**Forum:** General Assembly I

**Issue:** Addressing the Exploitation of Conflict Resources

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Introduction

Possessing a large amount of natural resources is generally considered a blessing for nation states. Extraction of resources, whether it be fossil fuels or valuable minerals, should have tremendous positive economic impacts for all countries. However, for many resource-rich nations, possession of such valuable materials may actually become a curse. In the competitive industrialized and increasingly globalized world, ownership of highly sought after resources can indeed bring more harm than good, leading to problems including corruption, unequal distribution of wealth, and violent conflict.

Dating most clearly to the industrial revolution and subsequent imperial age in the late nineteenth century, the role of resources in conflict has been increasingly obvious, and more recently has transformed due to global changes in forms of armed conflict. Although natural resources are rarely the single cause of conflict, since 1990, there have been at a minimum 18 major violent conflicts worldwide identified as fueled by the exploitation of natural resources. Issues involving natural resources and conflicts are explained by Achim Steiner, the Executive Director of United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), to correlate in three primary ways. Firstly, competition for natural resources can be seen as a clear and direct cause of conflict. Secondly, the presence of resources may intensify or prolong conflicts that initially stemmed from other proximate causes. Lastly, discovery of natural resources may revive previous conflicts that had thought to have been resolved. In the last 60 years, the UNEP suggests that at least 40% of all domestic conflicts have had a link to these “conflict resources.”

The expanded global supply networks of the twentieth and twenty-first century, necessitating exploitation of numerous commodifiable particularly those found in the subsoil (minerals and fuel), funds some of the world’s most brutal conflicts. Resources from countries ranging from Afghanistan to Colombia to the Democratic Republic of Congo provide funding to armed groups, who frequently wage violent struggle for these materials leading to human rights violations and/or irreparable environmental deterioration. These resources then work their way into global supply chains, being found in seemingly innocuous places as component parts of our phones, computers, or jewelry, with consumers of these products often completely unaware of the fact that these products help fund violence across borders - thereby contributing to the theme of a “complacency crisis” worldwide.

Definition of Key Terms

**Conflict Resources**

The term “conflict resources” applies to natural resources found and extracted in conflict zones, afterward typically sold by terrorist or militia groups to multinational corporations, resulting in the intensification or perpetuation of warfare.

**Conflict Zones**

A conflict zone is an area where violence happened or is happening with military involvement.

**Consumerism**

Consumerism refers to a social and economic order, which, in an effort to support customers, encourages the acquisition of goods and services, which leads to mass production and consumption. The concurrent rise in overall global wealth and reduction in extreme poverty of the last half-century, coupled with mass communication and marketing, means that consumerism has become a dominant expression of popular culture affecting nearly all global regions and markets in varying degrees.

History & Developments

**Culture of consumerism**

Consumerism is doubtlessly a root cause of resource conflict. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, as rising living standards encourage members of global society to purchase material objects ranging from daily essentials to luxury purchases, the desire for access to materials with which to produce these goods climbs ever higher. Although such commodifiable resources are spread unevenly throughout the world, it is often in developing countries where the impact of their existence will most often lead to instability or outright conflict. As begun during the age of imperialism stretching back to the 16th through 19th centuries, but through more modern and interconnected ways, large corporations exert pressure or influence most readily in politically and economically vulnerable areas. As the extractive industries in formerly colonized areas are often controlled by some sort of power group (for example a paramilitary or terrorist group), such groups seek through force to monopolize and then sell resources to these corporations for a profit. The resultant profits and dependence are the reason for the continued survival of the power group (whether that be a corporation or militia), and with it can emerge a cycle of exploitation and/or warfare. Perhaps the most recognizable examples of this situation are seen in the oil and mining sectors: oil remains the fuel driving energy and transportation worldwide, while material views and simple scarcity of precious stones or rare earth minerals are always in high demand. As long as society demands an ever increasing amount of goods, such resources will drive competition, which can spill over into armed conflict without proper international commitments to peace or oversight in the extractive process.

**The Congo War**

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a massive country, equivalent to the size of Western Europe. It is home to an abundance of copper, gold, diamonds, cobalt, and other natural resources. It is also home to the world’s “bloodiest conflict since World War II” and the most notable example of a conflict based on natural resources. The First Congo War started in 1996, which led to an outright Civil War lasting until 2003. Since then, there has been continuous conflict. The control of mining areas continues to shift between different armed groups and units of the Congo Military. The fight for control over the resources has worsened the conflict, which has led to greater difficulty in managing the resources to benefit the public. In northeastern provinces, local militia groups and foreign rebel forces terrorize the region. Due to the 1994 Rwandan genocide, around 700,000 refugees fled to the DRC border, on the edges of the Virunga National Park. They increase the consumption of resources in this region, which negatively impacts the environment, for example by mass deforestation.

Oil and gas in Aceh, Indonesia

In 1971, there was discovery of vast amounts of oil and natural gas reserves in Aceh, Indonesia. The local ethnic group in the area is called the Acehnese. Production of gas gave a lot of money to Indonesia’s central government, but there was little to no benefits for the locals. With the expansion of production, many Acehnese were forced to relocate as factories took over their villages. Also, there was a significant influx of non-Acehnese and non-Muslim workers hired to work and handle the gas and oil machinery, and the government hired thousands of Indonesians that are not from Aceh as security guards in the factories. This made the locals infuriated at the government due to widespread mistreatment. In 1976, the Free Aceh Movement started an insurgency movement; it lasted for almost 30 years. The government responded with a massive demonstration of force, and in the end, 10,000 to 30,000 people were killed. Up until the 1990s, when Indonesia went through another interval of becoming democratic, there were no meaningful ventures to try and settle the battle. Thereafter many mediations were conducted, which eventually all failed. At last, in 2005, with the prior Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari and his Crisis Management Strategy, the Acehnese and the Indonesia government came to the conclusion that Aceh had the right to retain 70% of the revenue gained from oil and gas generated from the region from the last 8 years, and in the future, the revenues would be equally divided among the local Aceh's and the Indonesian government.

Panguna Copper Mine

The Panguna Mine is located in Bougainville, a province of Papua New Guinea. It operated from 1972 until 1989, and was closed down due to violent conflict which erupted between 1988 and 1997. Before it closed, the mine provided 9% of Papua New Guinea’s gross national product, additionally, with it being one of the biggest holes dug by men in the world. Conflict began because of the adverse impact on the environment due to the mine, the low positions that local workers held in the mines, the lack of profits from the mines going directly to the locals, and the potentially destabilizing influx of migrants to the region, taking away jobs from the locals. In 1988, the villages next to the mine asked for requitals for the environmental degradation that the mine already caused and was causing. They demanded for the locals to control the mine for 5 years, claiming that the mine was responsible for poisoning an entire river, causing birth deformities, in addition to the extinction of a bird species named the flying fox from Papua New Guinea. The local community only received 0.5-1.25% of the accumulated revenue from the mine. Eventually, these negotiations prompted the way to an exacerbation of violent conflict between the locals and the government. They created the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), in which the government responded to this with the instituting of groups against the BRA, otherwise called the Resistance Forces. Civil War erupted in the island causing the shutdown of the mine.

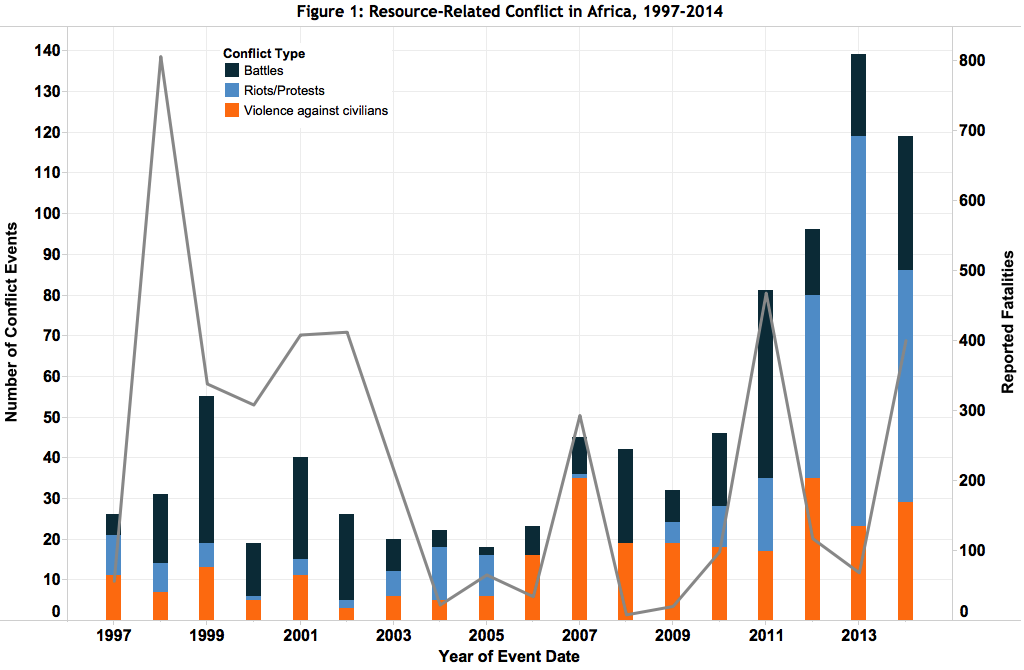


Figure #1: This graph shows Resource-Related conflicts in Africa, demonstrating a general increase from 1997-2013 with the number of conflicts as well as the number of reported fatalities.

Geopolitics

**International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict**

November 6th was declared in 2001 by the UN General Assembly as the day to raise awareness of the devastation as well as the exploitation of the environment which occurs during and after warfare. On this day, people from all kinds of different specialties such as journalists, teachers, etc., come together to discuss the damaging effects already happening to the environment, and possible ways of mitigating this from happening. Multiple articles are published, speeches are given, and many radios address the issue on this day. Combined with activities in classrooms, these instances take place to inform a broader spectrum of audiences, and to educate children from a young age. In addition, it is a day for the UN to reinforce and stress the importance on an action plan for the environment, with it being part of preventing conflict.

**Central African Republic (CAR)**

One of the most well-known examples of global trade, exploitation of natural resources, and resultant conflict stems from the Central African Republic. Diamonds which originated in that area notoriously earned the name of blood diamonds, in reference to the blood spilled in the CAR due to international trade of such precious stones. As one of the poorest countries in the world, it has been plagued with religious conflicts between Muslim Rebels and Christian Militias since the end of 2012. Although the government placed a ban on diamond exports from the CAR in an attempt to stem this conflict, the trade is still ongoing as it states nothing about trading and selling diamonds within the CAR. Another reason the trade cannot be stopped is because tens of thousands of lives depend on it for their continued survival as they have no other job, demonstrating that a quick fix is unrealistic. As both parties of the religious conflict stand to benefit immensely from the trade in conflict diamonds, bringing the violence to an end will necessitate sustainable economic solutions.

**Belgium**

Western corporations, most especially for example those with headquarters in Belgium (a major former colonial power in the Central African region dating from the late nineteenth century), are among the leading corporations purchasing diamonds and other resources found in the Congo and Central African Republic. They enter the picture inside the CAR and pre-emptively buy the diamonds for millions of dollars, often using channels that skirt regulatory agencies. Although the UN recently imposed sanctions on two Belgian companies, much more action needs to be taken to prevent these large corporations from taking advantage of situations in war-torn countries solely for bringing profit to their own shores. They buy the diamonds with little questioning about sourcing, and market these diamonds as “precious” and “very valuable.” A crucial step towards solving this problem is to educate or alternatively penalize the behavior of such corporations, as will be outlined below.

**Afghanistan**

Afghanistan is another example of a resource-rich country suffering from conflict due to what might otherwise be perceived as a blessing. Because of the trillions of dollars in resources that may be available, 60% of the country’s budget is provided by foreign donors. However, it’s also a country with no mining culture, a corrupted government, with no idea how to support a trillion-dollar business. Logar is a province in Afghanistan and currently, it is where all sides of the Afghan conflict reside and intersect. However, it is also home to one of the world’s largest untapped copper deposits. This is important because if opened, the copper deposit will likely be used to fuel war as Afghanistan is in the middle of a civil war. A Chinese company has owned the rights to the mine since 2007, the Taliban (an insurgency group made up of Sunni fundamentalist Islam who are currenting carrying on war inside Afghanistan) ignores the rights of the Chinese company and controls the area with the copper mine. To this day, nothing has happened, and the Chinese company didn’t tap the deposits yet due to the Taliban presence in the area.

**South Sudan**

South Sudan’s ongoing civil war since December 2013 due to competition for natural resources and climate change has hindered their path towards peace and development as a newly constituted nation. According to the UNEP, the war continues to threaten the lives of more than 10 million people, already claiming thousands of lives, as well as creating millions of refugees. Oil, water, minerals and trees are the main resources involved, and in 2018, the US imposed sanctions on 15 oil-related companies based from South Sudan due to their contribution to the ongoing war and humanitarian crisis. South Sudanese President Salva Kiir stated that a lack of environmental standards and guidelines to safeguard the exploration and exploitation in mining industries has led to pollution in oil fields, and that South Sudan needs help from the international community, especially countries that successfully sustain and manage such industries and resources.

**Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan**

The Nile River is the world’s longest river, flowing through ten countries in northeastern Africa. Since the 1800s, it has been subject to various geopolitical disputes, and numerous treaties were put into place to prevent conflict from happening. Water in this region (and increasingly in all others) is a precious resource, one that has caused conflict in the past and will likely cause conflict in the future. Egypt is the country most reliant on the river, and has sustained itself for around 5,000 years utilizing its flow for agriculture. On the other hand, Ethiopia, whose tributaries provide 86% of the Nile’s waters, plans to build a dam in these headwaters to generate electricity and boost economic opportunity. Seleshi Bekele, Ethiopia’s minister for water, irrigation and electricity, says that it’s not about controlling the flow of the river, but instead giving opportunities for energy development. He also stated that it provides a lot of benefit for downstream countries. Sudan, one of such, welcomes the creation of the dam, but Egypt does not on the grounds that it will lose control of and/or access to vital water supply. Their minister of water resources and irrigation states that if the water coming to Egypt is reduced by 2%, the country will lose around 200,000 acres of arable land. One acre makes at least one family survive, and in Egypt, each family is around 5 people. Mathematically speaking this means that one million Egyptians could be left jobless. Negotiations between the two countries continue without success. With the dam currently 2/3 of the way toward completion, in the absence of negotiated regional or international settlement Egypt may see a form of military action as the only remaining solution.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Due to the alarming amount of conflicts stemming from competition for natural resources, in 2007 the European Union (EU) partnered up with the UN to build capacity for land, natural resources, and conflict prevention. The United Nations Interagency Framework for Preventative Action is the group which oversees the project, and it is funded by the EU’s Instrument for Stability. Together, this project brings together many departments and UN agencies, which together support countries affected to improve natural resource management during conflicts and peacebuilding. The partnership furthermore created guidance notes and training material upon the subject and also an analysis on the sustainable management of land and resources within the UN.

Mediating Natural Resource Conflicts was another collaborative research project involving the issue undertaken by the Policy and Mediation Division of the UN as well as the UNEP’s Environmental Cooperation for Peace-building Initiative. It is another guide which references successfully mediated resource conflicts, drawing on the experience of 30 mediators gathered at the UN in New York, who provided more insight and sharing of experience. The guide drawn up is also an extension of the conflict prevention research created by the EU and UN partnership as aforementioned. It also addresses case studies and practices established within the global framework in handling such situations.

The G8 Africa Action Plan has also made some commitments towards the issue of resource conflict. The plan, under section 1 of Promoting Peace and Security, supports the UN and other initiatives to monitor and address exploitation of natural resources from Africa, as well as supporting voluntary control efforts such as the Kimberly Process for diamonds. (The Kimberly Process was adopted in UN General Assembly’s Resolution 55/56 as a process to prevent conflict diamonds from entering the mainstream diamond market. This process, however, has courted much controversy as to whether it is actually helpful; in order for a country to become a participant, they must endorse a System of Warranties, which all buyers and sellers have to state on their invoice that the diamonds for sale are from legitimate sources complying with the UN. There were 81 countries participating in 2013. Failure to abide by the system results in expulsion. However, there have been many loopholes found in the process, one including billions of dollars’ worth of diamonds being looted through tax havens. Therefore, many organizations pulled out of the process, such as the Global Witness.) In addition, the plan states to ensure better accountability and transparency towards the import and export of natural resources from areas of conflict, and promote regional management of trans-boundary natural resources. The G8 Africa Action Plan has already been quite successful at strengthening institutions and human capital, and there are high hopes towards making headway with the exploitation of natural resources as well.

Possible Solutions

The first step towards solving this issue is to establish a **clear definition** for the phrase “conflict resources.” Currently, there is no direct metric for measuring or categorizing conflict resource wars apart from other types of conflict. Member nations should collaborate with each other to create this definition, and to be sure that all conflicts involving such will be included. With the creation of a definition, these conflicts can finally be classified and determined, and there will be case studies to see the most effective way of tackling these issues.

Next, there should be a **coherent framework created to assist with the protection of natural resources**. There should be laws and regulations in place to prevent these resources from getting exploited in the first place. There needs to be strict guidelines in which the mining industry must follow, which will help maintain transparency. Instead of focusing on foreign forces coming in to resolve these conflicts, change needs to be implemented from inside the country first.

Additionally, **corporations must be punished**. The reason militias and terrorist groups are getting money is because the resources are being funneled out of, for example, the CAR to corporations, who buy the minerals from these militias and sell it to customers. Therefore, they are the reason that the terrorists are funded and are the root cause of the problem. The International Criminal Court (ICC) needs to prosecute these corporate actors for the war crime of pillage. There also needs to be **more transparency** inside these corporations: where their resources came from, what methods they used to obtain them, etc. Corporate criminal laws should be reformed, and states should look more often inside corporations to ensure that they are abiding to the laws. States should also work harder to deter prosecution of a single individuals, and instead encourage the prosecution of the corporation as a whole.

Delegates should also work towards **mitigating terrorism and militia groups**. In doing this, nations should confer with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee, in addition to strengthening coordination and collaboration between nations facing terrorism to combat such crimes. One of the key aspects is to also stop the spread and recruitment of militia groups and terrorism. Most conflicts are stemmed from misunderstanding related to religion and ethnicities, so nations should arrange meetings under the supervision of the UN, to promote tolerance and respect for both parties, or should have third-party mediators come and mediate the conflict. Nations involved should also take advantage of frameworks already provided towards counterterrorism and adopting and enforcing them.

Especially with Third World countries, they need to **learn how to better manage resources**. Mismanagement of resources leads to their exploitation, and to solve this, countries should create good-fit policies tailored to their own nation instead of adopting pre-written best-practices. Capacity building should be implemented for the development and application of mining or extraction industries. The UN should set up workshops which help aid and guide these countries towards successful resource management and training.

Lastly, the UN should work towards **reforming the global supply chain**. With a lack of trackability, it is one of the main reasons conflict diamonds can make it onto the mainstream market. A way to increase this is by creating a blockchain network, which is a shared network where utilizers can dispense and reserve information. They can track transactions as they are happening. A major advantage of this system is that it is unable to be hacked or corrupted, and once information is on the network, it stays there forever. It would streamline global supply chain operations and make it harder for corruption to occur inside a corporation. With the implementation of a blockchain network, it will also be harder for militias or terrorist groups to sell exploited resources in the mainstream market.

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