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“Ecological diplomacy – can we use environmental conservation to build peace?”

Is it possible to build peace on the basis of environmental conservation? This suggestion has encountered many skeptical views in the international relations theory. When a Kenyan environmental conservation activist won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004, for instance, many intellectuals raised doubts about the connection between environmental conservation and peace. There are four schools of thought in International relations with respect to natural resources. The first is that a dearth of resources leads to conflict. This is the prevailing view among students of international affairs. The second is that a wealth of resources leads to conflict, which arises in the absence of management or regulation following the collapse of regime governance over certain resources. The third is that a wealth of resources leads to cooperation, while the fourth is that a dearth of resources leads to cooperation. I will present the fourth perspective, that is, I will argue that joint management by states of environmental conservation areas promotes the resolution of territorial disputes.

Environmental conservation areas that play a beneficial role in the creation of peace and the maintenance of amicable relations among the parties concerned have been termed “peace parks.” Joint management of peace parks by the parties to territorial disputes encourages cooperation between them. Even where environmental issues are not connected with existing disputes, inter-state cooperation can be advanced by intentionally creating peace parks. The area along the Condor mountain range between Ecuador and Peru serves as one example of a peace park. The border dispute between the two countries dates back several decades and, though a peace treaty was concluded in February 1995, the two countries were unable to reach an agreement on the placement of the borderline. As an alternative, the two countries designated this district a natural conservation area. Domestic natural conservation groups coordinated with Conservation International and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) to form an ecological management regime in 2000. This cooperation led to the 2004 establishment of the Condor-Kutuku Conservation Corridor in the first example of environmental conservation groups being actively involved in international conflict resolution.

In East Asia, peace parks should be employed to assist in conflict resolution on the Korean peninsula. The Demilitarized Zone in particular still boasts abundant ecosystems, and I believe that joint environmental conservation efforts by North and South Korea in the context of a peace park could

contribute to conflict resolution. Cooperative efforts toward environmental conservation on the Korean peninsula are already underway around Kumgangsan and in the Kaesong Industrial Region. These projects make clear that the economic dimension must also be incorporated in order to develop a Demilitarized Zone peace park into something truly significant.