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The political ecology of war: natural resources and armed conflicts

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Abstract

Throughout the 1990s, many armed groups have relied on revenues from natural resources such as oil, timber, or gems to substitute for dwindling Cold War sponsorship. Resources not only financed, but in some cases motivated conflicts, and shaped strategies of power based on the commercialisation of armed conflict and the territorialisation of sovereignty around valuable resource areas and trading networks. As such, armed conflict in the post-Cold War period is increasingly characterised by a specific political ecology closely linked to the geography and political economy of natural resources. This paper examines theories of relationships between resources and armed conflicts and the historical processes in which they are embedded. It stresses the vulnerability resulting from resource dependence, rather than conventional notions of scarcity or abundance, the risks of violence linked to the conflictuality of natural resource political economies, and the opportunities for armed insurgents resulting from the

lootability of resources. Violence is expressed in the subjugation of the rights of people to determine the use of their environment and the brutal patterns of resource extraction and predation. Beyond demonstrating the economic agendas of belligerents, an analysis of the linkages between natural resources and armed conflicts suggests that the criminal character of their inclusion in international primary commodity markets responds to an exclusionary form of globalisation; with major implications for the promotion of peace.



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Keywords

Armed conflict; Dependence; Natural resources; Political ecology; War

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