



U.S Domestic Regulation of Global Conflict Resources

November 11, 2015

By Michael D. Beevers

Michael D. Beevers is Assistant Professor of Environmental and International Studies at Dickinson College.

Abstract: *The violent conflicts in developing countries during the 1990s too often were blamed on rebel groups fighting for natural resource loot. Yet, the natural resources do not cause conflict, which is often rooted in deep-seated and historically contingent sets of grievances. For this reason, we should not expect regulations to end conflict or consolidate peace. Rather, we must look for opportunities for reconciliation, cooperation and confidence building, as well as greater inclusion of individuals and communities in decisions about natural resources.*

The 1990s saw armed conflicts, which were located primarily in the developing world.¹ The violence was particularly savage on civilians and non-combatants with thousands killed, millions displaced and governments collapsing. Genocide, ethnic cleansing, sexual violence and the use of child soldiers were commonplace. The conflicts created sprawling humanitarian emergencies and refugee crises and compelled action by the international community. Such conflicts were considered threats to international security because failed and war-torn states were believed to provide fertile ground for terrorist networks, organized crime, drug and weapons trafficking, pandemics and mass migration.

Addressing such spillover effects led to a concerted international effort to mitigate conflict, build peace and better understand the causes of civil conflict. For a long time, the conventional wisdom was that new wars were triggered largely by the economic motives of warlords and rebel groups. Rather than political drivers like repression or inequality, conflict seemed to be about “greed” and “loot-seeking.”² Because natural resources can be traded for substantial revenues, it appeared that the central motivation for violence and the continued armed conflict was the control of natural resources.³ In Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), evidence began to surface that diamonds, timber and minerals were

¹ Peter Wallenstein and Margareta Sollenberg, “Armed Conflict, 1989-2000,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 38 (2001), pp. 629-644.

² Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “On the Economic Causes of War,” Oxford University Economic Papers 50 (1998).

³ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Justice-Seeking and Loot-Seeking in Civil War,” World Bank Paper (1999).

fueling conflict.⁴ “Conflict resources” became a security priority for global actors, despite doubts about the empirical links between natural resources and conflict.⁵ The United Nations, intergovernmental organizations like the World Bank, Western governments and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began to address the issue. The United Nations imposed sanctions on resources thought to fuel conflict and international initiatives have been designed and implemented to bring an end to conflicts and consolidate peace.

The United States has engaged in a variety of ways to address global conflict resources based primarily on the view that, if not addressed conflict resources pose a threat to U.S. national security. As a result, the United States has passed ambitious domestic regulation to address various conflict resources, including the Clean Diamond Trade Act (2003), Lacey Act (2008) and Dodd-Frank Act (2010). While each case is different, they all are designed to limit rebel groups’ ability to fuel war by undermining their capability to finance operations through the smuggling or trading of diamonds, minerals and timber. This article examines what these regulations likely can (and cannot) do and better understand their usefulness and limitations as a national security strategy.

I find that these regulations can be useful in at least three ways. First, U.S. domestic regulations work to institutionalize certain understandings of conflict resources. This draws attention to the potential links between natural resources and violence even though the explanations emphasize economic agendas rather than long-standing political grievances. Second, the regulations generally compel compliance and improve the traceability of supply chains, particularly in importing countries. This can help determine whether products originate in conflict zones. Third, they lead to the formalizing of resource policy and increased state revenue in producing countries. While this can be a sign of progress, formalization also can have unintended consequences for local communities and, for better or worse, lead to the consolidation of state power. Moreover, there is no guarantee that new revenues will go toward development programs or the provision of basic services. Although U.S. domestic regulation can help shape the behavior of certain actors and establish a moderately effective certification of origin norm, we should not expect them to end conflict, or by themselves, lead to peace consolidation.

Clean Diamond Trade Act (2003)

Diamonds are associated with elegance and wealth. To the extent diamonds or the diamond industry overlapped with the international community it was as a commodity worth billions of dollars and traded in world markets. Unlike other

⁴ Global Witness, “A Rough Trade: The Role of Companies and Governments in the Angolan Conflict,” (1998); Ian Smillie, Lansana Gberie and Ralph Hazleton, “The Heart of the Matter: Sierra Leone, Diamonds and Human Security,” (2000); Global Witness, “Logging Off: How the Liberian Timber Industry Fuels Liberia’s Humanitarian Disaster and Threatens Sierra Leone,” (2002).

⁵ Macartan Humphries, “Natural Resources, Conflict and Conflict Resolution: Uncovering the Mechanisms,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 4 (2005), pp. 508-537.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1127479>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1127479>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)