non-military threats.²⁰ What is being secured, and against what threat, of course depends on the conception of security employed. In the International Relations tradition, security concerns territorial nation-states and their citizen populations and the threats they pose to one another. The limited nature of this conception having been recognized, the redefinition of security is the topic of a broad literature, which has become increasingly specific in its attention to environmental security,²¹ and supported by a

¹⁶ N. Myers, *Ultimate Security: The Environmental Basis of Political Stability* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), p. 16.

¹⁷ I. Rowlands, 'Environmental Issues in World Politics', in N. Rengger and J. Baylis (eds.), *Dilemmas of World Politics: International Issues in a Changing World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 299; See also I. Rowlands, 'The Security Challenges of Global Environmental Change', *Washington Quarterly* 14:1(1991), pp. 99–114.

¹⁸ Pirages, 'Environmental Security', p. 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁰ Rowlands, 'Environmental Issues', p. 299.

²¹ For a usefully organized and extensive bibliography, see the Woodrow Wilson Centre Environmental Change and Security Project's 'Bibliographical Guide to the Literature' on their web site at <http://ecsp.si.edu/ecsp/lib.nsf/>. There is a wide and growing literature addressing environmental security, a sample of which is indicated here to give a sense of its development from the redefinition of security to the more specific (often critical) environmental focus over the last decade or so: L. Brown, *Redefining National Security*, Worldwatch Institute Paper no. 14, (Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute, 1977); R. Ullman, 'Redefining Security', *International Security*, 8:1(1983), pp. 129–53; J. Mathews, 'Redefining Security', *Foreign Affairs*, 68:2 (1989), pp. 162–77; N. Myers, 'Environment and Security', *Foreign Policy*, 74 (1989), pp. 23–41; N. Brown, 'Climate, Ecology and International Security', *Survival*, 31:6 (1989), pp. 519–32; P. Gleick, 'Environment and Security: The Clear Connections', *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, 47:3 (April 1991), pp. 17–21; S. Dalby, 'Security, Modernity, Ecology: The Dilemmas of Post-Cold War Security Discourse', *Alternatives*, 17:1 (1992), pp. 95–134; J. Kakonen (ed.), *Green Security or Militarized Environment* (Brookfield: Dartmouth Publishing, 1994); J. Vogler, 'Security and Global Environmental Change', *Conflict Processes*, 1:2 (1993), pp. 1–13; R. Matthew, 'Environmental Security and Conflict: An Overview of the Current Debate', *National Security Studies Quarterly*, 1:2 (1995); M. Renner, *Fighting for Survival: Environmental Decline, Social Conflict, and the New Age of Insecurity* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996); D. Deudney and R. Matthew (eds.), *Contested Ground: Security and Conflict in the New Environmental Politics* (New York: SUNY Press, 1998); K. Conca, 'The Environment-Security Trap'; See also such specialist publications as the *Environmental Security Network Newsletter* and the new journal, *Environment and Security*.

developing literature which treating security from an explicitly critical perspective.²² It is not surprising that the difficulty remains of how security can be conceived in any way that does not involve some political or moral agent, whether identity group or state or other polity or actor, which is concerned to secure its interests against threats from others. The environment itself does not have political or moral standing independently of the interests that political actors invest in it (*pace* the various ecocentric arguments for 'intrinsic value'²³). In part this is what makes the environment a special case of security: while states or peoples may feel their security is threatened by environmental change, the environment is not in the role of a threatening 'other'; indeed it is the environment itself which is threatened by human activities, and thus by extension, states. It is this latter feature which makes it possible for states and other actors to view one another as threatening to 'their' own ('national') environment, although the global dimension of environmental issues such as climate change makes this territorial perspective on the environment unsustainable. An environmental perspective on security might better reflect human concern about environmental change, the insecurity that it engenders, and the prospects for coping with it. In this sense, a full account of the complexity and centrality of environmental issues in the twenty-first century cannot distance itself from the security considerations it necessarily invokes.

Is everything an international issue?

In the age of globalization (with all its various manifestations and interpretations) we can reasonably ask if everything needs to be included in the field of International Relations, or whether we can't maintain some discrete area of investigation and some modest claim to special knowledge of, say, inter-state relations, war and peace, and sundry other topics which seem all too relevant at the close of the twentieth century. Clearly there are matters specifically of concern to national populations and governments, even in respect of global environmental change—local characteristics of adaptability and resilience, and local variations in environmental impacts, means that not everything is the same everywhere; there are national perspectives and responses, and there is not always international 'spill-over' when environmental problems arise. Yet environmental concern amongst peoples everywhere has given rise to some shared perspectives, and scientific knowledge and information about environmental change does not trouble itself much with national boundaries. It is, perhaps, the local-global dimension of environmental change that presents the greatest challenge to state-centric International Relations, since the degree to which environmental issues dominate the 'international agenda' (including transnational societal agenda) suggests that the feast has moved. Where once the great issues of

²² R. Wyn Jones, 'Message in a Bottle?' Theory and Praxis in Critical Security Studies', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 16:3 (1995); K. Booth, 'Security in Anarchy', and 'Security and Emancipation'; S. Dalby, 'Security, Modernity, Ecology'; R. Lipschutz, *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); K. Krause and M. Williams (eds.), *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1997).

²³ See R. Eekersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Towards an Ecocentric Approach* (London: UCL Press, 1992) and R. Goodin, *Green Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

world affairs could only be conceived of and addressed through the mechanisms of inter-state relations, these mechanisms now appear to be playing 'catch-up' to globalized political practices. Thus, while not everything is necessarily an 'international' issue, that in itself has little or no bearing on relative importance.

The prospects for a thorough conceptual redefinition of security, for taking a new concept of environmental security seriously, depends in part on whether there is room among the underlying assumptions of the discipline's theoretical frameworks for a genuinely global perspective. The case in point is global environmental change, which has been adopted as a social value in advance of any state identifying it as a matter of national interest.²⁴ Even where a politico-military focus is intended, public attitudes tend to force open the discussion to include environmental issues.²⁵ National interest could account well enough for the failure to establish perfect international cooperation on environmental issues (such as the slow progress in agreeing emission reductions), but it could not easily account for the significant cooperation that *has* occurred (even if through state-oriented international organizations), nor for the increasing significance of environmental change on the international agenda, without admitting at least a shift in values that has prompted a more 'enlightened self-interest'. Importantly, this version of self-interest does not rightaway invoke a military stance, and the distinction has been noted between those environmental concerns which require non-military responses and the rather limited number that might be addressed by a military response of some kind.²⁶

National interests are likely to vary greatly in the environmental context—security in this sense is related to environmental impacts, which are uneven—and responses must typically be collective in order to have the desired environmental effect, and while it is hard to say precisely what influence cultural constructions of the environment may have on conflict and cooperation, it is clear that there are differences, and this in itself suggests potential difficulties in communication. Variations in world-views (understood as cultural biases) may provide the most convincing explanations of risk perception.²⁷ So, the risks of global environmental change may be perceived in the light of particular cultural priorities or life-styles, rather than merely in terms of actual environmental degradation—indeed, what is acknowledged as a problem of environmental degradation can depend on the priorities attached to certain aspects of the environment. Importantly, this is also true of perceptions of national security.²⁸ As Rosenau argues, the dynamics of global environmental change and global social change are only examined separately for reasons of analytic con-

²⁴ R. Dunlap, G. Gallup and A. Gallup, *The Health of the Planet Survey: A Preliminary Report on Attitudes on the Environment and Economic Growth measured by Surveys of Citizens in 22 Nations to Date*, survey conducted in 1992 (Princeton, NJ: The George Gallup International Institute, 1993); L. Harris and Associates, *Public and Leadership Attitudes to the Environment: A Report of a Survey in 16 Countries*, conducted for the United Nations Environment Programme (New York, NY: Harris and Associates, 1989).

²⁵ R. Smoke (ed.), *Perceptions of Security: Public Opinion and Expert Assessments in Europe's New Democracies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 22.

²⁶ Woodrow Wilson Centre Environmental Change and Security Project, 'Critical Review of Various Conceptions of Environment and Security', on the web site at <http://ecsp.si.edu/ecsp/lib.nsf/>

²⁷ A. Wildavsky and K. Dake, 'Theories of Risk Perception: Who Fears What and Why?', *Daedalus*, 119:4 (1990).

²⁸ P. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Smoke, *Perceptions of Security*.

venience, so profound is their interaction.²⁹ Consequently, the *meaning* of global environmental change is not given by a potentially universal scientific or political consensus, but by the complex product of political cultures, ideologies, world views, and life ways.³⁰ Thus, with any increase in the salience of environmental security in relation to traditional politico-military security, the behaviour (and relative importance) of political actors will be judged by different criteria. Attempts to ameliorate defection from political consensus by bolstering the institutions of global governance will only underline the tension between existing international structures and the more various political forces created by environmental change. The point here is thus not whether 'the environment' fits into conventional categories of 'the international', but rather that 'the international' is stretched out of shape by the implications of environmental change.

Environmental security could not take the same form everywhere, nor guarantee that a global norm concerning the environment will be established—although there is 'a rising prospect that a new norm of international society will develop from an increasing concern over ecological issues'.³¹ However, the notion of environmental security opens up the possibility that such a central problem in international relations may create the conditions for transforming International Relations as a discipline. Buzan suggests that environmental security is linked to other focal points within the security problematique—military, political, economic and social—and 'concerns the maintenance of the local and the planetary biosphere as the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend'.³² The more inclusive the notion of environmental security is taken to be, the more persuasive the case for its enclosure of the conceptual field of the discipline.

Conclusions

The enclosure of the discipline by environmental security seems a tall order, but at least it provides a useful heuristic device in the form of a cautionary tale. Perhaps contrasting the security of the environment and the security of states is over-stating the case, if the main features of international relations remain unchanged or only modified.³³ The point is that the project of environmental security carries with it implications for International Relations including, potentially, the demise of the inter-state perspective on global politics (especially as this has already taken quite a beating in a broader theoretical literature).³⁴ The real difficulty is in finding compelling referents in the present to support a long term global perspective, though these might be found in the speed of technological change, in the growing awareness

²⁹ J. Rosenau, 'Environmental Challenges in a Turbulent World' in R. Lipschutz and K. Conca (eds.) *The State and Social Power in Global Environmental Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

³⁰ M. Thompson, R. Ellis and A. Wildavsky, *Cultural Theory* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1990), p. xiii.

³¹ B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, p. 172.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

³³ K. Conca, 'Environmental Change and the Deep Structure of World Politics', in Lipschutz and Conca (eds.), *The State and Social Power*.

³⁴ See, for example, R. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

of environmental degradation, in the globalization of financial markets, information and communication, and in other transnational activities.³⁵ A further difficulty is that the concept of security has already been overstretched, is in some respects *passé*,³⁶ and so may not be up to further manipulation. Still, there is the heuristic value of the exercise.

Since the concept of environmental security must reflect the great spatial and temporal span of environmental change, it diverges from the traditional concern with immediate threats to specific territories. The question is, does this invoke a disciplinary challenge to diverge accordingly? If coping with processes of change is more important than preserving time-bound and space-bound conditions, then the meaning of security, with its preservationist connotation, is directly challenged. Territorial security for delimited groups may once have been fundamental to achieving 'the good life', but it now seems more likely that the security of the global environment (incorporating localities) is the basic condition for human security. Of course, we are left with the problem of making practical provision for security once redefined, which may paradoxically require powerful states to support it; recent critical perspectives have identified this as a problem if it means that the environment becomes yet another tool of hegemonic power, and this is exacerbated by the admixture of security.³⁷ Nevertheless, these issues point to a significant shift in disciplinary focus since, simply put, if ecological politics go beyond the spatial limitations of inter-state politics (and they clearly do) then International Relations also needs to go beyond the state.³⁸ Among other things, this may require considering the 'universality' of environmental security, and the implications of this for the political agency of the state.³⁹ Naturally, we shouldn't be too ready to predict the end of the state (reports of its demise being somewhat premature), not least because while some progress has been made in relation to environmental issues when viewed as 'low politics', the sovereign prerogative of the state is quickly asserted when the 'high politics' of security are introduced.⁴⁰ Yet in the end, identifying a fixed locus of environmental security may not be an appropriate objective, since only particular interests require a secure residence, and the securing of the global environment is a common interest if ever there was one. The disciplinary difficulty is that International Relations has always had more luck in identifying the problems of common pursuits, and less in giving them coherence and credibility. In the case of environmental security there just might be enough coherence to go it alone, leaving International Relations to contemplate its increasing irrelevance. Thus we are left to ponder two alternatives. One is that the disciplinary boundaries of International Relations have always been insufficiently secure to exclude new and challenging

³⁵ P. Cerny, 'Globalization and the Changing Logic of Collective Action', *International Organization*, 49:4 (1995), pp. 595–625

³⁶ T. Sorenson, 'Rethinking National Security', *Foreign Affairs*, 69:3 (1990), p. 3.

³⁷ Conca, 'The Environment-Security Trap'.

³⁸ T. Kuehls, *Beyond Sovereign Territory: The Space of Ecopolitics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 37.

³⁹ H. Dyer, 'Environmental Security as a Universal Value: Implications for International Theory', in J. Vogler and M. Imber (eds.), *The Environment and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 1996); H. Dyer, 'International Theory and Environmental Security: Values, Interests and Agency', *Environment and Security*, 1:3 (1998), pp. 133–53.

⁴⁰ A. Clark with E. Friedman and K. Hochstetler, 'The Sovereign Limits of Global Civil Society: A Comparison of NGO Participation in UN World Conferences on the Environment, Human Rights, and Women', *World Politics*, 51 (1998).

perspectives, and this obligatory but healthy openness will allow conceptual retooling yet again, thus happily preserving this field of study as 'the discipline that never was'. The other is that entrenched assumptions will persist, and in its disciplinary efforts to grapple with the environmental challenge International Relations will be swallowed by the whale. In sum, the possibility of the enclosure of International Relations' disciplinary concerns by the concept of environmental security provokes investigation; a substantial but worthy task, as the growing literature suggests.