

The Rhetoric of Securitization: How The US Declared War on the
Environment

Caitlyn Burford

Northern Arizona University

In an official 2007 military report, a group of army generals released a statement outlining the current risks of ecological disasters on political stability. According to Georgina Banita (2008), the report focused on the continuing destruction of the natural environment and how it was becoming a threat to national security; they stated that both Global North and Global South countries were at a greater risk of political unrest due to ecological disasters than humanitarian disasters. Initially, having the military publicly raise consciousness about the hazards of environmental damage seems to be a progressive statement, particularly considering the military's gross overuse of natural resources and environmental exploitation. However, the rhetoric of the report itself framed the environment as the enemy and a growing threat to what the military refers to as the "War on Terror". The report stresses that the US should "invest more significantly in combating ecological threats" or "face their destructive political consequences in the future" (p. 126). By rhetorically framing the environment as a threat to national security, the US can shift its foreign and domestic policy, allowing the government to spend billions of dollars on a war in Iraq while Solara, a single federally funded solar panel company, goes bankrupt.

Purpose

When Hurricane Katrina flooded over the seawalls in New Orleans, the US military was unprepared. While the military spends billions of dollars training for other disasters, including physical, nuclear, or biological attacks, they were unfamiliar with how to properly address a hurricane and the many people were left stranded due to poor preventative measures (Banita, 2008). The problem is two-fold. First, the military should not be the first authority on environmental protection and preservation as we can see in their overuse and exploitation of the land. Second, the rhetoric of the military shapes nature as a threat to security and something to be fought and contained, rather than preserved and maintained. So, how did the military gain control over the environment? Their use of a rhetoric of securitization prioritizes national security over environmental security and ultimately frames nature as the most significant current threat to national security.

Military Destruction of the Environment

In discussions about environmental policy and protection, the military is rarely discussed. Often, public regulations are extended to individuals and business but the military is exempt. Additionally, in strategic environmental discussions, the focus is on domestic energy use. While these concerns are certainly significant, they are a drop in the proverbial bucket when weighed against the consumptive and destructive capabilities of the US military.

Victoria Davion (2004) points out that historically, the theaters of modern war have been located outside of populated areas. They are fought in rural areas outside of cities where there is minimal loss of human life. While human life is immediately preserved with this type of strategy, the long-term effects are felt for years after. Additionally, there is no calculus for the amount of environmental damage that takes place. In *The Peace Review*, Paul Carr (2007) discusses how the Vietnam War, which ended nearly thirty years ago, reveals a picture of the longevity of environmental damage. The use of Agent Orange led to the loss of land, livestock, and medicinal plants. There is no economic calculus for the loss of biodiversity in a region. As Agent Orange was sprayed over millions of acres of jungle, many were directly exposed to the poison and now suffer from various cancers. Children born after the war are also affected as the chemical agent seeped into the soil and has now contaminated nearly every type of agricultural production (Carr). Serbia is currently facing a similar situation with the after-effects of war. The US used chemicals such as lead, metallic mercury, sulfur dioxide, and many other dioxins as chemical weapons sprays. While the immediate effects killed thousands, the effects still occurring have assumedly killed thousands more, as the chemicals soaked through the soil and have now polluted the aquifer underneath (Joksimovich, 2000). As the aquifer is the nation's primary source of fresh water, each resident is now required to drink contaminated water decades after the war officially ended.

As evidenced by the circumstances of modern warfare, much of the weapons exchange disproportionately occurs on Global South (or economically disenfranchised) countries. These countries, such as Iraq,

Lebanon, Nicaragua, etc. are often sites of toxic waste dumps (Carr, 2007). The weapons left behind often leak radiation and chemicals into the area around them. In regards to weapons themselves, each year, an estimated 30,000 people die or are injured from landmines left behind after the US exited a battleground. These mines threaten animals in the area more than they do humans. They have killed countless elephants in Burma, brown bears in Bosnia, tigers in Cambodia, and threatened the very survival of the snow leopard and barking deer in Tibet (Carr). The Navy's use of sonar threatens many species of whales who lose their hearing and can no longer navigate around the oceans (Herpel, 2009). In one year alone, the US military bought 2 billion barrels of oil which was enough to sustain all other corporate, public, and personal energy uses in the country for twenty-two years (Mirzoeff, 2008).

While these facts and statistics can certainly stand alone and signify the harsh environmental destruction at the hands of the US military, they also expose many other issues. First, we can see how the Global South and even domestic poorer areas unfairly feel the effects of environmental devastation. Second, we can see how the effects of war on the land are felt years after the war has ended, ruining arable land and water sources virtually indefinitely. Finally, we can see how there is little to no calculus of impact on the effects of war to animals or the land. Researched by Ann Herpel (2009), the Pacific Command, the largest branch of the US military, currently controls 50% of the Earth's surface which is mostly water. From the Arctic to the African coast to the Antarctic, the Pacific Command has almost unregulated use of the natural earth. Coincidentally, this area is also considered the most at risk in global climate change. Herpel refers to this as the militarization of climate change.

The Environment as a Weapon

While many aspects of ecological devastation are considered accidental or non-intentional, the US military has often used the environment as a weapon itself. To again reference the Vietnam War, Agent Orange was strategically used to kill every living plant where it was sprayed, reducing five

million acres of jungle to a wasteland (Herpel, 2009). Without the having to fight in an unfamiliar jungle, the US gained a tactical advantage by destroying the natural land. In the Serbian War, NATO (lead by the US military) bombed an oil well and refinery near Belgrade, purposefully polluting the air, water, and land in a city of two million civilians (Joksimovich, 2000). Even now, the ecologically fragile island of Guam has been turned into a military base as the island's deep lagoons can hold large Navy carriers and ships (Herpel, 2009). Despite the after-effects of war on the environment, the US military has actually manipulated and controlled nature to become a tactical weapon itself.

War on the Environment

Under a United Nations treaty ratified by the US president in 1979, any use of the military for "hostile use of environmental modification techniques" is banned by the United Nations ("Environmental Modification Convention", 1978, Article I). Environmental modification used in war is defined as "deliberate manipulation of natural processes--the dynamics, composition or structure of the Earth, including its biota, lithosphere, hydrosphere and atmosphere, or of outer space" (Article II). Any use of environmental alteration that is part of a strategic or tactical war is considered environmental warfare (Carr, 2007). To go beyond environmental war, Volin Joksimovich (2000) defines deliberate ecocide as the conscious destruction of the environment to achieve war goals. War permanently scars the landscape. But even with a UN treaty in place, there is no way to pursue conviction of environmental war crimes. The damage is often immeasurable. But how does the US continue to get away with deliberate acts of environmental war? The UN treaty goes on to state that "the provisions of this Convention shall not hinder the use of environmental modification techniques for peaceful purposes" ("Environmental Modification Convention", 1978, Article III). This sets up a distinction between environmental damage for war purposes and environmental damage for peaceful purposes. With this stipulation, all that the US military must do is justify that their actions are for intended peace and the military can bypass all

UN regulations. This is the strategy behind just war theory and shows its dangers.

Moral Justification of Destruction: An Ecofeminist Framework

Victoria Davion (2004) uses an ecofeminist lens to critique The Earth Charter, a UN-initiated charter that attempts to set up a global ethic for environmental care. She describes ecofeminism as a theoretical method that looks at the political and ethical links between the oppression of women and the oppression of the environment. When looking to Carol Adams (2000) and *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, the oppression of women is apparent in the global struggle for food. With increasing climate change comes increasing famine and scarcity of food. In these instances women (and often children) are unfairly disadvantaged and starve at higher and quicker rates than men who often control the food distribution. The burden of environmental damage is often placed on people of color; domestically, the US military uses poor areas and/or Native American land to test weapons and dispose of radioactive waste. Internationally, the US military places the burden of consumption on Global South countries. Vandana Shiva (1989) has argued that western-style development programs have actually increased global poverty. While this affects both sexes, women are often unfairly affected as much of the responsibility of gathering food and water and caring for children is placed on them. This intersectionality between the oppression of women, people of color, and the environment calls for an ecofeminist critique of the US military and its environmental rhetoric that frames nature as a security threat.

Military Patriarchy

According to Mary Clark (2004), there are roughly 200 nation states around the world. All are either directly or indirectly controlled by military power. When a people are dominated by a military power, it eliminates all other viewpoints from the conversation. Because military weaponry will always be the dominant force of control and power, a military presence will always exert hegemonic masculinity over other voices. The US military uses its hegemonic power to force weaker nations into cooperation even when

the military is not directly used. For example, even though military intervention was not used in Jamaica, the threat and power of the US military still forced and coerced Jamaica into signing unfair and unwanted economic agreements. Even though there are many countries that do not have or directly rely on a military, they are still subject to the international laws and economics controlled by the military-wielding nations (mostly in the Global North). Smaller nations are powerless and forced to cooperate with another larger and dominant nation.

According to Clark (2004), patriarchy in this context cannot be simplified to men's oppression over women; rather, patriarchy used in a global context represents larger societies that express gender dominance as well as class and racial dominance, with a small elite group controlling the rest of the society. Western democracies, therefore, are patriarchal in their electoral set up. These democracies, because they are governed by an elite few, need to secure their power. Thus, there is a need for a military. The creation of the military-industrial-complex is based off of the belief that evil is inherent in the world and must be dominated and controlled. If evil exists, then a military can be justified because it will be needed for protection. In order to justify military use and secure leadership, an external "evil" must be created (Clark). For example, immediately after September 11, 2001, the US rallied together in a communal cry for justice/revenge. By creating an "Other", or Iraq and Afghanistan in this case, as an external threat the military is justified in its actions in the name of national security. Security becomes the top of the hierarchy of priorities. For example, if US rights were taken away before September 11, there would have been protests in the streets. However, after the "War on Terror" created the ultimate Other that posed a threat, the rights of US citizens were taken away with little or no opposition under the guise of national security.

Western Dualisms: Security vs. the Environment

One key element of ecofeminism is that it challenges Western dualisms. Ingrained in much of western thought is the duality of elements as two opposing forces. Davion (2004) uses examples of these dualisms such as

masculine/feminine, civilized/primitive, human/nature, and reason/nature. These dualisms are largely based on a moral hierarchy. When there are two opposed forces, one of them is necessarily considered morally superior. The masculine is seen as superior to the feminine, reason is superior to emotion, and humans are superior to nature. In order for the US military, the US government, and the international community to allow and condone the military's war on the environment, they have to deem that war ethically superior to the alternative. This has set up a framework for discourse that pits national security against environmental protection. The rhetoric surrounding the US military has created a dualism between security and the environment, where security takes the moral high ground.

The Rhetoric of Security

According to Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011), post 9/11, much of US foreign policy and military rhetoric has been classified as the "clash of civilizations" or the war between the West and the Islamic world. Mirzoeff claims that this focus of rhetoric on counterinsurgency has displaced climate change as the central issue of focus. The media is constantly circulating images of counterinsurgency politics, using images of war to create a visual spectacle that makes the counterinsurgency appear "real". Climate change, on the other hand, is harder to see. While there is scientific proof that the ocean levels have risen significantly around islands in the Pacific, one cannot "see" a few centimeters of increase in the water level. These images are not circulated around media outlets. In this sense, the counterinsurgency is a visible threat and climate change remains invisible. Mirzoeff uses just war theory to examine how the US military acts. There are two types of war: offensive and self-defensive. Offensive wars have been virtually condemned and disallowed by the global community in a series of treaties and agreements. Wars fought out of self-defense however are another story. Self-defense is justified if it can assume the moral high ground.

A rhetoric of national security is needed to justify offensive wars in the name of self-defense. The military has adopted an unofficial mantra of "better safe than sorry" (Banita, 2008). This phrase is circulated and used

around departments when making decisions and even in official guidebooks instructing soldiers how to act. This phrase justifies and necessitates pre-emptive actions. In a modern era of global conflict, "terrorism" is an elusive concept. There is no concrete or clear threat. This means that preemptive measures are justified even if no real threat exists.

The Rhetorical Hierarchy: The Prioritization of Security

This rhetoric of securitization has been widely applied to the environment. Since the Iraqi invasion was justified to find oil and increase US oil security, criticisms of environmental damage have been largely ignored. In Iraq, the US military has been responsible for igniting and destroying roughly 600 oil wells in the region (Carr, 2007). Not only did this deplete the region of natural resources but it created long-term damage to the local populations who have seen an increase in birth defects and cancer, both related to the oil fires as well as depleted-uranium remnants left behind by weapons use (Banita, 2008). In all of these instances, damage to people and the earth are seen as necessary side effects of ensuring national security.

The phrase "Shock and Awe" was used to describe the destructive bombing of Baghdad, rhetorically framing the action as a necessary attack. The destruction became key to security (Carr 2007). The phrase "collateral damage" signifies the same meaning. Collateral damage is the technical term used to refer to the accidental or non-intentional damage that occurs in military action. This includes civilian lives lost, damage to civilian buildings, or damage to the environment. This phrase again necessitates destruction and relieves the US military of responsibility. Even if damage to the environment is intentional (i.e. Agent Orange) it is framed as a necessary side effect of insuring security. Recently, in Guam, Admiral Thomas Fargo has dramatically increased military facilities on the island despite warnings and concerns expressed by the Environmental Protection Agency (Herpel, 2009). The Admiral said that Guam was a key area for military strategy and that the potential loss of an ecosystem was less important than the military controlling its "area of responsibility" (p. 653). This phrase used by Admiral Fargo made the US military responsible for the security of nearby nations.

The ethics of responsibility again bolster the moral superiority of securitization over environmental protection.

In light of Hurricane Katrina, documents were found that reported the dangerous condition of the ocean levees two years before the hurricane hit (Carr, 2007). The situation raised many discussions over poverty and racial discrimination that led to no preventative action and a slow response time by the government and the military (2007). While the levees decomposed, the US military was spending \$700 billion a year in foreign wars (Herpel, 2009). While the hurricane left thousands without food, water, or shelter, the US military was overextended in Iraq and Afghanistan insuring national "security". The only way environmental issues are considered by the US military is if they are rhetorically framed as a threat. Under the Clinton/Gore administration, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said, "Our citizens cannot be secure if the air we breathe, the food we grow, and the water we drink are at risk because the global environment is in danger" (Joksimovich, 2000, p. 143) Although the Clinton/Gore administration did make significant steps in raising awareness about environmental problems, their discourse was still used in a way that framed the environment as an enemy that had to be stopped. What better way to stop an enemy than to increase military power?

Trying to Blend Security and Ecology: The Difficulty With Ecopolitics

Because environmental devastation is such a clear threat to the global community and has even been referred to as a threat against US national security, Banita (2008) advocates a position for ecological politics, or ecopolitics. Because natural events like Katrina can lead to political unrest, Banita suggests that the military begin to train and prepare of ecological disasters. There are hopeful elements to her suggestion. With an ecopolitics perspective, there is a focus on environmental influence that expresses how interconnected the world is. Within this viewpoint, it is impossible to justify capitalist or neoliberalist economic agendas because they become ethically

impossible in an interconnected world. Banita advocates a “new politics” or a “different ecological approach”:

“. . . one that draws connections between the technological and political virtuality on the one end, and the locality or re-territorialization on the other. This aim is to make room for a form of ecology that not only includes militarist action but could also take steps toward harnessing such action in the direction of environmentally ethical purposes” (p. 128).

The seemingly well-intentioned vision of a new ecopolitics has many inherent problems in its rhetoric. First, given the basis of military framework and environmental damage, it seems impossible that any military action could be used towards environmentally ethical purposes. The problem is that the hierarchy is already in place and trying to merge the military and the environmental movement will only allow environmental politics to be completely governed by the same securitization rhetoric that the US military uses.

The problem is, ecopolitics has already been tried and failed. The US military and the Department of Defense already control many of the environmental organizations in the United States. The Army Corp of Engineers was put in charge of building and maintaining the New Orleans levees, an inherently environmental concern in which the military engineers treated the water as an external threat that had to be kept out, rather than part of a larger problem of rising sea levels and global climate change. The engineers would refer to the water as the “enemy” and would compare the levees to a “fortress” when they were constructing the project (Mirzoeff, 2011).

Additionally, the US military has already proven that its actions taken toward any sort of environmental sustainability are a farce. The Earth Charter was a charter initiated by the United Nations as a collaborative international treaty that was committed to promote ecological development and sustainability along with eradicating environmental poverty around the globe (Davion, 2004). The charter goes on to state that the military must avoid

destructive activities and eliminate nuclear, biological, and toxic waste. While the US signed the Earth Charter, there is one clause that allows them to continue acting as they are. The charter includes the rhetoric that "building democracy" around the world is a key part of the charter (Davion, 2004, p. 117). Under this analysis, the US military can assist in building democracy by continuing to weaponize different areas and pursue global wars as is business per usual. Furthermore, according to the UN Charter, "Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense" (United Nations Charter, Chapter VII, Article 51). Again, a rhetoric of self-defense and securitization justifies the avoidance of international environmental law.

Even within the United States, the military avoids domestic environmental protection laws. For example, the Marine Mammal Protection Act requires all individuals and businesses to obtain a permit before capturing or purposefully killing a whale or dolphin. However, under the Defense Authorization Amendment, the Navy is excluded from these requirements (Davion, 2004). Not only are whale populations threatened as the sonar kills them, but these mammals have been turned into weapons themselves. Dolphins have been trained to swim with .45-caliber guns attached to their snouts. After firing, the dolphins would lose their hearing and sense of direction and drown. Even though many of the military violations and infringements on environmental law are hidden, it is painfully clear that environmental law has no control over the US military as long as a rhetoric of securitization is prevalent.

Is the Military the New Face of Humanitarian Aid?

Even with the reality showing that the US military functions as a threat to the environment, many public and political figures argue that the military has to be at the forefront of the environmental movement. According to U.S. Representative James Leach: "*only* the Department of Defense has the logistics, capacities, as well as a chain of command, that can really deal with disasters" (Herpel, 2009, p. 661). As Guam continues to face flooding due to rising sea levels, the military has been commissioned to develop a climate

change strategy. Their method? They are using Seabees (a branch of the Navy Seals) to build higher and higher seawalls to combat the rising waters. As Phaedra Pezullo (2007) writes, many common problems with environmental movements are that they address the effect and not the cause. The cause of the rising sea levels is global climate change which needs to be addressed on an international level, regulating consumption and military practices. Instead, in both Guam and New Orleans, money and effort is put into building walls, to attack the effect of a problem that we continue to create.

The US military continues to try and function as a humanitarian aid organization. In 2004, the military was responsible for aid to Indonesia in light of the Tsunami. In 2005, the military responded to the India/Pakistan earthquake. In 2007, the US military went to Bangladesh to repair broken villages due to the cyclone (Herpel, 2009). The military has begun to train itself to fight the environment. The Pentagon is now supposed to function as a protective agency between humans and nature. If the rhetoric of the military and military securitization continues to define public and environmental policy, then this is a battle the military will not win.

Conclusion

Using an ecofeminist lens to challenge the moral dualisms created by Western cultures, we can see how the dualism between national security and environmental sustainability has been created. Though this is a false dichotomy, an either/or scenario that shouldn't exist, it is reinforced and upheld through securitization rhetoric. US policy has been largely governed by national security in light of the global "War on Terror", created to justify US military interventions. This places national security as the top priority; if the environment is hurt in the process, it is simply referred to as "collateral damage". Additionally, this rhetoric shapes nature to be an enemy of security. For example, energy stability is a national security issue, not an environmental issue. Soon, clean water will become a vital and valuable resource that will be the cause of many conflicts and struggles over access to it. If the US military continues to use securitization rhetoric to justify

environmental exploitation and invasion, the war over water will be one dominated by a hegemonic patriarchal military force. To end the securitization rhetoric, we have to break the prioritization of security over the environment. Instead of using the words "collateral damage" to refer to environmental destruction by the military, we can call it "criminal negligence" (Joksimovich, 2000, p. 142). Perhaps these strategic rhetorical devices will eventually change the way we view both the military and the environment, and how the two should interact.

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