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## Climate Change and Global Security

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## **Climate Change and Global Security**

# Climate Change and Global Security

*Nathan P. Jones and John P. Sullivan, Editors of Special Issue*

Policy makers, scholars, strategic military thinkers, and intelligence analysts increasingly recognize climate change as a profound multi-dimensional global crisis. The dimensions of climate change have the potential to alter the way people live by presenting a range of environmental, cultural, economic, political, and social challenges. These include the potential for extreme weather events (hurricanes, storms, floods, heat waves) triggering mass migration, refugees, and depopulation of entire regions as they become uninhabitable due to extreme heat or sea level rise, droughts, degraded water supplies, famine and food insecurity, and health and biosecurity threats trigger humanitarian emergencies.<sup>1</sup>

Climate security is rapidly becoming a core component of global security as recognition that the dynamics of climate change and adaptation place extreme stress on all societal systems. These stresses promise to influence governance, conflict, and crime in profound ways. In addition to geopolitical influences, climate security embraces conflict; specifically, a ‘climate-conflict nexus’ as expressed through state fragility, resource wars, insurgency, and terrorism. It also anticipates the rise of organized crime exploitation of climate insecurity through corruption, resource extraction, and conflict-generating potentials. We anticipate those issues will become increasingly salient as the intensity of climate stressors deepen. Indeed, climate security as an issue area and field is imperative to negotiate the intense stresses anticipated due to the changing climate.<sup>2</sup>

Climate security may be an unfamiliar concept for many security practitioners—especially those involved in law enforcement and criminal intelligence—since it is an emerging and evolving threat. Beyond that, climate security can be seen to have three—at least—general facets: environmental security, human security, and geopolitical security.<sup>3</sup> Add to these biosecurity and criminal aspects which bridge the confluence between the three general facets and the nexus between climate-conflict and conflict and crime become realistic potentials. Consider the example of the COVID-19 pandemic where a range of criminal groups—gangs, cartels, mafias (aka, Criminal Armed Groups or CAGs)—exploited the gaps in response and state weakness in the contested pandemic space to exert

criminal governance over areas as disparate as Brazil's *favelas*, El Salvador and South Africa's gang fiefdoms, Colombia's rebel-ruled zones, and Italy's mafia-exploited urban centers.<sup>4</sup>

In the pandemic, conflict, crime, and "alternative governance" emerged.<sup>5</sup> It is expected that climate change will exert these same influences—indeed there are indicators that it already is as seen in the rise of water conflicts,<sup>6</sup> and migration-driven civil strife.<sup>7</sup> These conflict drivers and amplifiers are increasingly seen worldwide and are driving migration from the global south to the north demanding new skills and initiatives for humanitarian diplomacy to mitigate conflict.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, what happens if—or more likely when—climate activists embrace terrorism to further their cause?<sup>9</sup> Will they continue to embrace 'monkeywrenching' or ecotage or will they resort to active terrorism from the Left?<sup>10</sup> Will they embrace 'Avocado Politics' or ethno-nationalist terrorism from the right as described by Gilman?<sup>11</sup> Or will extreme environmental degradation lead to complex, hybrid insurgencies where the political and violence converge to bring a variety of 'criminal insurgency' as seen in Mexico, Latin America, and the Petro-Insurgency in the Niger Delta?<sup>12</sup> Ultimately will climate conflict fuel state transition to alternate governance structures?<sup>13</sup> If so, will convergence between geopolitical climate stress and transnational organized crime and gangs lead the way?<sup>14</sup>

Corruption is certainly a component of climate driven-insecurity and conflict. Indeed, corruption will exacerbate resource extraction and financial misconduct enabling criminal enterprises to capitalize on climate instability. Corruption and impunity will also enable degradation of the environment and threaten human security. Thus climate-related corruption will likely fuel climate conflict and terrorism and enable racketeering and profiteering.<sup>15</sup> At the extreme edge this will drive ecocide<sup>16</sup>—which in turn will fuel the intensity of terrorism and conflict, include the 'crime-terror' nexus.<sup>17</sup> In these contexts climate change can trigger instability, act as a threat multiplier, and stimulate the rise and empowerment of non-state armed groups, including CAGs.

This special issue brings the discussion of climate security forward by looking at collective climate security from a NATO perspective, climate change and hybrid warfare, the impact climate change on transnational crime in the guise of drug trafficking in the Sierra Tarahumara along the

US-Mexico borderlands area, the dynamics of petroleum resource governance in Nigeria and Norway, the impact of climate change on cultural security, water security and conflict in South Asia, fisheries conflict and climate change, climate change and terrorism, and finally a discussion of climate change from a critical security studies perspective looking at disaster discourses through the lens of ‘Zombie Apocalypse.’ Together these papers help frame the contours of the emerging “climate-conflict” environment. We hope this special issue will help broaden the appreciation of climate security as a critical component of global security and encourage increased debate and research into the security components of climate change and climate-related conflict and crime.

## Endnotes

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