Transnational Threats to National Security: Daniel Deudney's Case Against Linking Environmental Degradation and National Security

David P. Fidler[1]

1. Introduction

1.1 The Working Group's Mandate and Daniel Deudney's Essay

1.   The Princeton Project on National Security tasked the Working Group on State Security and Transnational Threats (Working Group) with identifying the primary transnational threats to U.S. national security in the 21st century. The Working Group's mandate covers a potentially large number of transnational threats to state security that do not involve, or directly derive from, interstate conflict and war. The number and diversity of transnational threats, combined with their status as non-traditional threats to state security, raise two fundamental questions which the Working Group has to address. First, how should the Working Group define national security? Second, what transnational threats fall within the chosen definition of national security?

2.   These questions have, of course, been part of the debates about the meaning of "national security" and "security" since at least the 1980s. From the rich literature contributing to these debates, the Co-Chairs[2] of the Working Group selected a 1990 essay by Daniel Deudney—"The Case Against Linking Environmental Degradation and National Security"[3]—to consider in more detail because Deudney's analysis goes to the heart of fundamental questions facing the Working Group. The Co-Chairs of the Working Group commissioned this paper in order to inform the deliberations of the Working Group not only on whether environmental degradation is a national security issue but also on the broader conceptual and policy challenges posed by thinking about transnational threats through the lens of national security. In short, Deudney's analysis provides a classic challenge to the nature of the Working Group's mandate.

1.2 Overview of the Paper's Analysis

3.   This paper first summarizes the three major arguments Deudney makes in his essay, namely (1) linking environmental degradation to national security is analytically

---

[1] Member, Working Group on State Security and Transnational Threats, Princeton Project on National Security and Professor of Law and Harry T. Ice Faculty Fellow, Indiana University School of Law, Bloomington.

[2] Peter Bergen of the New America Foundation and CNN and Laurie Garrett of the Council on Foreign Relations.

[3] Daniel Deudney, "The Case Against Linking Environmental Degradation and National Security," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (1990); 19: 461-476.

flawed because such degradation does not connect to protecting the state from violence from other states; (2) environmental degradation is unlikely to cause war between states; and (3) appealing to national security to increase attention on environmental problems subordinates environmental interests and values to "national security mindsets" [p. 469] incapable of appreciating the central messages of environmentalism (Part 2). Deudney's arguments combine to reject the linkage between environmental degradation and national security both analytically and normatively. The paper explores the relevance of Deudney's arguments for the larger task of thinking about transnational threats as national security problems (Part 3).

4.   The paper then analyzes each of Deudney's arguments in detail, focusing on problems and questions that his approach raises (Part 4). Two of Deudney's three arguments depend on his acceptance of a definition of national security that those who link environmental degradation and national security would contest. Deudney's third argument then curiously advises environmentalists not to appeal to a definition of national security that is "of dubious value" in the "emerging post-industrial civilisation." [p. 469] However, by contesting traditional perspectives on national security, those linking environmental degradation and national security had already concluded that these traditional perspectives were suspect.

5.   The effort to re-conceptualize national security, as attempted in literature on non-traditional, transnational threats to states, flows to a large extent from perceptions that more conventional definitions of national security have become analytically and normatively questionable as policy guides. Deudney's essay admits the validity of this perception but nevertheless continues to utilize the traditional definition of national security to critique efforts that challenge the conventional wisdom on what national security means.

6.   Despite the unsatisfactory nature of Deudney's approach, his essay contains insights that confront attempts to move national security beyond traditional tropes so that non-traditional transnational threats receive more serious attention in the "high politics" of international relations. The final part of this paper considers the implications of these insights for the task set for the Working Group (Part 5). Three insights deserve particular attention: (1) the deeply entrenched conceptual and institutional nature of conventional definitions of national security; (2) the danger of non-traditional perspectives on national security degenerating into analytical vacuity because of a lack of clear parameters; and (3) ideological disagreement about what transnational threats deserve attention and how such threats should be addressed.

2. Summary of Deudney's Analysis

2.1 Why Deudney Believes Environmental Degradation is Not a National Security Threat

7.   The catalyst for Deudney's 1990 essay was the "tendency to link environmental degradation and national security" [p. 461] exhibited by "many liberals, progressives and environmentalists" [pp. 461-62] in the 1980s as part of broader efforts to redefine

national security. This tendency covered two types of arguments: environmental degradation as a (1) potential cause of violence among states; and (2) national security concern on its own terms without reference to possible violence among states. Two of Deudney's three main claims in his essay take aim at these two linkages between environmental degradation and national security.

8.   First, Deudney generally rejects broadening the concept of national security beyond its traditional definition. He observes that, "[u]ntil this recent flurry of re-conceptualizing, the concept of 'national security' (as opposed to national interest or well-being) has been centered upon *organised violence*." [p. 462] In short, "national security" is the pursuit by a state of security from violence organized by another state or states. States predominantly organize this pursuit through military means that involve highly specialized organizations "trained in the acts of killing and destroying." [p. 465] Deudney argues that (1) the "war system" [p. 463] created by state pursuit of national security through military means does not cause most of the environmental degradation of concern to linkage advocates; and (2) environmental degradation causes deterioration in human well-being within states but does not connect to threats of organized violence states present to each other.

9.   Deudney sharpens this latter point with his second major claim—the phenomenon of environmental degradation is unlikely to generate interstate violence and thus produce contexts of national security importance. Deudney explores five ways in which environmental degradation might theoretically produce interstate conflicts that involve organized violence: (1) wars for control of scarce natural resources; (2) environmental degradation creates internal instability within states that could produce interstate violence; (3) environmental degradation could materially alter the relative power of states, leading to violent conflict; (4) cross-border pollution could produce violent interstate conflict; and (5) degradation of the global commons (e.g., climate change, ozone layer depletion) could lead to conflict and war among states [pp. 469-74]. Deudney's exploration of these possibilities leads him to reject or heavily discount the likelihood that environmental degradation could be the proximate cause for organized interstate violence (see Table 1).

10.   In sum, Deudney's first two substantive arguments posit that (1) environmental degradation is not a phenomenon capable of causing interstate war and thus national security threats; and (2) expanding the definition of national security beyond the state's pursuit through military means of security from violence organized by other states is unhelpful because this move saps the concept of "national security" of analytical utility. In short, Deudney asserts that linkage advocates can neither play effectively on national security's traditional turf nor persuasively alter the scope and substance of this turf.

Table 1.

Possible Environmental Cause for Interstate Violence	Deudney's Reasons for Rejecting Such Possible Causes
Wars over access and control over natural resources	• Robust world trading system means that states no longer experience resource dependency as a major threat to their military security and political autonomy • Territorial conquest to gain control of resources has become prohibitively costly for states, even great powers • Technological developments provide ways for states to adjust to, and even escape, resource dependency
Interstate violence results from internal turmoil caused by declining living standards	• Pessimistic interpretations of the relationship between environmental sustainability and economic growth are based on unsound economic theory • Economic decline might dampen interstate conflict rather than make it more likely
Environmental degradation may affect interstate relations in such a way as to cause war by altering relative power capacities of states	• Economic and military power are not as tightly coupled today as in the past • States suffering from relative declines in their power may very well be marginal countries and thus unimportant for order in the international system • Although today everything is connected, not everything is tightly coupled, meaning that relative power declines affecting some states will not matter to other states
Pollution across state borders could cause interstate violence	The circumstances necessary for this dynamic to develop (asymmetrical and significant environmental degradation by one state against another) are rare
Degradation of the global commons could lead to interstate conflicts	It is doubtful that states would find military power useful for coercing countries materially contributing to the degradation of the global commons because those countries are likely to be major powers themselves

2.2 Why Deudney Believes That Environmentalists Should Not Use National Security Arguments

11.   Deudney's final argument turns the tables on the linkage advocates by asking why these advocates want to stimulate action on global problems that require international cooperation by appealing to the "war system" replete with its nationalistic, militaristic, zero-sum oriented, and violence-imbued characteristics. He asserts that "[f]or environmentalists to dress their programmes in the blood-soaked garments of the war system betrays their core values and creates confusion about the real tasks at hand." [p. 475] Deudney senses that underlying the linkage thesis is a normative commitment to a different understanding of national security, what he calls "the political sociology of environmentalism, namely . . . a 'common security' understanding of the organised violence problem." [p. 468] The common security approach, Deudney claims, challenges "mainstream 'national security' thinking and practice" but has failed to be "widely accepted in principle outside certain progressive circles, despite the sound reasoning behind it." [p. 469] Rather than trying to co-opt national security thinking, Deudney counsels linkage advocates to rely on environmentalism's "powerful set of values and symbols—ranging from human health and property values to beauty and concern for future generations." [p. 469]

3. Deudney's Arguments and the Larger Set of Transnational Threats

12.   Although Deudney's article focuses on the linkage between environmental degradation and national security, his arguments have broader relevance to controversies about whether transnational threats deserve a place at the national security table. The application of traditional definitions of national security to many transnational threats often places such threats beyond the purview of national security because neither the threats nor the solutions to them involve interstate violence and protection against such violence.

13.   This approach acknowledges that transnational threats, such as infectious diseases or natural disasters, kill people and destroy property on a large scale; but, as long as the killing and destroying do not connect in some manner with organized interstate violence, the damage to a state's population and material capabilities is not, by definition, a national security issue. Many transnational threats, including terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking, infectious diseases, and environmental degradation, do not typically involve one state organizing violence against other states. This reality leaves open only one avenue for getting such threats on the traditional agenda of national security: the threats could—if severe enough—alter the relative political, economic, and military capacities of states enough to increase the likelihood of interstate violence.

14.   Deudney's skepticism that environmental degradation would actually be the proximate cause for interstate violence also has relevance for doubts that exist about whether other transnational threats could actually trigger conflict among states. Research in the environmental area has focused on the possible role environmental degradation plays in fostering civil violence rather than interstate warfare, and even these connections between environmental degradation and civil violence are blurred by the presence of many complicated factors interacting to produce conditions conducive for domestic instability and violence.

15.   In short, connecting transnational threats with any form of violence requires, as a first step, moving away from interstate violence toward a complicated, interactive, and unpredictable dynamic unsuitable for the traditional definition of, and approach to, national security. This situation helps explain why advocates of linking transnational threats to national security challenge the conventional definition of national security. Such advocates need the national security path less traveled by to make any difference at all.

16.   Finally, Deudney's argument that "liberals, progressives, and environmentalists" [p. 461-62] should not appeal to national security to advance the cause of dealing with environmental degradation also has larger significance for discourse on transnational threats. The Working Group itself has discussed possible pitfalls of labeling certain transnational threats as national security problems, including the possibility of more unilateral action on the part of great powers rather than more cooperation in international forums. As Deudney's analysis indicates, labeling environmental degradation a national security threat does not change the nature of the

response needed—a response guided by environmental sciences and implemented by civilian agencies through mechanisms of international coordination. The labeling can be interpreted (and is thus interpreted by Deudney) as merely an effort to elevate the political importance of environmental degradation rather than an attempt to tackle such degradation with a radically new set of assumptions, assets, and approaches. The same criticism could be leveled at efforts to elevate other transnational threats to national security status.

4. Critique of Deudney's Analysis

4.1 Overview of the Critique

17.   The intellectual leverage in Deudney's analysis flows from his application of the traditional conception of national security as military security against organized interstate violence. All three of his substantive arguments rest on his embrace of the conventional wisdom about what national security has historically meant and should mean in the future. Two aspects of Deudney's approach are problematic. First, he criticizes a linkage effort that does not agree that the traditional definition of national security is analytically or normatively appropriate. He mounts this criticism without defending the appropriateness or value of the conventional approach. In fact, Deudney's rhetoric at times draws attention to the unsavory nature of the conventional wisdom he wields against linkage advocates. These tactics actually heighten the willingness to scrutinize the conventional wisdom rather than accept it in the seemingly unquestioning manner adopted by Deudney.

18.   Second, his presentation of the conventional perspective on national security resembles more a caricature than a realistic description of how states think and act about national security. Numerous historical and contemporary examples show that Deudney's narrow definition of national security as encompassed only by the state's pursuit of security from violence through military means provides a poor basis on which to understand national security. Deudney's caricature of national security does not do justice to the complexity of the exercise of national power in the face of shifting political, economic, and ideological vulnerabilities.

4.2 The Battle of Definitions

19.   As Deudney acknowledges, linkages between environmental degradation and national security connect to a larger project devoted to redefining national security. The redefinition project finds the traditional perspective on national security—military security against organized interstate violence—too narrow analytically and normatively. One can hardly be surprised, therefore, when Deudney rejects the environment-national security linkage by applying the conventional wisdom about national security the linkage itself rejects. Deudney's approach undermines all three of his substantive claims against linking environmental degradation and national security.

20.	His first two arguments rest entirely on his application of the traditional definition of national security—environmental problems do not cause, and have little in common with, "the traditional focus of national security—interstate violence[.]" [p. 461] Deudney's analysis takes the easy road of criticizing linkage advocates for not using a definition they in fact reject. Deeper justification for applying the conventional view of national security appears limited to the proposition, "obvious to common sense," that "security from violence is a primal human need, because loss of life prevents the enjoyment of all other goods." [p. 462]

21.	Advocates of linking environmental degradation and other transnational threats to national security do not question that security from violence is important. They in fact raise the possibility that such transnational threats may contribute to the perpetration of violence. Rather, they question why discourse about "security" cannot include security for other primal human needs, such as the need to eat, to have shelter, and to reproduce. These primal human needs have throughout history caused humans to be violent, thus feeding directly into the need for security from violence. Deudney is aware of this dynamic: "Other environmental elements, particularly fertile soil, water and earth minerals, have been subject to intense, often violent, intergroup competition." [p. 461] Neglect of primal human needs other than security from violence may in fact undermine achieving such security. The fact that ensuring the security of these other primal human needs may not involve the use of organized violence does not necessarily diminish their status as security issues.

22.	Deudney claims that "security from violence is a primal human need, because loss of life prevents the enjoyment of all other goods." [p. 462] Advocates for thinking about transnational pathogenic threats as security issues could easily, for example, reformulate this assertion as follows: "security from disease is a primal human need, because loss of life prevents the enjoyment of all other goods." Governments have fundamental responsibilities to protect their populations from violence and disease. These governmental obligations are, of course, not absolute. Violence and disease take lives on a large scale in any society. But "security" as a concept properly enters discourse when violence or disease prevalence reach levels that threaten materially to disrupt economic activity, weaken governance functions internally, and erode a state's power and influence externally. Deudney is wrong to argue that violent crime is only a security issue "at the individual level" [p. 463] because, as the growing problem of global organized crime illustrates, crime can be organized trans-state violence that can threaten the foundations of civil order and international stability. These security consequences for a nation can flow from events and developments that have nothing to do with organized interstate violence.

23.	Oddly, Deudney's defense of the traditional perspective on national security— the security of the *state* from organized violence from other *states*—rests on a justification focused on the *individual's* primal human need to be secure from physical violence. To borrow from Kenneth Waltz's famous "three images" framework for explaining war, Deudney's approach is a "first image" explanation: states behave the way they do because of human nature. Selecting human nature as the independent variable for

explaining international politics is not, however, considered productive by most international relations scholars. Thus, Deudney's analysis creates a "level of analysis" problem: how do we analytically justify *state* security from violence perpetrated by other states by appealing to *individual* security from violence committed by other individuals?

24.   Although Deudney cites Hobbes to support the idea that national security means state security from violence [p. 462], Hobbes' thinking on security is more complicated than Deudney's reference to him suggests. To begin, Deudney cites Hobbes for a proposition about national security in an interstate context. But, Hobbes "wrote almost nothing about international relations"[4] and "gave little thought to war between nations."[5] Hobbes' concentration on civil war highlighted that the individual's vulnerability to physical violence from other individuals was greater than the state's vulnerability to physical violence from other states. This distinction in levels of security helps explain Hobbes' insistence on a Leviathan to quell internal violence among individuals but his acceptance of the state of anarchy between states. Hobbes' primary emphasis was on internal security not national security in the interstate sense.[6] In short, Hobbes' thinking does not support Deudney's jump from the primal human need for physical security to the conception of national security for the state narrowly defined in terms of organized interstate violence.

25.   Indeed, Hobbes' preoccupation with the security threats individuals face in chaotic political environments supports the efforts linkage advocates make to focus security studies on violent or otherwise destructive threats individuals face today in weak and strong states. What happens when the Leviathan weakens under pressure from endogenous and exogenous forces? For Hobbes, security involved consideration of political conditions primarily within states—part of the message advocates of re-conceptualizing national security attempt to convey.

26.   Beyond his appeal to the primal human need to be secure from physical violence, Deudney's essay provides no analytical or normative justification for his acceptance of the traditional definition of national security. Theoretically, one could trace the narrow conception of national security to realist thought on international relations because of its emphasis on states as the primary actors competing in a situation of anarchy for survival and power. As with the traditional definition of national security, realism as a theoretical explanation of state behavior is hotly debated and its historical dominance of international relations theory is contested.

27.   Deudney acknowledges that linkage advocates contest realist assumptions and concepts by calling "into question the national grouping and its privileged status in world politics" and "challenge the utility of thinking in 'national' terms." [p. 468] He remarks that "[t]here is nothing about the problem of environmental degradation which is

---

[4] Cornelia Navari, "Hobbes, the State of Nature and the Laws of Nature," in CLASSICAL THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (I. Clark and I. B. Neumann, eds.) (1996), p. 21.
[5] C. B. Macpherson, "Introduction," in Thomas Hobbes, LEVIATHAN (C. B. Macpherson, ed.) (1968), p. 9.
[6] *Id.* ("His overriding concern was with civil war; its avoidance was for him the main purpose of political inquiry.").

particularly 'national' in character." [p. 464] In addition, Deudney notes that "[c]oping with global problems and new forms of interdependence requires replacing or supplementing national with other forms of group identity." [p. 468] Rejection of realism and the national security paradigm it spawns means that linkage advocates favor concepts of "common security," which were "fashioned as a fundamental alternative to mainstream 'national security' thinking and practice." [p. 469] Deudney again criticizes linkage advocates for using conceptual approaches that intentionally reject the application of mainstream, state-centric explanations of international relations.

28.   Early in his essay, Deudney notes that "environmental issues are likely to become an increasingly important dimension of political life at all levels—locally, inside states, as well as internationally." [p. 461] His rejection of any linkage between environmental degradation and national security adds, however, a caveat to this observation: The environment will be increasingly important for all levels of political activity except national security, as defined by political assumptions and practices not informed by the environment's growing political and economic significance at every other level of political life. How does "national security" somehow get sealed off from political ferment at all other levels of the political life of a nation? The point of trying to link environmental degradation to national security is to change the way people think about national security by preventing, in Deudney's words, "an excessive focus on military threats." [p. 462]

29.   Deudney correctly observes that "there is no guarantee that the world would spend money saved from military expenditures on environmental restoration[;]" [pp. 462-63] but lack of funding and political will for addressing environmental threats are guaranteed unless states re-calibrate their governance priorities, including their dedication to the "war system." Defining national security as the military pursuit of security against violence and elevating this conception politically and economically sucks oxygen out of politics for alternative perspectives on how a nation ought to think about its security.

30.   Deudney's approach would make more sense if he defended the conventional wisdom. He does not. He observes that "common security" approaches do not animate state violence-security organizations and that common security thinking remains subordinate to traditional national security approaches [p. 469]. However superficial as empirical observations, these statements from Deudney do not constitute analytical or normative arguments *why* conventional wisdom should be considered wisdom. In fact, he makes comments that suggest he is not sure that the "war system" fostered by the traditional approach to national security deserves commendation.

31.   First, he indicates that the reasoning behind the concept of common security is sound [p. 469]. Second, he argues that "national security mindsets" are "themselves of dubious value, even on their own terms" especially "in the wake of the nuclear revolution[.]" [p. 469] Elements that make these mindsets dubious are their attachment to nationalistic, militaristic, zero-sum, and violent attributes. His statement that national security threats are sometimes taken to "an absurd extreme" [p. 468] reinforces the idea that the traditional approach is dubious. Third, he argues that the environmental

movement's "'green' sensibility can make strong claim to being the master metaphor for an emerging post-industrial civilisation" [p. 469] and implores environmentalists to drop the national security linkage in order to "continue to develop and disseminate this rich emergent world view." [p. 469]

32.   These interesting observations from Deudney raise questions about his analysis. To begin, it draws attention to his third major claim that linkage advocates do their cause a disservice by appealing to traditional national security arguments. This argument falls flat because the linkage advocates are not appealing to national security traditionally defined but to a re-conceptualized notion of how we should think about the security of the state. His hypothetical response from a linkage advocate that "some semantic innovation without much analytical basis is occurring" [p. 465] again reveals a level of misunderstanding about what linkage arguments are really about. The same applies to his criticisms that linkage arguments are "not primarily descriptive, but polemical . . . not a claim about fact, but a rhetorical device designed to stimulate action." [p. 465]

33.   The exercise of re-conceptualization is not an attempt to fit the square peg of transnational threats into the round hole of conventional national security. Nor is it an effort to whittle down the square peg so that it will fit into the round hole. It is, however, a repudiation of what Deudney does—reject the square peg entirely because it does not fit into the round hole without providing any justification for why the square peg should be judged according to the round hole.

34.   More importantly, Deudney's qualms about the dubious value of the war system force us to look more closely at the shape and size of the round hole. Advocates of linking transnational threats to concepts of security are engaged in exactly this kind of scrutiny of conventional wisdom. Further, Deudney's admonition to avoid traditional national security concepts in advancing environmental protection forgets that the traditional approach to national security, by definition and design, subordinates issues it classifies as beyond its parameters. Environmentalism cannot become the "master metaphor" [p. 469] of the post-industrial age without confronting the deeply entrenched, but counter-productive, conventional interpretation of what national security means.

4.3 Critique by Caricature

35.   A second major concern with Deudney's analysis involves the traditional definition of national security he applies. In some respects, his presentation of the conventional perspective on national security represents a caricature as opposed to a nuanced understanding of how states view their security. Deudney argues that, under the traditional perspective, "[t]he prevailing assumption is that everyone is a potential enemy, and that agreements mean little unless congruent with immediate interests." [p. 467] U.S. national security policy does not function under the assumption that every state is a potential enemy. U.S. national security policy has used agreements that were congruent with long-term interests despite short-term risks and costs (e.g., using agreements to build a framework for liberalized trade during the Cold War).

36.   The caricature continues in the extreme state-centrism of Deudney's presentation of what national security means. The Working Group's agenda includes transnational terrorist threats, such as Al Qaeda. After September 11th, little doubt exists in the U.S. national security community that violent attacks by non-state actors constitute a national security threat. Under Deudney's definition of national security, however, what happened on September 11th, and the ongoing violent threat posed by global terrorist groups, cannot, by definition, be a national security threat because it did not flow from militaries engaged in organized interstate violence.

37.   Similarly, a great deal of violence of national security importance since World War II has come in the form of civil wars or through the implosion of states into chaos and anarchy. The national security importance of such internal violence involved concerns that such violence could trigger interstate conflict, but often the national security interest in civil unrest and violence in other countries involved matters not directly related to a fear that the state would be attacked by another state. Chief among these fears were ideological concerns—whether internal violence would augment or weaken the state's ideological commitments and sphere of influence. Viewing national security as only involving organized violence by states conducted through military means does not capture the full reality of national security during the Cold War.

38.   The Cold War also witnessed the United States and its allies engaging in non-military forms of national security actions. Specifically, the United States used economic assistance and a liberalized trading system to help rebuild countries shattered by World War II. The concern was less that Soviet tanks would roll over the borders than the susceptibility of weak, desperate countries to communist infiltration. The threat was not organized interstate violence but opportunism created by weak political and economic governance within strategically important states. National security fears about the prospect of "failed states" stimulated military and non-military policies designed to ensure that states of strategic concern did not fail internally. The idea that national security challenges can only be defined and addressed by military institutions and responses, as Deudney's analysis suggests, is historically inaccurate. The national security mindset has long been conceptually more sophisticated than the one presented by Deudney.

39.   The end of the Cold War also demonstrates that national security involves more than organized interstate violence perpetrated by militaries. Entire states, most notably the Soviet Union and East Germany, disappeared without any organized interstate violence and surprisingly little civil violence. Explaining these events through security approaches limited conceptually to organized interstate violence proves impossible. Despite formidable capabilities to engage in organized interstate (and intrastate) violence, the Soviet regime could not withstand the ideological winds of change that swept across its sphere of influence in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

40.   These examples underscore the poverty of thinking about national security in the constricted manner presented by Deudney, and the poverty of this approach is not limited to the post-September 11th period but extends back to events before and while he

wrote his essay. These observations touch upon, of course, longstanding debates in national security circles on economics and complex interdependence as national security considerations, finding the right mixture of "hard power" and "soft power" in national security policy, and "winning hearts and minds" of potential adversaries ideologically and culturally. These debates cluster around the realization that the "war system" and its military trappings cannot exclusively define a state's power and vulnerabilities in the international system.

41.   Deudney's critique by caricature backfires because the caricature invites critical scrutiny of the conventional wisdom and encourages those interested in national security to reject such a narrow, constricted view of a nation's security and search for something both more realistic and credible as a strategy. Those engaged in re-conceptualizing national security to take into account the challenges states face from transnational threats have been involved in just such an enterprise. Contrary to his intentions, Deudney's analysis actually stimulates incentives to deconstruct conventional national security thinking and replace it with alternative models or approaches.

5. Challenging Insights for Efforts to Link Transnational Threats and National Security

5.1 Overview of Insights That Challenge Linkages Between Transnational Threats and National Security

42.   Although Deudney's analysis is not persuasive, his essay contains some challenging insights for those engaged in re-thinking national security in light of various transnational threats states confront today. Three such insights deserve specific mention. First, Deudney's essay highlights how deeply entrenched, both conceptually and institutionally, the conventional perspective on national security is. Second, Deudney pinpoints a serious danger re-conceptualization of national security faces—the analytical slippery slope that contains no clear delineation between national security issues and other large-scale political or social issues. Third, Deudney's approach highlights ideological or philosophical disagreements that adversely affect identifying transnational threats as national security issues and how policy should address such threats. These insights in Deudney's essay are, in fact, fundamental issues the Working Group is considering in contemplating what transnational threats deserve consideration on the U.S. national security agenda in the 21st century.

5.2 The Power of Conventional Wisdom

43.   Deudney's use of the conventional wisdom about national security illustrates, in many ways, its power in national security discourse. Many experts willing to expand the scope of national security beyond "pursuit of national-security-from-violence through military means" [p. 462] recognize how entrenched such views remain in national security circles. As Deudney's essay indicates, states have refined and honed their military abilities for organized violence through specialized and secretive organizations; and these efforts have deeply grooved power, mindsets, and institutional interests devoted

to perpetuating these capabilities. Deudney forthrightly argues that "[n]ationalist sentiment and the war system have a long-established logic and staying power that are likely to defy any rhetorically conjured 're-direction' toward benign ends." [p. 475]

44.   The logic of the conventional perspective on national security creates two types of responses to claims that transnational threats belong on national security agendas, both of which appear in Deudney's essay. The first response dismisses such claims outright because they fall outside the traditional definition of a national security threat. For example, Deudney rejects environmental degradation as a national security threat because such degradation does not fall within the traditional focus of national security on organized interstate violence.

45.   The second response involves strict scrutiny of claims that a non-traditional threat constitutes a national security problem. Deudney engages in such strict scrutiny when he examines whether environmental degradation could produce interstate violence and conflict. Strict scrutiny demands that non-traditional threats have either (1) a serious potential to cause interstate war; or (2) destructive impact on the state equivalent to interstate war. About the only transnational threats that survive this kind of strict scrutiny are threats of large-scale terrorist violence, particularly terrorism undertaken with weapons of mass destruction.

5.3 The Problem of the Analytical Slippery Slope: National Security Cannot Mean Everything

46.   The strict scrutiny fostered by the entrenched nature of the traditional national security mindset connects to the second challenging insight in Deudney's essay—the analytical slippery slope. Vetting transnational threats under the logic of the war system requires that such threats cross a high threshold and do not just constitute large-scale political or social ills. Deudney remarks that, "[i]f we begin to speak about all the forces and events that threaten life, property and well-being (on a large scale) as threats to our national security, we shall soon drain the term of any meaning." [p. 465]

47.   Proponents of re-conceptualizing national security have not often done a good job identifying, conceptually or empirically, the "tipping point" between a large-scale problem and a problem that deserves to be considered a national security issue. Part of the difficulty with identifying such a "tipping point" involves the empirical challenge of disaggregating the complex factors that make up large-scale transnational problems, such as environmental degradation or emerging infectious diseases. As Thomas Homer-Dixon's work on the influence of environmental scarcity on violence suggests, the role of such scarcity in violence "is often obscure and indirect. It interacts with political, economic, and other factors to generate harsh social effects that in turn help to produce violence."[7] Thus, national security analysts would face difficulties identifying what factors are proximate causes of state-threatening violence or incapacitation in complex transnational threats.

---

[7] Thomas Homer-Dixon, ENVIRONMENT, SCARCITY, AND VIOLENCE (1999), p. 177.

48.   Advocacy for transnational threats to be considered national security issues is further complicated because, as illustrated by empirical and conceptual work undertaken on environmental scarcity and infectious diseases, such threats most clearly resonate with security concerns in weak, developing countries. The ability of strong countries, such as the United States, to respond to challenges and changes posed by environmental degradation, infectious disease emergence, organized crime, and biosecurity dampens the effect of these problems on the well-being of the population, the fortunes of the economy, and the functioning of governance mechanisms.

49.   The "tipping point" between large-scale political problem and national security threat will differ depending on where a country sits in the hierarchy of the international power structure. Thus, HIV/AIDS in some sub-Saharan Africa countries may well be a national security threat given its demonstrated ability to hollow-out the material capabilities on which the security of a state depends. HIV/AIDS in the United States is not, however, a national security threat because the virus and the disease do not, at present, cause material damage to the population, economy, and governance functions of the nation.

50.   Whether serious HIV/AIDS-related devastation in another country affects U.S. national security depends on a variety of factors, especially whether the country is strategically important to vital U.S. national security interests. To paraphrase Deudney, non-military threats "in a country or region could become so extreme that the basic social and economic fabric comes apart. Should some areas of the world suffer this fate, the impact of this outcome on international order may not, however, be very great." [p. 473] One reason why some experts do not believe that HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa is a national security threat to the great powers is because of how marginal sub-Saharan Africa is strategically, politically, and economically to the current international system.

51.   One effect of these difficulties might be for analysis to err on the side of caution and set the threshold between large-scale social problem and national security threat high so that the number of possible transnational threats potentially affecting national security is winnowed down significantly. This approach does not, however, address the problem of where to set the threshold unless clear analytical indicators accompany the threshold's establishment. To complicate matters further, such indicators would, in all likelihood, have to be different for environmental problems than for infectious disease threats or terrorism.

5.4 The Problem of Ideological or Philosophical Disagreement

52.   The difficulty of pinpointing empirically or descriptively the "tipping point" between a large-scale political, economic, or social problem and a threat to national security tends to foster reliance on ideological or philosophical preferences as the key determinant for what gets labeled a national security issue. Deudney senses this phenomenon, as evidenced by his (1) various references to liberals, progressives, and environmentalists; (2) contrasting the incompatibility of the nationalistic mindset of

national security and the globalist outlook of the environmental movement; and (3) argument that linkage advocates aim not for analytical traction but polemical impact in stimulating action "to find a 'moral equivalent of war' to channel the energies behind war into constructive directions." [p. 465]

53. The tendency to fall back on ideological or philosophical preferences also may have the effect of elevating the threshold for what constitutes a national security threat because political consensus can only be reached on the most obvious threats, which typically relate to forms of intentional violence that has significant material and/or psychological impact on a state's population, economy, and governance functions. Underneath that high threshold, conceptual and theoretical disagreement about whether specific transnational threats cross the threshold from foreign or domestic policy into the narrower realm of national security merely adds more grease to the analytical slippery slope.

6. Conclusion

54. In completing the task set for it by the Princeton Project on National Security, the Working Group has to define what it means by national security and then identify what transnational threats fall within that definition. Analyzing Deudney's case against linking environmental degradation and national security provides some guideposts for the Working Group's efforts, namely:

• In defining national security, the Working Group needs to acknowledge the power of traditional, narrowly tailored perspectives on national security but clearly distinguish how its definition differs analytically and normatively from traditional views. Although unpersuasive, Deudney employs a clear definition of what national security means. The Working Group needs to avoid a Deudney-like response that chastises it for merely attempting to co-opt traditional "national security" rhetoric for non-traditional "liberal" or "progressive" purposes. The overall aim of the Princeton Project on National Security of rethinking the foundational premises of U.S. national security strategy also supports the need for the Working Group to develop a credible and coherent definition of national security.

• The Working Group's definition of national security needs to avoid the trap of reflecting only a particular period of time in order to be able to guide analysis and planning well into a future that will, in all likelihood, be different from the present moment. The traditional definition of national security used by Deudney bears the heavy imprint of the Cold War, a configuration of power, politics, and threats the world no longer faces.

• The Working Group's definition has to be applied consistently to the range of transnational threats under consideration. Deudney does apply his definition consistently across the range of environmental threats raised in that linkage discourse.

• Consistent application of the Working Group's definition will place a premium on embedding in the definition useful indicators that signal when a transnational threat has crossed the threshold from being a foreign or domestic policy concern to a national security issue. Deudney's indicators—organized violence by states through military means—center his analysis of the claims that environmental degradation deserves to be considered a national security threat. The Working Group's indicators can perhaps be arranged in the form of a "decision tree" to ensure consistent application across a broad range of diverse transnational threat categories.

• The process of selecting indicators has to keep in mind the danger of the analytical slippery slope, which means that the Working Group will have to include and exclude threats and justify these choices analytically. It is hoped that this process of inclusion and exclusion can avoid not only the over-inclusiveness produced by the analytical slippery slope but also the under-inclusiveness of Deudney's caricature of national security thinking.

• Indicators would also be useful in systematically pinpointing mechanisms that are needed to address transnational threats that are, or threaten to become, national security issues. Such analysis may help identify what national, international, or global governance mechanisms need reform and what kind of reform is required.

• The Working Group could also usefully identify what developments would have to take place before some excluded threats could be considered national security issues. Here again, robust indicators could help identify trends that would force an issue over the threshold from foreign or domestic policy into the realm of national security. In addition, identification of what factors keep a transnational threat from crossing the national security threshold would be informative because it would draw attention to presently obscure or neglected contributions to the country's security (e.g., global epidemiological surveillance in the case of bioterrorism and emerging infectious diseases).

55.   These guideposts are not exclusive, and Working Group members may have other or better ideas about how to construct an analytical approach to identifying the primary transnational threats to U.S. national security in the 21st century. Without a framework of analysis, however, the Working Group's efforts will be vulnerable to a Deudney-like "case against the Working Group on State Security and Transnational Threats" based on national security assumptions that hew closely to traditional conceptions that reject rethinking how states should conceive of their national security in light of transnational threats.

* * *