

The Link Between Ecology and War

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When it comes to their energy consumption, industrialized Western nations are like a big kid who suffers from a serious addiction to sweets. Even though he has a mountain of chocolate at home, he fights to the finish for another bar.

The opinion by ecologists that was attached to the High Court of Justice petition against the separation fence raised questions about the connection between ecology, war and peace, and touched on concerns of green organizations in Israel and abroad, regarding their social and political roles.

Is there any justification for worry about a healthy environment when the world is torn apart by war? And, alternatively, is it worth fighting and winning a war just to discover the environment in which we will live has been ruined and polluted beyond redemption? And are there other connections between these two concerns?

After the first Gulf war, global green organizations issued a thick volume reporting on pollution and damage to natural ecosystems in Kuwait, Iraq, the Arab Gulf, the Indian Ocean and, of course, the atmosphere. The conclusion was clear: The war was a polluting event on an enormous scale - a fact that may be true but does little to advance the discussion. Most people do not need scientific reports to make the environment another reason, and not necessarily the most important, to be against wars.

The issue of the connection between the environment and war and peace is even more acute when the war is over resources. Many refuse to believe that the U.S. attacked Iraq to guarantee the reliable, cheap supply of oil from the Persian Gulf and natural gas from the Caspian Sea. Many also ignore the role of the

oil, gas and coal reserves in the ethnic struggles in the Caucasus.

But nobody can deny that the stability of oil-rich regions like the Middle East, central Asia and East Europe is a central element in the defense policies of many important countries. And that brings us to some of the most fateful environmental issues of our time.

The elixir of life that keeps Western civilization going is fossil fuels - oil, gas, coal - burned in huge amounts by cars, power stations and factories. One by-product is global warming, diagnosed by the Pentagon - among others - as a threat to global safety. Another by-product is growing dependence on the steady supply of the raw fuel, forcing the producing countries to want to be involved in global geopolitical developments.

In the 1970s, the environmental discourse was focused on the dwindling natural resources of the entire planet as a single unit. Now the discourse is about how those resources are divided up among the countries and inside them. When the wealthy industrialized nations organize their global security concepts to guarantee free access to energy sources, and when their overuse of those resources accelerates the pace of global warming, an absurd situation results: Armies go out to occupy or safeguard oil reserves, while unbridled exploitation of those reserves could even threaten the victors.

When it comes to their energy consumption, industrialized Western nations are like a big, strong kid who suffers from a serious addiction to sweets. Even though he has a mountain of chocolate at home, he fights to the finish for another bar. The poor countries are like his hopeless rivals: the skinny kid, weak and hungry, who fights for the candy because it gives him another day or week of life. Making peace between the two children will continue to be hopeless as long as the big kid isn't weaned from the addiction.

And, to keep the metaphor going, an energy

crisis for an economy that has become addicted to oil is very similar to what happens to a sugar-obsessed child forced to go cold turkey. To satisfy the uncontrollable hunger for the stuff, even an otherwise reasonable personality, with reasonable values, could deteriorate to senseless violence.

That is one possible junction, where environmental thinking emphasizing consumer restraint meets political positions trying to prevent wars. A global agreement on the implementation of the Kyoto Protocols, which would reduce solid fuel emissions by significant percentages - among other ways by reducing consumption and production of electricity, transportation, and more - could go a long way toward advancing world peace.