

# ENVIRONMENT, SECURITY AND UN REFORM

*Also by Mark F. Imber*

**THE USA, ILO, UNESCO AND IAEA**

# **Environment, Security and UN Reform**

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**To A. J. R. Groom and John Simpson,  
whose enthusiasm and excellent teaching most  
encouraged me to study international organisations**

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# Preface

Why another book on environmental diplomacy? The issue of environmental security has been addressed very well in many places, by Arthur Westing, Caroline Thomas, Ian Rowlands, Daniel Deudney and others. The linkage between environmental degradation and the burdens of Third World debt has also been addressed, by Morris Miller, Susan George and others. Proposals for the protection of the global commons have been advocated since the 1980s by Willi Brandt and Gro Harlem Brundtland in their world-famous reports, and by Barry Buzan, Steven Krasner and John Vogler, in the academic literature. I am not, however, aware of a *single* study which attempts to synthesise this triple dilemma, within the analytical framework of international relations and furthermore, linked explicitly to the agenda of UN reform.

In 1989 I concluded a study of the troubled relations between the US and the specialised agencies with the observation that the environmental agenda would prove the toughest test of the UN system's ability to recover from a decade of alleged politicisation and the American-led response of budgetary austerity and partial boycott. This study, although standing alone as an investigation of environmental and security issues, represents, for the author, a second stage in the study of the UN system, linked by a concern, common to both studies, to investigate the limits of the possible in what David Mitrany called 'the progress of international government'. As a rationalist and agnostic in world of passionate fundamentalists, the functionalist is born to be disappointed. However, in the world of states, 'binding together those interest which are common, where they are common and to the extent that they are common' is, alas, the only way forward.

In a sense this book was written backwards: each chapter initially chosen as the point of introduction needed explaining by one that logically had to precede it. From a nuts-and-bolts investigation of the mandate and performance of the United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP, commissioned by the ESRC in August 1990, it emerged that UNEP could only be explained if prefaced by discussion of more fundamental questions of the context in which the post-Stockholm development of the international environmental regulation had been conducted.

In trying to understand the causes of diplomatic inertia, intransigence and the persistently egotistical behaviour of states caught in the two 'prisoner's dilemmas' of environmental security and military security, I was repeatedly impressed by the centrality of financial arrangements as an

underlying factor. For Third World countries their burden of debt is critical to their inability to embrace sustainable development policies. For the North, fear of the loss of competitive advantage, the recessionary condition of industry since 1990 and, above all, a decade of Mrs Thatcher and President Reagan, led hostility to regulation and intervention in the marketplace, have inhibited the recognition of enlightened self-interest in addressing the need for higher environmental standards.

Much that is written here will be familiar to the NGO and development studies community, but it is not common knowledge within the international relations community, generally concerned with diplomatic and military relations. Herein lies another justification for persevering with what I admit is a work of synthesis. I am concerned to present to an IR readership the argument that environmental questions and UN reform are central and not peripheral to the field, and that innumerable 'security' questions cannot be understood without adopting an environmental perspective.

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