

## **Climate Change and (In)Security Project Briefing Note**

### **The G7 Can't Afford to be Short-Sighted: Today's Crises are only an Inkling of a Possible Future**

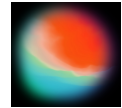
In May 2022, foreign ministers from the West's most powerful economies met to discuss the multiple crises engulfing the world. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine and food price shocks have been high on the agenda. Importantly, also on the agenda was climate change and how it poses grave threats to the security of the G7 and its partners around the world.

Droughts, heatwaves, floods and fires are already wreaking havoc the world over, with greater intensity, frequency and consequences for human lives and security. By forcing people to leave their homes, trapping communities in untenable livelihoods, by increasing competition over natural resources, and by piling additional pressure on societies already grappling with conflict and deep divisions, climate change accelerates risks of violence. It is therefore vital that political leaders understand the ways in which climate change can lead to conflict, and take concrete action to avert the risks.

In an unprecedented but impressive move in this direction, the G7 agreed on a declaration recognising the impacts of the climate and biodiversity crises as a threat to international peace and stability (FFO 2022). The "G7 Foreign Ministers' Statement on Climate, Environment, Peace and Security" paves the way for enhanced multilateral action on climate security, a result the authors are proud to have supported.

The significance of this declaration cannot be understated. It represents a highly welcome breakthrough in multilateral efforts to prevent the worst outcomes of the climate crisis in the coming years. It commits G7 member-states to a specific, seven-point agenda for action, "to advance timely and effective responses to the risks posed by climate change and environmental degradation to stability and peace. This is indeed an important step, but it is only as good as the action that comes from it.

What could the G7 actually do to tackle some of these thorny issues on the ground, at a point where multilateralism seems to have reached an all-time low? Whilst the G7 on its own cannot tackle such a growing crisis as the climate and security nexus, as wealthy nations who have done much to create the crisis, they have a responsibility and the opportunity to tackle the issue and make change. Even in a world where security is challenged by increasing conflict and polarisation at the same time as reduced multilateral cooperation, there is the opportunity and the need for them to take action. For a start, it could, for example, kickstart a working group tasked with implementing the ambitious seven-point agenda for action. It is also imperative that others beyond the G7 join the declaration to ensure the process is truly global – not just lead by the rich club whose emissions initiated the problem in the first place.



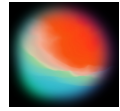
Also important is that this declaration calls on the G7 member states to act now to prevent the crises of the future. Not just fire-fight the problems facing us right now. To avoid a constant lurch from one global crisis to another, the G7 must keep an eye on the future. Where and how climate change can compound future risks and lead to greater instability needs to be firmly on their regular agenda, and for this, they need better foresight.

Predicting potential flashpoints is no easy task. Scientists have developed incredibly powerful and accurate tools for understanding how the greenhouse gasses we are pumping into the atmosphere will change weather patterns, and the consequences of that on physical realities like tree cover, crop yields and sea levels. Political realities are inherently less predictable. The IPCC report on *Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability* published in February (Weathering Risk 2022) makes clear that the very real links between climate change and conflict nearly always involve other questions. These include: “how will people in cities react to migrants from the countryside, as traditional livelihoods become untenable?”; “are states strong enough to counter the appeal of radical groups to young people, as the futures they had imagined become untenable?”; and “will communities compete, rather than cooperate, as resources become scarcer?”

Answering such questions is beyond even the most sophisticated computer models. But looking to foresight and scenario tools long-used by the military offers some invaluable lessons. Taking foresight methods to another level are “superforecasters”, inter-disciplinary experts especially adept at predicting geopolitical events. In a new report, Adelphi and the superforecasters, Good Judgement looked at the key questions the G7 should be asking in order to stave-off the climate-related security crises on the horizon (Adelphi 2022). Questions like: “Which cities will experience the highest levels of fragility in the coming decade?”; “how much will food prices fuel instability?”; and “will oil-producing countries remain stable in a decarbonising world economy?”

The superforecasters’ findings make for grim but important reading (Adelphi 2022). Climate change is already being experienced in some parts of the world – even if not being felt consistently in the G7 countries – and conflict as a result is already growing. This, then, is something to be tackled now, not just discussed. There is a priority need to identify the most vulnerable and fragile societies; those where minimal help will have significant impact. The planet will still be on track for global warming far beyond what many ecosystems and communities can cope with, self-interest will continue to determine when and how countries act to reduce their emissions, and the poorest and most vulnerable will suffer the most.

But these outcomes are not locked in. The G7 have the opportunity to have a disproportionate effect, balancing the need to adapt with the imperative to build resilience. They have a raft of “no regrets” options at their disposal. Even if the worst-case scenarios do not come to pass, there is no real downside to investing in, for example, making cities more resilient to the impacts of climate change or making sure that climate investments also support – or at least do not inadvertently undermine – peace outcomes.



The crises facing the world today are perhaps only an inkling of what is to come. The G7 declaration moves us a step towards getting better at looking out for preparing for these risks. From here, we need to see bold action to avoid costly mistakes and early investments to prevent climate-related security crises in the future.

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\*This briefing note is written in the authors' personal capacity and should not be taken as reflecting the opinions or policies of the CCI Project, Reuben College, or CHACR.

## References

Adelphi 2022. Seven Questions for the G7: Superforecasting Climate-Fragility Risks for the Coming Decade. *Weathering Risks*.

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