

World's future conflicts will be over water and mineral resources

IPS, Washington

US strategic doctrine over the past 30 years.

Klare, who teaches at Hampshire College in Massachusetts, argues that it is not only the United States that is preparing for such conflicts, but that all regional powers are focusing increasingly on how to protect or enlarge their access to vital resources over the next generation.

His argument appears in a newly-released book, 'Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict,' some of his other works include 'Low Intensity

Warfare: Counterinsurgency, pro-insurgency, and anti-terrorism in the Eighties,' and 'Rogue States and nuclear outlaws: America's Search for new foreign policy.'

'For over forty years, from the late 1940s until 1990, the overarching goal of US strategy was to create and maintain a global system of alliances capable of containing and, if necessary, defeating the Soviet Union. According to the book,' All other considerations, including the pursuit of America's own national interests, were subordinated to the all-encompassing mission of containment.' But this was an exceptional period in Washington's 200-year-old foreign policy, according to Klare. 'With the end of the cold war, resource issues reassumed their central role in military planning.'

A major signal of such a change-indeed, the one with which Klare opens his new book-is the increasingly extensive joint military exercises undertaken by US troops over the past several with armies in energy-rich Central Asian nations, including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

These exercises are not only designed to build up the military forces of those countries and encourage their independence from more powerful neighbours, especially Russia, China and Iran, says Klare, but also to plant the US flag and US military might-in a region which is believed to harbor as much as 270 million barrels of oil, or about one-fifth of the world's total proven reserves.

Similarly, Washington has been systematically building up its military ties in other key energy-producing regions, notably in the gulf of Guinea where new offshore drilling technology is enabling oil companies to tap into oil and gas reserves that could only be dreamed of a decade ago.

Klare sees the virtually permanent deployment of a formidable US naval force in the gulf after the 1991 Gulf War as another example of Washington's policy priorities, but he adds, it is not only the United States which is acting to ensure future access to energy resources.

The dizzying rise in energy demand in Asia, which cooled only temporarily in the wake of the 1997-98 financial crisis, is now resuming its tempo amid shortages.

The South China Sea-which is believed to cover substantial oil reserves-has become the site of a 'naval arms race' of almost half a dozen countries claiming rights to it.

Foreign oil and gas-ensuring access to which is certain to be featured prominently in President George W Bush's soon-to-be-released energy strategy paper-are by no means the only resources likely to fuel conflict in the coming years, according to Klare.

The struggle over fresh water may be even more desperate in the coming years, simply because in vast areas stretching from North Africa to South Asia, 'the demand for water is rapidly overtaking existing supply.'

River basins where the situation is most acute are found within regions where population growth also is putting the most pressure on existing supplies and global warming may actually increase drought conditions.

These include the Nile, which flows from Ethiopia through Sudan to Egypt; the Jordan, which is shared by Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority; the Tigris Euphrates, which flows from Turkey through Syria, Iraq and Iran and the Indus, whose tributaries run through Kashmir and nuclear-armed Pakistan and India.

'As population grows and the need for water and food rises in tandem, each of the riparians will seek to maximize its utilization of the available supply. When the actions of any one of these states results in a declining supply, for any of the others, the conditions are set for an intrabasin clash over the distribution of water,' according to Klare.

Conflicts will not only be between states but within states as well, particularly for control of minerals and disappearing stands of valuable timber, according to Klare.

The evaluation of threats to the planet must be conducted simultaneously at global, regional and national levels.

UN to map Earth's health

AFP, Paris

The United Nations will launch on World Environment Day a vast scientific assessment of threats to the world's ecosystem, plants and animals, involving an unprecedented network of experts and scientists.

'This worldwide scientific enterprise will map the health of our planet, and so fill important gaps in the knowledge we need to preserve it,' said Secretary General Kofi Annan in a statement Sunday.

The 'Millennium Ecosystem Assessment,' will take four years to complete at an estimated cost of \$1 million dollars (24.7 million euros) and will officially be launched in Turin, Italy, host of this year's Environment Day on June 5.

Some 1,500 scientists, experts and representatives of non-governmental organisations will take part in the project.

'The aim is to supply decision-makers with concrete information to help them make the right choices, like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is currently doing,' explained Veronique Placque-Fichelet, in charge of coordinating the study on the evolution of ecosystems.

She is also head of Scope, a scientific association which groups 40 academics from across the world.

The example of climate change is poignant: the 3,000 scientists gathered together since 1990 under the auspices of the UN and the World Meteorological Organisation have succeeded in convincing the international community of the reality of climate change, said Placque-Fichelet.

But other ecosystems are also suffering from human activity and their degradation pose a threat to the survival of life on earth--deforestation, droughts, floods and various forms of pollution.

Studies of the ecosystem exist but 'above all we don't have a real global overview, and therefore lack precise information on regional consequences,' she said.

The evaluation of threats to the planet must be conducted simultaneously at global, regional and national levels.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Many people wept as they passed the crystal coffin carrying the body of Pope John Paul II.

Pope's body goes on show

INTERNET, VATICAN CITY

In a surreal ceremony, the exhumed and restored body of Pope John Paul II, who died in 1983, was carried Sunday in a glass coffin to a new resting place in St. Peter's Basilica where it will be visible to the faithful.

It was eerily recognisable--the familiar hooked nose, the round belly, the big hands, the 'Camauro,' or white fur-trimmed red bonnet, designed in the 12th century that John liked wearing because it kept his head warm in the cold Vatican halls.

The coffin, which looked like a crystal boudoir jewellery box framed in gold, was rolled out of a side entrance of the basilica on a wheeled, red-draped platform.

Vatican ushers dressed in gray tuxedos slowly pushed the platform, which was bedecked with red and yellow roses, behind a silent procession led by solemn-looking cardinals and altar boys wearing fashionable sunglasses.

Inside the glass box, John's body was dressed in a white, silk cassock and red cape. His big head rested on damask red pillows. His face was covered with a wax mask.

The coffin stood in the square as Pope John Paul said a mass for tens of thousands of people.

Pope John will join only two other pontiffs to be placed in glass coffins inside the church. The others are Saint Pius X and Innocent XI.

Sunday's ceremony marked one of the rare times in history that a living pope and the body of a dead pope were in the square at the same time.

In his homily, the Pope said it was a 'happy coincidence' that John's body had returned to the same square where tens of thousands of people prayed for him on the night of June 3, 1983, as he lay on his deathbed, his stomach ravaged by cancer.

The body of John, who was beatified and put on the road to sainthood last year, was exhumed in January and found to be in surprisingly good condition.

Although some thought it was a miracle, the conservation was in fact due to the work of Professor Gennaro Goglia, a doctor who secretly embalmed the dead pope with a special liquid.

Goglia, now 78, said his emotions on seeing the face were mixed.

'It made me think of Madame Tufts (Wax Museum),' he told Reuters Television. 'It could have been handled better,' he said, adding that a cleansing solution would have given the dead pope a more natural look.

In the past five months since it was exhumed, technicians have been working to keep the body preserved so that it could remain visible to the faithful.

Since it was exhumed, the body of John was effectively 'mummified,' as one technician put it. The coffin's glass is bullet-proof and treated to block ultra-violet rays which could damage the body.

John, known as the 'Good Pope' because of his jovial and benevolent nature, reigned from 1958 to 1963.

Although his reign was relatively brief, he revolutionized the Roman Catholic Church by calling the Second Vatican Council, which modernized the Church.

After Sunday's mass the body was moved into the basilica's main floor, and after faithful are allowed to file past it for a day, it will be placed permanently in a side chapel.

The body had been kept in a marble crypt in the Vatican grottoes under the basilica along with many of the 147 other popes.

Although Vatican officials are not commenting, there has been widespread speculation that the current Pontiff someday may be buried in the spot in the grottoes where John Paul II was.



PHOTO: AFP

President Gloria Arroyo (R) meets two soldiers wounded in a battle yesterday with the Abu Sayyaf Muslim guerrillas who kidnapped 20 people from a resort last week. Nine of the hostages have been rescued but two others have been found dead while the Abu Sayyaf have fled with the remaining captives including three Americans. Arroyo has ruled out any negotiations with the Abu Sayyaf and vowed to wipe them out.

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