



Introduction to International Relations

Chapter Notes: Chapter 14

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Chapter Fourteen:

World Environment

Chapter Overview

Chapter 14 examines various aspects of the world environment—such as population, resources, global warming, and pandemics—detailing specific problems associated with each. Additionally, it looks at the environment through the different perspectives, offering advice on how best to counter these problems based on how the three perspectives view the nature of the threats. Realist perspectives stress the scarcity of resources and the subsequent competition that arises and argue that any action ought to be taken on a decentralized basis; above all, they resist one-size-fits-all solutions. Liberals, on the other hand, emphasize the role of international institutions and rules in dealing with environmental problems, viewing the environment as a common task that all must work to preserve. Identity perspectives, finally, see environmental issues as deeply embedded in—and also reflective of—the values of human society. To change the environment, they suggest, we must first change our perceptions of the environment.

World environment: Identity

- Sees environmental problems as deeply embedded in human societies and values
- Best solution is to shift responsibility to international NGOs, which constitute a new global civil society.

World environment: Liberal

- Views environmental issues as problems of managing collective or public goods
- Places emphasis on managing collective goods through traditional international institutions

World environment: Realist

- Stresses circumstances, scarcity, and competition
- Best way to handle environmental problems is on a decentralized basis. Above all, the realist perspective resists one-size-fits-all solutions.

Population

- Demographic transition—a period of accelerating population growth as living standards increase.
- Western countries experienced a demographic transition a century ago and now have graying populations; many industrializing nations are currently undergoing demographic transitions while also experiencing youth bulges.

Resources, energy, biodiversity

- Fossil fuels have a large impact on foreign affairs because they provide 95 percent of world energy consumption.
- One-fifth of the world does not have safe drinking water.
- Biodiversity, or the multiple species of plant and animal life, is shrinking due to overhunting and the destruction of habitats.

Pollution and global warming

- Forms of pollution
 - o Smog
 - o Acid rain
 - o River and ocean pollution
 - o Toxic and hazardous wastes
 - o Atmospheric pollution
- Destruction of the ozone layer
- Global warming due to trapped greenhouse gases
- Montreal Protocol—Signed by 22 states in 1987, this agreement was designed to reduce CFCs by 50 percent by 1998.
- Kyoto Protocol—Set deadlines for industrial countries to cut average greenhouse gas emissions. The United States, accounting for 34 percent of industrial country emissions, did not ratify it.

Pandemics

What are potential pandemic diseases?

- Tuberculosis, Malaria, Ebola virus, AIDS, SARS, and the Avian bird flu virus [Also known as: A/chicken/Nakorn-Patom/Thailand/CU-K2/04 (H5N1), where the H5 means Hemagglutinin #5, and the N1 means Neuraminidase #1.]

How do we deal with pandemics?

- _ Liberal: Rely on international institutions.
- _ Realist: Treat it as a matter of national security.
- _ Identity: Unite nations with sense of common human purpose.

Thought Questions

2. What are positive aspects of each perspective's take on the global environment? What are some limitations or drawbacks?
3. What measures, if any, ought to be taken in response to population issues? Is it moral to seek to limit population growth?
4. Are international environmental treaties like the Kyoto Protocol inherently discriminatory against larger, developed countries? If so, how can this be changed?
5. What are the greatest threats to the environment, in your opinion? How can they best be combated?
6. How should countries react to the threat of pandemics? Should they pursue it as an issue of national security, like realists would suggest, or as an issue of global welfare, like identity perspectives advocate?