News & Analysis | *Joshua Busby*

Climate Change and Security A Credible Connection?

In April 2007, the United Nations Security Council held its first ever debate on the potential impact of climate change on peace and security.

With the United Kingdom holding the Council's rotating presidency, then-UK Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett took the lead. She compared the threat of climate change to the "gathering storm" leading up to World War II. She argued that "there are some fairly basic needs that underpin our collective security . . . . Take them away, fail to prepare adequately and you raise the chances of conflict and instability. If people don't have enough food to eat it can lead to instability."[1]

The Chinese representative, Liu Zhenmin, challenged the UK government's effort: "The developing countries believe that the Security Council has neither the professional competence in handling climate change — nor is it the right decision-making place for extensive participation leading up to widely acceptable proposals."

China's critique is rooted in broader North-South political disputes and is used instrumentally to avoid addressing the country's own soaring greenhouse gas emissions while countries like the United States do little to restrain theirs. Nonetheless, China raises a legitimate question: Is the UK effort merely a tactic to get top decision-makers to pay attention to climate change, or is climate change actually a security threat?

This article seeks to answer that question by first, reviewing recent efforts to link climate change and security; second, summarizing the effects of climate change and the potential links to security; and third, turning to the policy agenda to address those security concerns.

Climate change does have credible security connections, particularly from the rising risk of extreme weather events. Unless more is done to support risk reduction and adaptation, storm surges, drought and heat waves — made more likely by climate change — will kill tens of thousands, with developing countries most vulnerable. These effects of climate change will sometimes overwhelm local relief capacities, contributing to refugee crises, instability and the possible need for humanitarian intervention.

Recent Initiatives in Climate and National Security

The Security Council debate is one of several recent efforts that have shed light on the potential security consequences of climate change. In March 2007, US Senators Dick Durbin (D-Illinois) and Chuck Hagel (R-Nebraska) introduced a bill requesting a National Intelligence Estimate to assess whether and how climate change might pose a national security threat to the United States. Senator Durbin described the threat: "Environmental changes caused by global warming represent a potential threat multiplier for instability around the world. Scarce water, for example, may exacerbate conflict along economic, ethnic, or sectarian divisions."[2]

In April 2007, the CNA Corporation, a US-based think tank, released a report overseen by retired US generals and admirals that examined the links between climate change and national security. The report concluded that: "Projected climate change will seriously exacerbate already marginal living standards in many Asian, African, and Middle Eastern nations, causing widespread political instability and the likelihood of failed states."[3]

In June 2007, the German Advisory Council on Climate Change released a similar report. While the Council thought the possibility of inter-state wars as a result of climate change was "unlikely," they concluded "climate change could well trigger national and international distributional conflicts and intensify problems already hard to manage such as state failure, the erosion of social order, and rising violence."[4] What is the scientific basis of these concerns?

UN Photo/Tim McKulka

United Nations Mission in Sudan

A mother belonging to the Ambororo nomadic tribe with her children cooks a meal for the family (Juba, Sudan, 26 December 2006). In 2007, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon invoked climate change as one of the background causes for the conflict in Darfur, Sudan.

Developing countries have the least capacity to deal with extreme weather and are the most vulnerable. Climate shocks could contribute to instability, violent conflict and, at their extreme, state failure.

Climate Change Effects and Security Connections

In 2007, the expert body, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), released its Fourth Assessment Report summarizing the effects of climate change by kind, likelihood and impact on different sectors such as agriculture and human health (see Table 1). They concluded: "confidence has increased that some weather events and extremes will become more frequent, more widespread and/or more intense during the 21st century."[5]

The IPCC has also summarized likely regional effects. Africa and Asia in particular will likely experience more events of extreme flooding in coastal areas and in the mega-deltas of rivers. In the Sahel and southern Africa, water-stress due to drought may adversely affect the food supply, increasing the possibilities for famine and competition over water resources. In 2007, Ban Ki-moon, the new Secretary-General of the United Nations, went so far as to invoke climate change as one of the background causes for the conflict in Darfur, Sudan.[6]

Parts of Asia are also projected to experience considerable shortfalls in fresh water due to glacier melt in the Himalayas alongside more irregular and intense monsoon rains.[7] One recent study found that a tenth of the world's population — 634 million people — live in coastal areas that lie within zero and 10 meters above sea level; 75 percent of those live in Asia.[8] Even the United States will face a number of negative consequences from droughts, heat waves and storms.

While rich countries in many cases can afford to adapt to climate change, regions characterized by poverty, past conflict and weak governance will find it much more difficult.[9] Climate change will have security consequences, particularly from the effects of extreme weather events. As with the 2004 Asian tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, the damage will likely overwhelm the capacity of many governments to respond, requiring military mobilization to prevent humanitarian disasters. Such events could put hundreds of thousands of people on the move, straining the countries and localities that receive them.

Bangladesh, for example, has 46 percent of its population located in low elevation areas.[10] Its capital, Dhaka, with about 12.6 million people, is extremely vulnerable to flooding, having experienced severe flooding in 1988, 1998 and 2004.[11] Severe flooding could send thousands across the border to India. Developing countries have the least capacity to deal with these events and are the most vulnerable. These climate shocks could contribute to further instability, violent conflict and, at their extreme, state failure.

The Policy Agenda

The policy agenda that emerges from this security focus involves both 1. short-and long-term efforts to reduce emissions and 2. immediate enhanced support for risk reduction and adaptation, particularly for developing countries. (It is the latter, which has been much neglected, that I will focus on here.) Policies that should be on the agenda include vulnerability assessments, early warning systems, emergency response plans, better building codes, coastal defenses, water conservation and catchment, and investment in new crop varietals. Policymakers should also work with insurance companies to discourage dangerous coastal settlements.

Adaptation is almost always less costly than responding to a disaster. One estimate from the US Geological Survey and the World Bank suggested an investment of $40 billion would have prevented losses of $280 billion in the 1990s. Among the examples provided was China, which spent $3.15 billion on flood control between 1960 and 2000 and was estimated to have averted losses of some $12 billion.[12]

The amount of money currently dedicated to adaptation is wholly inadequate. The World Bank's Global Environmental Facility (GEF) administers a number of adaptation-related funds, including the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF) and the Least Developed Country Fund (LDCF). The total volume across all these funds is quite low (they collectively have raised about $215 million).[13] Why so little? Supporters of a more robust climate policy have interpreted money for adaptation as giving up on mitigation and emissions reductions. In reality, both are needed. Unless a major reduction in greenhouse gases takes place before mid-21st century, climate damages are likely to exceed most governments' adaptive capacities. However, some climate change is at this point inevitable, and poor countries especially need support to minimize the worst effects.

The Stern Review estimated that it would cost developing countries between $4 and $37 billion per year to minimize the climate damage to new investments. Of that total, between $2 and $7 billion should come from

external finance to cover the portion of international investments vulnerable to climate change.[14] Since this estimate focuses on protecting new investments and doesn't take into account poor countries' resource constraints, it likely understates the total external finance developing countries need.

Clearly, more money is needed for adaptation. While GEF funds could be scaled up, recent turmoil at the World Bank, coupled with the low-level of fundraising, raise questions about its institutional adequacy. In other domains, there has been institutional innovation. In the health arena, for example, donors have simultaneously created an independent funding agency (the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria) while also increasing their bilateral programs. World leaders should seek to enhance the funds available for risk reduction and adaptation through some combination of the GEF, the United Nations Development Program, bilateral efforts, and/or a new institution.

Adaptation is on the agenda for the 13th Conference of Parties climate meeting in December 2007 in Bali. It should be on the agenda for every major meeting in the coming year including the 2008 G-8 meeting in Osaka.

Donors should also look for new sources of funds. In recent G-8 summits, rich countries made grandiose promises to increase the resources for developing countries, particularly for Africa. Commitments for specific purposes such as health are more popular with donors than general cash support for governments. In the health sector, France pioneered a sales tax on flights to support the Global Fund. Following the UK's lead, donors also are backing bond sales to fund development through the International Financial Facility. Policymakers should make climate adaptation and risk reduction one of the core areas that receives funds from these kinds of initiatives. Moreover, as countries like the United States establish regimes that price carbon such as emissions trading schemes, some of the revenue should be directed towards adaptation, at home and abroad.

The first vital need is a global risk assessment of the most densely populated coastal places that are vulnerable to climate change, particularly in developing countries such as China, India and Bangladesh. Cities with large vulnerable populations should be assessed to determine which adaptation strategies are likely to yield the most damage reduction at the least cost.

Even if this risk reduction agenda is implemented with great success, some countries will be buffeted by extreme weather events. Both the United Nations and donor countries will have to improve their coordination and rapid response capabilities to minimize the loss of life. Without breakthroughs in clean energy technologies that allow us to reduce emissions and capture carbon, all the security concerns identified here will be much worse.

And what of the role of the Security Council? It is debatable whether the Security Council could again serve as a productive venue for discussion of climate change and security. Should other arenas fail to achieve a breakthrough in the short-run, members of the Security Council may wish to use the forum to draw attention to the stalemate. Beyond that expressive value, however, no institutional setting will be of much use in the absence of a change in the positions of China and the United States. For those concerned about the effects of climate change, including the security concerns identified here (which include increased instability, conflict and even state failure), a shift in their attitudes could not come soon enough.

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Endnotes for this paper appear on page 8.

Table 1/Summary of Expected Effects in IPCC 2007 Report

Phenomenon and Direction of Trend	21st Century Likelihood
Over most land areas, warmer and fewer cold days and nights, warmer and more frequent hot days and nights.	Virtually certain
Warm spells/heat waves. Frequency increases over most land areas.	Very likely
Heavy precipitation events. Frequency increases over most areas.	Very likely
Area affected by drought increases.	Likely
Intense tropical cyclone activity increases.	Likely
Increased incidence of extreme high sea level (excluding tsunamis).	Likely

Note of explanation: The IPCC has developed specific language to describe the probability of different potential outcomes associated with climate change. *Virtually certain*, those that have a greater than 99% probability of occurrence. *Extremely likely*, > 95% probability. *Very likely*, >90%. *Likely*, > 66%. *More likely than not*, >50%. *Unlikely* < 33%. *Very unlikely*, <10%. *Extremely unlikely*, <5%.

At a Glance: The Work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

Recognizing the problem of potential global climate change, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988. It is open to all members of the UN and WMO. *The role of the IPCC is to assess on a comprehensive, objective, open and transparent basis the scientific, technical and socio-economic information relevant to understanding the scientific basis of risk of human-induced climate change, its potential impacts and options for adaptation and mitigation.* More information at http://www.ipcc.ch/.

Working Group I: The Physical Science Basis

This report explains the physical science basis for global climate change. It asserts that as a result of human activities, concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide — referred to as *greenhouse gases* — have unequivocally increased since the year 1750. These gases, combined with aerosols, solar radiation and land surface properties in the atmosphere, are responsible for the warming of the earth's climate.

This increase in carbon dioxide levels is due mainly to the use of fossil fuels, while agricultural activity is the main cause of high methane and nitrous oxide concentrations.

The report concludes that global warming is undeniable. Warming has caused an increase in global air and ocean temperatures. It has also contributed to the widespread melting of snow and ice, which, in turn, causes sea levels to rise. In fact, the planet is growing warmer with each passing year. The report notes: "Eleven of the last 12 years (1995-2006) rank among the 12 warmest years in the instrumental record of global surface temperature (since 1850)."

The report also predicts that future warming will cause snow cover to contract and "arctic late-summer sea ice to disappear almost entirely by the latter part of the 21st century," as well as increased heat waves and heavy precipitation.

Working Group II: Impact, Adaptations and Vulnerability

This part of the report, based on data collected since 1970, concentrates on the effects climate change has had on the natural and human environment and confirms that warming is unlikely to have been caused by natural circumstances alone.

Scientists have observed many changes in the environment that they attribute to global warming, which include earlier spring peak discharge in glacier and snow-fed rivers and increased water run-off. There have also been many negative changes in terrestrial biological systems, such as earlier timing of bird migration and egg-laying.

Resources like food and water will also be affected, although these changes will vary by region. The report states that "drought-affected areas will likely increase in extent," and that water supplies stored in glaciers and snow cover will most likely decline, reducing water supplies to regions by major mountain ranges — where more than one-sixth of the global population now lives. Crop productivity at lower latitudes will decrease, and therefore increase the risk of hunger, while the frequency of droughts and floods will compound the negative changes to crop production.

Africa may be the continent most vulnerable to climate change due to various stresses, including political and economic instability and the prevalence of disease such as HIV/AIDS. These factors, and others, will affect Africa's ability to adapt to climate-related problems. The report projects that by the year 2020, between 75 and 250 million Africans will be exposed to increased water stress due to climate change. Access to food and areas suitable for agriculture are both expected to decrease. "In some countries, yields from rain-fed agriculture could be reduced by up to 50% by 2020."

Climate-related changes are also likely to affect the health of the global population, especially those in developing nations. Among the health problems listed are increases in malnutrition and "increased deaths, disease and injury due to heat waves, floods, storms, fires and droughts."

Working Group III: Mitigation of Climate Change

This report states that greenhouse gas emissions have increased by 70% between 1970 and 2004. The largest growth during this time is a direct result of the energy supply sector (increase of 145%), with other greenhouse gas contributions from transport (120%), industry (65%), and various land use including forestry and agriculture (40%).

It also states that if current climate change mitigation policies remain the same, global greenhouse gas emissions will continue to rise — but there is both macro and micro economic potential for new policies that could curb growth of these emissions.

Energy infrastructure investment will total over US $20 trillion between 2007 and 2030. Although it will take a considerable amount of time, investment in low-carbon technologies must be encouraged in order to make the necessary changes to the energy infrastructure. The report shows that "it is often more cost-effective to invest in end-use energy efficiency improvement than in increasing energy supply to satisfy demand for energy services." Renewable energy would most likely benefit the employment sector as well as energy security and would also lower regional pollution. Also, the more fossil fuels cost, the more competitive alternative energy will be on the market.

The report goes on to list, in detail, a bevy of key mitigation suggestions for various sectors, including agriculture, waste, transport, energy supply and industry. Suggestions include switching from coal fuel to gas and renewable heat and power sources such as hydropower, solar, wind or geothermal energy, increasing the efficiency of heating and cooling devices, and creating more fuel-efficient vehicles. Lifestyle changes, such as walking instead of driving, will also reduce greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to a sustainable environment. These changes can be encouraged through educational and management programs or other policies.

Perhaps most importantly, the report makes suggestions to governments, stating that many options are open to nations who desire to slow the rise of greenhouse gas emissions, including setting a price for carbon, providing financial incentives and addressing climate change when implementing sustainable development policies or programs.

Summaries prepared by Hannah Rappleye, intern with *Disarmament Times*.

The Work of the First Committee (Continued from page 1.)

Promising Signs

There are, however, several promising signs. The CD is closer to commencing negotiations on a Fissile Materials Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) than it has been in years; an agreement to do so would concurrently spark substantive discussions on issues relating to outer space, negative security assurances and nuclear disarmament as well.[3]

Even in Washington, progress is being made. Congress zeroed out funding for the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) program, and significantly cut back funding for missile defense.[4] Hope for the US ratifying the Comprehensive nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), whose elusive entry-into-force is in large part dependent on American ratification, has been buoyed by the Senate Armed Services Committee's adoption of a non-binding provision in a bill that called for such ratification.

Going beyond these basic arms control measures, conservative, establishment policymakers such as Henry Kissinger, George Schultz, William Perry and Sam Nunn have called for the *abolition* of nuclear weapons and recommended practical steps to get there in a landmark op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, thus silencing those who would argue that advocating elimination is unrealistic.

Recommendations to the First Committee

It is a propitious time, therefore, for leadership, and thus an opportunity for the First Committee to act to mitigate the dangerous developments and support and lend credence to the harbingers of progress.

Towards this end, there are several new resolutions that the First Committee could adopt this year, such as, *inter alia*:

1. urging Russia and the US to negotiate a verifiable post-START agreement;
2. urging all parties to the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty to fully implement the treaty and calling for Russia to lift its suspension of compliance with it;
3. noting the importance of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty and calling for a universal ban on intermediate range forces;
4. urging the Nuclear Suppliers' Group to reject the US-India deal on the grounds that it undermines the NPT or to add preconditions such as entry-into-force of the CTBT and an FMCT;
5. calling for a universal moratorium on testing weapons deployed in or aimed at space-based objects, pending the conclusion of a multilateral treaty banning the weaponization of outer space;
6. comprehensively assessing the security regime in outer space, either through a High-Level Panel along the lines of "Threats, Challenges and Change,"[1] or through a similarly authoritative forum;
7. lauding the US for halting its RRW program and urging all nuclear-capable States to refrain from modernizing their arsenals; and
8. acknowledging and supporting the call for abolition from the writers of the *Wall Street Journal* op-ed (Japan, the New Agenda and/or the Non-Aligned Movement might include this in their annual disarmament resolutions).

Seeking Majority Support

Successful adoption of these new initiatives will require concerted efforts on the part of sponsoring states. To be sure, these measures will not accrue the consensus that co-sponsors normally seek. But consensus, after all, is what keeps the rest of our disarmament machinery mired in inaction.

In a context riddled with such dissent — with the US often casting the sole vote of opposition — the drive for total agreement should not dissuade States from instigating or supporting progressive initiatives. Resolutions adopted by an overwhelming majority, and especially when only one or two states vote against it, still work to strengthen international norms, and such international focus and long-term thinking are needed to balance the political vicissitudes of the most powerful states.

Last year's UK-led resolution on an Arms Trade Treaty (A/RES/61/89) is a good example of this important norm-building. While the draft resolution failed to accrue consensus (there were 24 abstentions in addition to the US's lone opposition vote), the initiative is paving the way toward establishing common international standards in arms manufacturing and exporting, taking into account the needs and concerns of "both consumers and producers," as noted by UK Ambassador John Duncan. Moreover, the universal membership of the GA, said Ambassador Duncan, made the First Committee "the most suitable forum" to launch such an initiative, whereby all states could deliberate "a more comprehensive and inclusive approach" to combat the scourge of small arms and light weapons.

In this way, the First Committee asserted itself as a leader in multilateral negotiating fora. Members began the process by which the world community will eventually develop a treaty regulating the small arms trade with its destructive consequences. By doing so, the First Committee not only affirmed its leadership abilities, but it also demonstrated the validity and unique importance of multilateral fora as a whole. In an era of unilateral actions and ad hoc alliances, such a reaffirmation of multilateralism and diplomacy is all the more necessary. Bold, majority-supported initiatives that challenge the legitimacy of unilateralism or strengthen the norms for disarmament can constitute exactly the sort of legitimate self-assertion that the General Assembly, and indeed the whole of the United Nations, was intended to project.

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Notes

1. The START I treaty was signed July 31, 1991, five months before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and expires December 5, 2009. It remains in force as a treaty between the US, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine have since totally disarmed their strategic arms capabilities.
2. The Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change reported to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (December 2004) on the world's new and evolving security threats. The Panel made more than 100 recommendations. Its report can be found at www.un.org/secureworld/.
3. See *Disarmament Times*, Summer 2007, for more details about an FMCT and the work of the CD.
4. See "UK and US Move Ahead with Plans to Replace Nuclear Weapons Systems," *Disarmament Times*, Spring 2007, for more information about the RRW program.

New High Representative Meets with NGOs

Sergio Duarte, the newly-appointed United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, met with members of the NGO community on August 14, in a luncheon hosted by the NGO Committee on Disarmament, Peace and Security.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Duarte noted that while some have called the situation regarding disarmament "gloomy," he sees some "bright spots" and possibilities for change. "In key countries," said Mr. Duarte, "leadership has changed or will change. We hope a new attitude will preside and this will help us advance disarmament."

"Our greatest challenge," asserted Mr. Duarte, "is to bring back nuclear disarmament to the disarmament agenda." Asked what NGOs could do to best help this effort, Mr. Duarte urged activists to work to educate and influence their own governments about the importance of disarmament. He also noted that public opinion seems to be reconciled to the fact that "weapons of mass destruction are here to stay. It is our task to try to overcome that mentality."

Asked about prospects for the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), Mr. Duarte responded, "I like to tell people I was present at the creation." The NPT, asserted Mr. Duarte, has "established itself as the cornerstone of the disarmament regime after 37 years. We can claim some success." But over the past several years the treaty has been under "very severe strain," according to Mr. Duarte. "There are countries that seem to have security perceptions that may take them on [the nuclear] path." Mr. Duarte identified the spread of technology and terrorism as additional dangers. "Members of the treaty have to make a great effort to relieve the strain," concluded Mr. Duarte. "Non-proliferation and disarmament must be seen as tied together. The separation [between the two] has contributed to the erosion in confidence regarding the NPT."

Asked, finally, about the mandate and resources for the newly-restructured Office for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Duarte, quoting Shakespeare, responded, "What's in a name?" "The important thing," continued Mr. Duarte, "is the mandate and the mandate is intact." "The Secretary-General's intention is to upgrade the department and make it closer to him," asserted Mr. Duarte. "I'm sure I have the backing and support of the 38th floor," added Mr. Duarte, referring to the location of the office of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in the UN Secretariat, "even if there are seven floors between us."

Climate Change and Security / Notes (from page 3)

1. The full proceedings of the Security Council meeting are available at http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/sc9000.doc.htm. A full text of Margarett Beckett's comments is available at http://www.fpa.org/calendar_url2420/calendar_url_show.htm?doc_id=472794.
2. Dick Durbin's statement is available at http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/2007_cr/s1018.html.
3. The CNA report is available at http://securityandclimate.cna.org/report/.
4. The report is available at http://www.wbgu_jg2007_kurz_engl.html.
5. The report is available at http://www.ipcc.ch/SPM13apr07.pdf.
6. Droughts in the 1980s brought pastoralists and agriculturalists into conflict over grazing rights in Darfur. Most scientists would shy away from attributing a single incident to human-induced climate change, saying only that climate change would make events like this one more likely. Since the original drought dates back to the 1980s, it is unclear if anthropogenic climate change could be fingered as a contributing cause.
7. IPCC, Climate Change 2007: Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Summary for Policymakers.
8. International Institute for Environment and Development, Climate Change: Study Maps Those at Greatest Risk from Cyclones and Rising Seas; available at http://www.iied.org/mediaroom/releases/070328coastal.html.
9. The CNA Corporation report echoes these conclusions as does a German Advisory Council on Climate Change report. WBGU, Climate Change as a Security Risk: Summary for Policymakers, available at http://www.wbgu.de/wbgu_jg2007_kurz_engl.html.
10. Gordon McGranahan, Deborah Balk, and Bridget Anderson, "The Rising Tide: Assessing the Risks of Climate Change and Human Settlements in Low Elevation Coastal Zones," Environment and Urbanization 19, no. 1 (2007).
11. World Bank, South Asia Population available from http://go.worldbank.org/P7Z0T79ZV0.
12. The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change is available at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/sternreview_index.cfm.
13. In April 2006, for example, the LDCF had total receipts of $41.8mn and the SCCF had $36.7mn in resources. The Adaptation Fund is to be financed from proceeds from the Clean Development Mechanism projects. Global Environmental Facility, Status Report on the Climate Change Funds; available at http://thegef.org/Documents/Council_Documents/GEF_C28/documents/C.28.4.Rev.1ClimateChange.pdf.
14. See note 12.