

10-2011

## Security and Environmental Change - Simon Dalby

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### Recommended Citation

Broberg, Len (2011) "Security and Environmental Change - Simon Dalby," *International Dialogue*: Vol. 1, Article 7.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32873/uno.dc.ID.1.1.1007>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/id-journal/vol1/iss1/7>

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### Cover Page Footnote

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# Review

## ***Security and Environmental Change***

Simon Dalby. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009. 197 pp.

Len Broberg<sup>\*</sup>

In *Security and Environmental Change*, Simon Dalby seeks to reframe national security in terms of environmental change and its threats to human safety and prosperity. Dalby promises a multifaceted examination of the issue, making clear that environmental change encompasses more than climate change but includes all human modifications of the planet: deforestation, water diversion and species extinction to name a few. In addition, the book seeks to deconstruct and rebuild the notion of security, moving out of classically framed Cold War national security focused on nation states toward a more human centered security. This effort succeeds and, in the process, provides a valuable resource for students and scholars in multiple fields.

*Security and Environmental Change* begins with a review of the basic terminology of security in traditional international relations scholarship and documents the evolving nature of the concept among those that favor the United Nations approach to human security in the late-20<sup>th</sup> and early-21<sup>st</sup> century. This section will be especially valuable to those new to security scholarship seeking to broaden their understanding of the political consequences of environmental change. The following chapters provide a succinct but substantial review of the scientific evidence of climate change and other human modifications of the planet to build a case for the adoption of the term ‘Anthropocene’ for the current geologic era based on the extensive artificial human

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modification of the biosphere, largely under the umbrella of “carboniferous capitalism.” While there may be room for debate whether such terms are merited for this period in the earth’s history, they are an effective device to legitimize the reframing of security from the traditional border and political integrity foci of security scholarship to a more humanitarian approach focused on protecting the most vulnerable regardless of citizenship.

The book joins perspectives from various fields to build the argument that (1) we are in an era that has no precedent in recorded human history, (2) that responses to that change must be refocused on human vulnerability and equity and (3) that traditional notions of national and political security do not adequately cope with the challenges expected. Drawing on scientific overviews such as the *Global Environmental Outlook* (UNEP 2007), the *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* (2005), the *IPCC Fourth Assessment Report* (2007) and the *International Geosphere Biosphere Program 2001 Global Change and the Earth System* report Dalby supports the proposition that dramatic changes linked to human activity (including climate change, deforestation, loss of biological diversity), superimposed on natural environmental change, have driven the planet’s ecosystems into states previously undocumented by humans. The concept of human vulnerability, typically applied to hazards or disasters, is reviewed and then applied to the concept of security to bolster the need to address security from a human needs perspective. Likewise, the examination of vulnerability highlights the failure of traditional conceptualizations of security to address the real needs of peoples in the coming decades or to address larger questions of international equity. Finally, in this section the book addresses the need to build resilience and capacity of human systems in the face of environmental change, particularly in the rapidly growing urban centers of the world that present their own issues of equity and stability. This cross-disciplinary review brings together currents of scholarship effectively and should be a useful introduction to students and scholars new to these lines of research.

Dalby effectively pulls together threads from current scholarship and international security dialogue to weave a new security pattern based on the duty to protect. Using disaster responses in post-Katrina New Orleans, in flooded Mumbai and the scalding 2003 European heat wave as case studies to illustrate the governmental and non-governmental roles and orientations to notions of security, the book brings to life the traditional, military approach to security of political and social order and the other, more humane response oriented to security of all people regardless of social station. From New Orleans he points to the body of work characterizing the federal Bush administration

response as the marginalization of those that could not afford the gasoline to escape the city or lacked access to such transportation while militarizing the issue through the use of armed security forces to protect upper classes and property from the dispossessed. He notes the more effective response of numerous non-governmental organizations to the real need to rebuild and rescue focused on meeting human needs rather than political stability. In the case of Mumbai he notes the emergence of a previously marginalized group, young unemployed males, as a primary force for rescue and response to save people and property in the face of the flooding, offering evidence that humanitarian responses can be acknowledged and can serve to change social status, as the ruling elite recognized the contribution of these young men, thus building resilience and capacity in human systems. The European heat wave example serves more to illustrate the power of the environmental changes upon us, but sets the stage for the case studies that follow. Pointing to the UN Development Program goals and the International Commission on Intervention and State Security the book concludes that reformulation of the concept of security, linking it explicitly to ecology, is required to adequately address the needs of the global community, acknowledging that the policy path forward under such a reconstruction of security is not altogether clear.

In order to fully flesh out the concepts reviewed and generated in the book, more sources will need to be consulted. By its nature the book is an overview that dips into a number of fields to build an argument for more scholarship and development of a new conceptualization of security. As such, it lacks detail in a number of areas. As an example, the incorporation of the concept of vulnerability and its antidote, resilience, is a real contribution to the breadth of the book, but its true dimensions are left blurred for the reader. The use of summary scientific assessments to capture the current state of the planet is effective, however, the reliance on United Nations generated or linked materials leaves one wondering whether other views or sources might be excluded. Readers will need to review the sources cited to develop the ideas more and research further to get the depth necessary to fully understand some of the concepts presented.

*Security and Environmental Change* succeeds in exploring the many facets of human security and its interaction with the environment. The overall argument of the book is convincing and well constructed, offering an introduction to and blending of a variety of fields. For students and scholars in environmental studies to political science this book is an excellent introduction to the topic and offers leads into many disciplines that are fruitful. Care should be taken to diversify the views of this issue, however.

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Overall, the book should prompt deeper thinking about security, the links between humans and the environment and the extent of the challenge before us.