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## **Policy Brief**

# **Climate security risk management for the defence and intelligence communities**

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### **Summary**

The effects of climate change present strategically-significant risks to national and international security, and countries must develop and advance comprehensive policy agendas for addressing these risks. Climate change has been on the international security agenda for over a decade, but the response from governments and national security establishments in most countries is still not commensurate with the risks it presents. Where progress in mainstreaming climate change as a security issue has been made, notably in countries that have championed the issue such as the US and the UK, it has proven vulnerable to changing political winds. Building a more robust and intentional global community of national security actors can help to support the implementation of whole-of-government responses that assess and manage climate security risk internationally, helping to prevent climate-related fragility and instability.

## Challenges

Climate change is a risk to international peace and stability, and the defence and intelligence communities have unique roles and responsibilities in managing this risk.

As recent consensus statements from the international security community note,<sup>1</sup> climate change places stress on water, food and energy resources, resulting in unique and hard-to-predict security risks that can be driven by a combination of often rapidly-changing physical, environmental, economic, social and political factors. Climate can drive instability by interacting with existing stressors such as poverty, marginalisation, ethnic strife, resource stress and religious differences, as was seen in the origins of the Syrian civil war. Stresses resulting from climate change can increase the likelihood of intra or international conflict, state fragility and failure, significant migration, and the creation of additional ungoverned spaces, across a range of strategically-significant regions including parts of Africa and the Middle East. In a future where competition for already-scarce resources increases, climate security impacts could make existing conflicts harder to stabilise, and halt or even reverse peace and development gains made over the past decade, for example in post-conflict countries like Rwanda and Guatemala, or conflict-affected states like Afghanistan and Yemen.

As well as posing future risks, climate change is already affecting militaries' readiness, operations and strategy. Sea level rise, extreme drought, higher temperatures and infrastructure vulnerabilities (including energy infrastructure) impact military installations and assets, for example low-lying coastal installations like Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, which are experiencing increasing flooding and may eventually become inoperable. Domestically and internationally,

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<sup>1</sup> Climate and Security Consensus Project statement, [https://climateandsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/climate-and-security-consensus-project-statement-2016\\_09.pdf](https://climateandsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/climate-and-security-consensus-project-statement-2016_09.pdf), International Climate and Security Consensus Statement, <https://climateandsecurity.org/internationalconsensus/>.

militaries often play a role in supporting civil disaster response and humanitarian relief capabilities, including in situations where climate is a driver. The impacts of climate change will increase the likelihood of more frequent and elaborate Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) mission requirements; this upward trend is particularly acute in Asia-Pacific. Overstretched governments, militaries and humanitarian teams may struggle to respond to supercharged natural disasters, which could drive further fragility and conflict in vulnerable regions.<sup>2</sup>

The security community has been warning about the systemic threats of climate change since the early 2000s.<sup>3</sup> The defence community is aware that it must manage the consequences of situations where the human security issues of climate change scale up into fragility, state instability and conflict, and this has helped drive climate change up the international security agenda.<sup>4</sup> For its part, the intelligence community's work on climate risks has informed other parts of the security community about climate and security interactions in vulnerable areas, although the responsibility for generating policy responses to manage risk has lain with other areas of government. The defence and intelligence communities remain integral to managing these risks because of their unique rapid response and lift and logistics capabilities and the scope and time horizons of their analysis.

## Responses

Many defence actors have incorporated climate into their planning documents by addressing the ways climate change might impact readiness, operations and strategy. This

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Early analyses include German Ministry for the Environment, 'Climate Change and Conflict', 2002; Peter Schwartz and Doug Randall, 'An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and Its Implications for United States National Security', NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, October 2003; CNA Military Advisory Board, 'National Security and the Threat of Climate Change', 2007; German Advisory Council on Global Change, 'World in Transition, Climate Change as a Security Risk', 2007;

<sup>4</sup> For more information, see <https://climatesecurity101.org/>.

analysis has also served to inform other areas of government about the nature, timing, scale and likelihood of both direct and indirect security risks posed by climate change.

The most detailed and comprehensive work has been undertaken in the United States by the Department of Defence (DoD) and the intelligence community. Policy documents including the DoD's Climate Change Adaptation Roadmap,<sup>5</sup> the U.S. Navy Climate Change Roadmap<sup>6</sup> and the DoD Directive on Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience,<sup>7</sup> amongst others, have elaborated a strategy for addressing climate risk across different areas of the DoD that may be relevant to other national governments as they formulate policy responses. It includes for instance...

The National Intelligence Council's reports on The Impact of Climate Change to 2030<sup>8</sup> and the Memorandum on the Implications for US National Security of Anticipated Climate Change,<sup>9</sup> amongst others, fit into a broader US strategy that outlines ways to coordinate high-level interagency cooperation to address climate-related risks to national security. While a change in presidential administration might signal a different approach to these risks within the US government, documents like 2016's Presidential Memorandum on Climate Change and National Security<sup>10</sup> can function as a

template for other countries seeking to coordinate comprehensive, multi-agency responses that are commensurate with climate risks.

The US and UK spearheaded the prioritization of climate within their security communities and internationally over the past decade. With recent changes in political leadership in both countries, there may be more space for new issue champions to advance domestic and international uptake of the relationship between climate change and security. Other governments have worked to incorporate climate risk management into their national security policies – examples include France, Germany, Australia, Mexico and Canada, amongst others, alongside multilateral structures including the European Union, NATO, the G7 and the OSCE.

Another important factor in mainstreaming climate change as a security issue has come through military to military (mil-mil) engagement on disaster risk reduction and in responding to current climate impacts. Such engagement has resulted in initiatives to strengthen preparedness for climate-related threats, including cooperation on issues like humanitarian assistance, disaster response and disaster risk reduction. These activities and engagement can lead to positive diplomatic developments, or drive cooperation and response between military and civilian actors in areas where mutual security interests may be otherwise elusive. Examples include:

- The UK and French militaries have formed a coalition that works with the African Union on disaster response.
- Disaster risk reduction, humanitarian assistance and disaster response are the focus of regional military cooperation in Asia-Pacific, where natural disasters are a significant threat. The Pacific Angel joint humanitarian and civic-military exercise, an annual event led by US Pacific Command held in partnership with countries around the region, focuses on capacity building in the host

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<sup>5</sup> United States Department of Defense, 2014 Climate Change Adaptation Roadmap (2014) <https://www.scribd.com/doc/242845848/Read-DoD-report-2014-Climate-Change-Adaptation-Roadmap>.

<sup>6</sup> United States Department of Defense, Navy Climate Change Roadmap (2010) <http://www.navy.mil/navydata/documents/CCR.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> United States Department of Defense, DoD Directive 4715.21, Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience (2016) <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/471521p.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Impact of Climate Change to 2030 (2009) <http://www.dni.gov/index.php/about/organization/national-intelligence-council-nic-publications/the-impact-of-climate-change-to-2030-commissioned-research-and-conference-reports>.

<sup>9</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Implications for US National Security of Anticipated Climate Change (2016) [https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports%20and%20Pubs/Implications\\_for\\_US\\_National\\_Security\\_of\\_Anticipated\\_Climate\\_Change.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports%20and%20Pubs/Implications_for_US_National_Security_of_Anticipated_Climate_Change.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> The White House Office of the Press Secretary, Presidential Memorandum -- Climate Change and National Security (2016) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/21/presidential-memorandum-climate-change-and-national-security>.

nation and promoting interoperability to address humanitarian crises.

- The Arctic Security Forces Roundtable promotes understanding between Arctic nations and provides a forum to enhance multilateral security operations in the region, which focus primarily on human security issues such as search and rescue operations or oil spill response.
- The NATO Crisis Management and Disaster Response Centre of Excellence builds out joint capabilities between NATO, member states, partner nations and international organizations, enhancing civil emergency response capacity in the context of climate change.

Groups of military leaders associated with think tanks and NGOs, such as the CNA Military Advisory Board,<sup>11</sup> the Global Military Advisory Council on Climate Change<sup>12</sup> and others, have produced research and analysis to advance the body of knowledge on this topic and demonstrate high-level awareness of and commitment to mitigating these risks.

## Looking ahead

Despite widespread acknowledgment of the security risks climate change presents by heads of state at the opening of the Paris climate negotiations, and in national and international security policy documents, the security community is not yet adequately prepared for managing climate risk.

Developing and operationalizing the policies that can manage climate risk will take time and resources, and require a level of foresight and forward planning that can be difficult to muster when the urgent takes precedence over the important. Issues like climate may be pushed down the agenda by emerging threats like nuclear proliferation and terrorism. In Europe, budgetary constraints in the wake of the recession and competing domestic humanitarian needs may push less immediate issues down the agenda.

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<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.cna.org/mab/>.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://gmacc.org/>.

In some countries that are vulnerable to climate-related fragilities, although there may be an implicit understanding of the linkages between climate and security, there may be limited appetite for incorporating non-traditional security issues into defence agendas. Climate may also be seen exclusively as a development or environmental issue – including by actors in those fields.

International security fora whose remit is to understand, anticipate and organise responses to a range of destabilizing issues may include climate change on their agendas and accompanying activities or publications, but the discussion may not reflect the scale and certainty of the risks involved, or seriously prompt security policymakers to grapple with how to implement effective responses to these threats. This is despite the quantitative and qualitative evidence base for climate as a conflict driver, for example in Syria, the repercussions of which are a major focus of discussions at security fora like the Munich Security Conference, NATO Summits and others. Regional security summits in Asia such as the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting may have touched on issues related to humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HA/DR) in the context of climate change, but their agendas have typically avoided addressing the scale of the geoeconomic, geopolitical and security risks, despite the region's exposure to complex threats which climate change will likely exacerbate.

As the Climate and Security Consensus Project statement notes, risk managers across institutions of national and international security, as well as intelligence agencies, industries and banks, have consistently identified climate change as a “high impact, high likelihood” risk. Discussions of climate security impacts are typically based on the most likely case; while there is a small chance that the impacts will be less than expected, there is a greater chance that the impacts will be more severe, particularly if crucial tipping points are breached. This necessitates a response that is commensurate with this risk profile, to both prevent and prepare for climate

change risks, and avoid potentially unmanageable climate-driven scenarios.<sup>13</sup>

Discussion in this Working Group will be aimed at identifying ways the security community can help to accelerate effective policy uptake on this issue, in order to implement responses that are commensurate with the security risks posed by climate change.

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<sup>13</sup> Climate and Security Consensus Project statement, [https://climateandsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/climate-and-security-consensus-project-statement-2016\\_09.pdf](https://climateandsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/climate-and-security-consensus-project-statement-2016_09.pdf).