

Climate Change, Social Stress and Violent Conflict

State of the Art and Research Needs

CALL FOR PAPERS

International Conference, KlimaCampus at Hamburg University, November 19/20, 2009

Key issues: Climate change is becoming a focal point for security and conflict research and poses a challenge for the world's policymaking and governance structures. The magnitude and diversity of risks associated with global warming could trigger a sequence of cascading events, involving environmental degradation, economic decline, social unrest and political instability, that could threaten human security and societal stability and lead to violent conflict. In parts of the world (notably in Africa, Asia and Latin America) the erosion of social order, state failure and violence could go hand in hand. In the worst-affected regions, conflicts may spread to neighbouring states, e.g. through refugee flows, ethnic links, environmental resource flows or arms exports. Such spillover effects can destabilize regions and expand the geographical extent of a crisis, overstressing global and regional governance structures. The devastating impact of hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the 2003 heat wave in Europe demonstrated that not only poor countries are vulnerable to climate change but the world's richest nations as well. Climate change could increase resource competition between major powers (e.g. in the Arctic) and induce strategies with additional risks and conflicts (e.g. nuclear power, bioenergy, geo-engineering).

The workshop aims to bring together national and international experts to explore and discuss main elements of the current "state of the art" in terms of knowledge on security implications and conflict potential of climate change. Furthermore participants will explore research needs, both with respect to problem analysis and methodologies. Besides providing a snapshot of the current debate, it aims at building connections among individuals and research groups that can provide a basis for establishing an international network on climate security and conflict.

In addition to reviews of current knowledge, the workshop organizers also invite suggestions for new efforts by the research community. This concerns both traditional concerns, such as the causal relationship between resource scarcity and violent conflict, as well as future large scale and cascading effects triggered by climate change. Effects for consideration can include harvest losses, floods, droughts, sea-level rise, mass migrations and natural disaster, that together with other factors could lead to social stress, societal instabilities, security risks and violent conflicts.

Guiding questions

- What are the major causal chains between climate change and violent conflict, and what is the empirical basis for these linkages, revisiting previous assessments of environmental conflict?
- Which approaches, methods and theories are helpful for the analysis of the links between climate change, social stress and violent conflict?
- Is it adequate to call climate change a threat to national or international security?
- Are broader security conceptions (such as environmental or human security) useful for evaluating the violence risks of climate change?
- What is the likelihood, potential damage and resulting risk for violent conflict of water and food scarcity, mass migrations and natural disasters induced by climate change?
- Will the international community face more violent conflict or more cooperation on climate change and the use of natural resources?
- What are the most likely and most adequate responses of the world's policymaking and governance structures to address the climate-conflict nexus and what can institutions contribute?

Examples of possible topics

1. Empirical basis of linkages between environmental stress and violent conflict, revisiting the debate on violent reactions to resource scarcity
2. Empirical basis of past climate change and prediction of climate futures, in the context of potential effects on humans that might possibly cause conflicts, in particular water and food scarcity, migration, disasters
3. Conceptual approaches and contributions of academic disciplines to understanding causal effects, cascading potential and tipping points in climate-security interactions
4. Impacts and conflicts associated with response strategies to address climate change, such as nuclear power, bioenergy, geo-engineering, disaster management.
5. Security concepts and their relations to climate change and violent conflict, connecting to the “securitization” discourse
6. Regional case studies of climate-induced security risks and conflicts: Sahel zone and Darfur, Middle East, Southern Asia, Central Asia, Latin America, Mediterranean, Arctic
7. Mechanisms and institutions for addressing climate security challenges and opportunities for strengthening international cooperation and peace.

When: November 19/20, 2009

Where: KlimaCampus, Hamburg University

Organizing Committee: The conference will be organized by a local organizing committee of participants in the KlimaCampus, Universität Hamburg, including: Jürgen Scheffran (coordination)¹, Michael Brzoska, Martin Claussen, Anita Engels, Lars Kaleschke, Martin Kalinowski, Jürgen Ossenbrügge.

International Program Committee: Frank Biermann, Alexander Carius, Geoffrey Dabelko, Nils Petter Gleditsch, Bill Hare, Peter Nardulli, Karen O’Brien, Úrsula Oswald Spring, Ole Wæver, Oran Young

Participants: Participants will include both invited international keynote speakers as well as participants selected by the organizers among the respondents to the call for papers. A number of those selected will be funded from the conference budget.

Abstracts:

Submission of abstracts: August 31, 2009

Notification of acceptance: September 21, 2009

Length: Maximum one page

Send abstracts to: ClimateSecurity@uni-hamburg.de (Subject line: Abstract Climate Conflict Conference)

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