



NATURE, PEACE, SECURITY: FORGING NEW PATHWAYS FOR GLOBAL STABILITY

1. Why focus on nature in peace and security?

The world is facing an unprecedented environmental crisis, with humanity having crossed several planetary boundaries, especially in biodiversity loss and climate change. Ecosystems, which underpin human wellbeing, prosperity, and security, are being degraded at alarming rates. Approximately 75% of terrestrial and 40% of marine environments are now degraded, with one million species at risk of extinction (IPBES 2019). This ecological crisis is not occurring in isolation: it increasingly interacts with rising insecurity and conflict worldwide. Environmental degradation and biodiversity loss are not only consequences of conflict but are also important drivers of instability, contributing to food, water, and livelihood insecurity, which in turn can fuel political instability and violence.

The nature-security nexus highlights how environmental factors—beyond just climate change—can drive conflict and undermine peace. These include ecosystem degradation, competition over and depletion of resources, and environmental crimes such as illegal mining, logging and wildlife trafficking. Conversely, conflict and insecurity often result in further environmental destruction, creating a vicious cycle (Rüttinger et al. 2022). The current decade, marked by increasing geopolitical tensions and armed conflicts, underlines the urgent need for preventative action and resilience-building, with nature at the core of peace and security strategies. Natural resources underpin energy transitions, food and water systems, and thus geopolitical influence. Ignoring ecosystems risks unintended hard-security consequences.

2. Geopolitical changes and their implications

The geopolitical landscape is increasingly characterised by heightened tensions, fragmentation, shifting alliances, and competition for resources. Conflicts in Ukraine (Iraola 2024), Gaza (EcoPeace), and Sudan (CEOBS 2025), to cite a few, have directly damaged ecosystems and redirected resources away from conservation towards humanitarian and military needs.

Geopolitical rivalries also undermine multilateral cooperation, essential for addressing transboundary issues like deforestation and water management. For example, the Arctic Council has been paralysed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, stalling collaboration on shared ecosystem threats (Andreeva 2023). Disagreements at forums such as the G7 (Avitzur 2025) and COP16 (Chandrasekhar et al. 2024) have diluted commitments on the phase-out of fossil fuels, land restoration and biodiversity finance, while rising defence spending is diverting resources from development and environmental priorities.

These trends not only deprioritise environmental action but also exacerbate the drivers of conflict. Armed groups exploit weak governance in conflict zones to profit from illegal resource extraction, while local

communities and conservation efforts are left vulnerable—as seen in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Twahirwa 2025). Yet, there are emerging opportunities: as the links between environmental degradation and security risks become clearer, some security actors and governments are recognising the strategic importance of investing in nature-based solutions for stability and resilience.

3. What is already happening?

Policy

At the policy level, the United Nations Security Council has increasingly recognised the security implications of environmental change (Rüttinger et al. 2022). However, while biodiversity loss and climate change are two sides of the same coin, the two issues are often treated separately. Integration of biodiversity and ecosystem health into security policy remains fragmented, often overshadowed by a focus on climate change. The three Rio Conventions (CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD) are now highlighting the interconnected crises of biodiversity loss, climate change, and land degradation and their impacts on peace and security. Regional bodies (AU, EU, OSCE, ECOWAS, ASEAN) are embedding ecosystem resilience in peace and security strategies, though operationalising these frameworks is often hampered by institutional and political challenges.

Also at the national level, governments are increasingly incorporating nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based adaptation into their climate and security policies, supported by international frameworks and regional strategies. Nearly 85% of Nationally Determined Contributions now address land use and forestry (UNFCCC 2024), and ecosystem-based adaptation is present in most National Adaptation Plans (Terton et al. 2024). While progress varies, these implementation efforts are crucial for ensuring that the linkages between nature, peace, and security move from policy rhetoric to tangible impact on the ground.

Programming

Initiatives recognising the links between nature, peace, and security are being driven by a broad range of stakeholders, including UN agencies, regional organisations, international NGOs, and national governments. Key actors such as the United Nations Climate Security Mechanism, UNEP, and UNDP provide integrated risk analysis, policy support, and technical assistance, particularly in fragile contexts, while agencies like FAO and WFP promote climate-smart agriculture and resilience-building to address the intertwined challenges of environmental stress and insecurity. International NGOs bridge global frameworks and local realities, piloting innovative approaches and advocating for ecosystem protection, though their impact is often limited by resource constraints and project-based funding.

On the ground, community-based initiatives such as reforestation, agroforestry, and projects like the Great Green Wall demonstrate how ecosystem restoration can enhance resilience and reduce conflict risks. These efforts benefit from multi-level partnerships but often face challenges related to funding, technical capacity, and the meaningful inclusion of vulnerable communities. While progress is evident, many interventions still focus on short-term solutions rather than tackling the underlying structural causes of insecurity linked to environmental degradation.

Finance

Major climate finance mechanisms like the Green Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility, and Adaptation Fund are incorporating peace and security considerations into their portfolios, supporting projects that deliver both environmental and peacebuilding benefits, especially in vulnerable regions (Heinrich Böll Stiftung and ODI 2023). Peacebuilding funds such as the UN Peacebuilding Fund now address climate and environmental risks as conflict drivers, while innovative initiatives like Finance for Peace seek to leverage public and private

investments for resilience and stability. Bilateral donors and international NGOs are also supporting nature-based solutions, though explicit prioritisation for climate adaptation remains limited.

Private sector finance, though still underutilised, is also gaining traction in advancing the nature-security agenda, with businesses and investors increasingly using mechanisms like green bonds and impact investment to fund projects that offer both environmental and security co-benefits. However, challenges such as investment risks and regulatory uncertainty persist.

The significant global increase in defence spending—reaching 2.7 trillion USD in 2024 (Liang et al. 2025)—poses both a challenge and an opportunity. While there is a risk of funds being diverted from climate and biodiversity priorities, new defence funding streams, such as those under NATO and the European Commission's Readiness 2030 package, could be utilised to support dual-use technologies and projects with both security and environmental benefits.

4. What more is needed?

Addressing the complex and evolving interlinkages between nature, peace, and security requires a transformative shift in how these issues are positioned within global and national policy agendas. Despite growing recognition that ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss can drive instability and conflict—and that healthy, resilient environments are fundamental to sustainable peace—responses remain fragmented and often siloed. To embed nature at the heart of peace and security strategies, unlocking new pathways for cooperation, resilience, it is essential that stakeholders across policy, programming and finance work together to:

1. **Mainstream nature into security policy:** Fully integrate biodiversity and ecosystem health into peace and security frameworks at all levels, ensuring that environmental action is recognised as a critical pathway to sustainable peace.
2. **Strengthen all forms of cooperation:** Reinvigorate and protect multilateral environmental agreements, regional cooperation mechanisms and bilateral cooperation to address transboundary environmental risks, even in times of geopolitical tension.
3. **Scale up financing for integrated solutions:** Mobilise and align public and private finance for projects that deliver co-benefits for nature, peace, and security—demonstrating clear returns for both environmental resilience and stability. This includes de-risking investments and leveraging new funding streams, including rising defence budgets for dual-benefit investment.
4. **Empower Indigenous Peoples, local communities and environmental defenders:** Ensure that vulnerable and marginalised groups are meaningfully involved in the design and implementation of interventions, for just and peaceful transitions. Protect environmental defenders and support community-led initiatives that restore ecosystems and build social cohesion.
5. **Foster knowledge exchange and capacity building:** Promote cross-sectoral collaboration, knowledge sharing, and capacity building between environmental, peacebuilding, and security actors. Support research and evidence-based advocacy to inform policy and practice.

Implementing these recommendations would help bridge the gap between environmental stewardship and sustainable peace, ensuring that nature becomes central to preventing conflict and fostering resilience in an increasingly uncertain world.

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