Proposal Title: Natural Resources and Armed Conflict
Topic: Models of Societal Resilience and Change (Topic 2), Energy, Environment, and Resource Factors (Subtopic 2b)
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How do natural resources, such as oil reserves, mineral deposits, and alluvial gemstones, influence the likelihood, type, and duration of armed conflict in the developing world? Large literatures in political science, economics, and geography address this group of questions but have not reached much of a consensus on the answers. We argue that one reason for this lack of progress is that most existing work has not investigated how variation in the degree and type of control that rebel groups exercise over resources influences their strategies of violence. Existing explanations of the links between resources and conflict make important assumptions about the role of control. But few develop these assumptions in any detail, and none utilize direct evidence about control in testing their hypotheses.

Our project addresses this deficit by developing (1) a comprehensive, global, geocoded dataset of natural resource locations, and (2) measuring if and precisely how rebel groups control exploit such resources. We use this data to generate scholarly analyses of the following four major questions:

- Do "lootable" resources increase the likelihood, severity, and duration of ethnic rebellion?
- How does access to natural resources influence the type of violence employed by non-state actors? Does access to resources lead violent actors to scale up from terrorist to insurgent violence?
- Do natural resources fuel third-party interventions into civil wars?
- How do natural resources influence state failure and political violence?
- How do the different ways that rebels can exploit resources (controlling production, theft, providing protection for producers, etc.) influence their duration, use of violence, and cohesion?

This project has important implications for US defense policy. Political instability and conflict in the developing world has been identified as a key security policy concern in the National Security Strategy of the United States. We know from existing research that natural resources are linked in some ways to such instability and conflict. Better understanding this link would place the United States in a stronger position to prevent conflict. In particular, understanding how control of resources influences conflict would allow the United States to identify and influence actors who control resource locations that are most likely to fuel conflict. We will also develop an online "dashboard" that identifies natural resource locations and their key geographic and political characteristics. Defense planners and others could access this open-source resource to prepare for potential conflicts that might involve the interests of the United States.