12. Climate and security

Overview

The past decade has seen increased acknowledgement within the academic literature and among the policy community of the relationship between climate change and security. Growing evidence of the links between climate change impacts and human security were detailed in the most recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Its first ever chapter dedicated to the topic states that: 'human security will be progressively threatened as the climate changes'.

Climate change is best understood as a 'threat multiplier' that interacts with and compounds existing risks and pressures in a given context, and can increase the likelihood of instability or violent conflict. The IPCC sets out evidence that contextual factors such as 'low per capita incomes, economic contraction, and inconsistent state institutions' are drivers of conflict and sensitive to climate change. It also found that '[p]eople living in places affected by violent conflict are particularly vulnerable to climate change' and that 'conflict strongly influences vulnerability to climate change impacts'.

Taking this further, the G7 commissioned an independent study, A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks in 2015 that identified compound risks such as resource competition livelihood insecurity, extreme weather events, volatile food prices and trans-boundary water management, and the unintended impacts of climate change policies, as some of the main ways in which climate change interacts with fragility. The study also finds that both mitigation and adaptation to climate change are highly relevant in addressing security and fragility risks.

Mirroring the growth in academic literature, the potential security implications of climate change have been gaining more attention from foreign and security policymakers at the national and international levels. Debates on climate change and security in the United Nations Security Council in 2007 and 2011 also underscored the issue. In 2011 the Security Council asserted that: 'possible adverse effects of climate change may, in the long run, aggravate certain existing threats to international peace and security'.

This chapter serves as an introduction to the principle linkages between climate change and security. Section I sets out seven compound risks that help illustrate the ways in which climate change interacts with fragility, and explores some of the limitations in the current thinking on the topic. Section II looks at the way in which climate-fragility risks affect and are addressed by key global and regional security, development and humanitarian policy processes. Sec-

tion III sets out some of the challenges and practical obstacles to the international policy community addressing the complex links between climate change and fragility, and offers some entry points for improving policy and practice.

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