

annual conference 2022

climate change & (in)security project



TIM CLACK

Director
climate change & (in)security project

Annual Conference 2022 Introduction

This is the second Climate Change & (In)security Project's Annual Conference, and I'm delighted that this event is being delivered in partnership with the U.K. Ministry of Defence.

Last year's conference focused on awareness, and this year's on the role of defence, within the context of climate security. We're shifting the focus from understanding to response, delivery and implementation.

contextual address

I'm going to observe here that the IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] risk framework has now evolved to recognize the centrality of response. Response, of course, carries risks. However, we need to be aware that the lack of response carries greater risks. So, the mission, the challenge, is to find and deliver the right responses.

I want to start with an introduction of the Climate Change & (In)Security Project (CCIP). It is a collaboration between the University of Oxford and the British Army's

Centre for Historical and Conflict Research (CHACR). CCIP has been in existence for just over two and a half years now - not a huge amount of time.

The project aims are straightforward. Essentially, CCIP wants to get people thinking about climate change, thinking about the threat, and thinking about the mitigations at all levels. This includes both the threats of today and those on the horizon. We want to bring the scientific and contextual state of the art to policy doctrine and decisions.



edited by

LOUISE SELISNY

Senior Research Associate
climate change & (in)security project

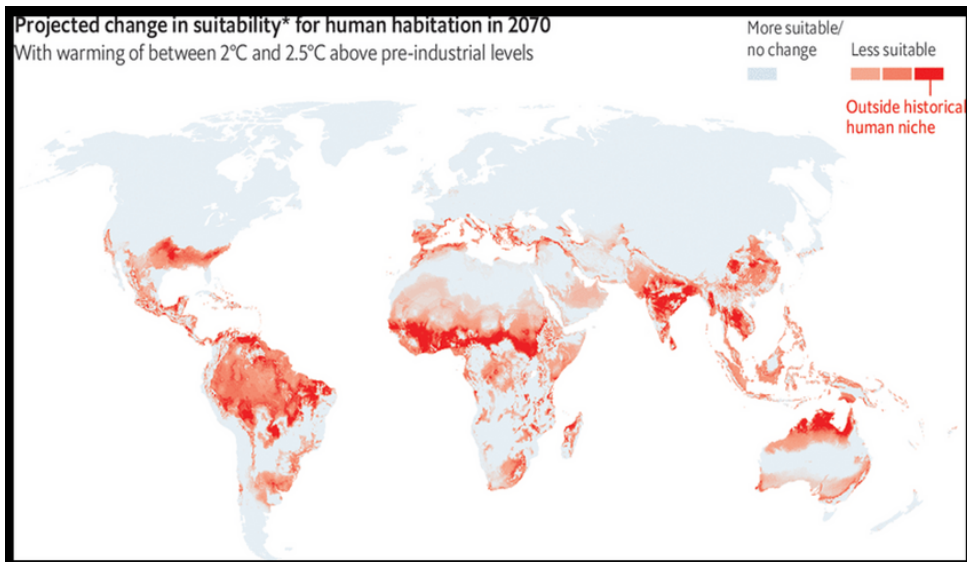
At present our team is made up of Ziya Meral, from CHACR, and myself, from Oxford, as directors. We also have Louise Selisny, Thammy Evans and General Richard Nugee as Senior Research Associates.

In addition to these five, we also have a team of other associates linked to the project from a wide variety of practitioner and research backgrounds, and they inform and produce specialist outputs, and also ensure that we stay as relevant as possible.

I'm proud to say that we are responsible for a number of impactful outputs, including workshops and wargames. We also put together training serials, exercise inserts, and briefing papers. We've also collaborated with a whole range of different organisations on assorted projects and outputs. We see these collaborations as being really positive. Indeed, when it comes to climate and security it's 'who shares wins'.

Let me say a few words on climate and security by way of context. I think it's clear that the evidence for climate change speaks for itself now. Anthropogenic climate change is happening, and it's picking up pace. This means that we are seeing - and we're going to see further - transformations to parts of the world. We're going to see water stress and climate shocks. We're going to see escalating threats to agricultural regimes. We're going to see spikes in food prices, and stresses to food production and food logistics. We're going to see increased pest and disease presence. And almost inevitably, in time, we're going to see not only shifts in diplomatic alliances, but also border disputes, population displacement, endemic famine, and conflict.

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Projected change in suitability for human habitation in 2070 (Source: IPCC AR5 'future of the human climate niche' by Chi Xu et al 2020)

The map here shows the projected change in regional suitability for human habitation in 2070 based on a warming scenario of 2 to 2.5 degrees.

Now, we might anticipate some of the places in dark red, such as North and Sahelian Africa, to bear the brunt of the climate crisis. Lots of the other red parts are perhaps less expected. Moreover, not only are some of these densely populated areas, but they are also hugely agriculturally productive. So, what will happen when these people can no longer feed themselves? What will happen when the trade from these places terminates? Don't forget that most people around the world are a fed by trade rather than through their own soil. The amount of red across this this map is very alarming.

If we unpack the situation a little further, we can note that China buys vast volumes of grains from the US, and Australia plays a huge part in feeding Southwest Asia. So, climate change is also going to create a disequilibrium here. It's going to have resonance geopolitically.

Despite being aware of the threat and the challenge, countries are not responding urgently enough. There's a huge delta between existing policies and pledged policies, for example, in terms of carbon reduction. There is then a vastly bigger delta between pledged policies globally and what's required in terms of the so-called the 1.5- and 2- degree carbon

reduction pathways. So, in terms of response, things are not where they need to be.

The damage wrought by climate change takes place gradually and often invisibly. The resultant environmental degradation has, by extension, been of a slow pace, but it's nevertheless a form of attack. And we're starting to see that in political narratives around the world. People are increasingly conscious of climate change insecurities and they're demanding responses to them.

Robert Nixon uses the term 'slow violence' to describe this climate-related attritional lethality. This is violence that takes place over decades and sometimes over generational time. Because it's slow, it's been easy to ignore. The important has been overridden by the urgent.

The recognition is there today that climate change is a powerful and existential threat, particularly to communities in the Global South. The threat has emerged at a pace so slow as to be somewhat imperceptible until its current manifestations.

I think the best way to communicate this is through metaphor: someone throws a rock in your direction, but instead of it hitting you, it flies through generational time and injures your child or grandchild. We have to be mindful that the rocks have been in the air for some time now. We need to

brace for impact, but we also need to stop more rocks being thrown. To respond with the necessary urgency, we need to change our gearing and thinking. A modified security paradigm might be useful in that regard.

I think a big part of the solution is communicating to publics that anthropogenic climate change is a massive security problem. Think of it this way: if there was an adversary out there which was attacking your cities with floods, fires, and bio weapons and which threatened to take away your drinking water, destroy your agriculture and food supply, and cause untold economic and human harm - what would the response be? War. The response would be war.

There are those who deny that climate change is happening. Sometimes this is for reasons of political expediency, sometimes for economic opportunity, and sometimes because it's a psychological coping strategy, for example, implicatory denial. There are many drivers of not 'looking up'. But the evidence is clear.

The climate challenge is enormous; the costs are vast, and effects at once complex and frightening.

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Those of us who work on climate security all recognise that climate change is a shaping threat and threat multiplier. Thomas Homer-Dixon has also made very clear that, in some contexts, climate change is - in and of itself - already a significant security threat.

This is not just a matter for the Global South. To conceive of the challenge that way is to misunderstand it. Indeed, aside from the geopolitical risks and shifts, MACA [Military Aid to the Civilian Authority] and HADR [Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response] operations are required in response to emergencies all over the world. The British military, for example, was called upon to support emergency relief efforts and evacuations in Somerset in 2014, Yorkshire in 2015, Lincolnshire in 2019, Yorkshire again in 2020, and London in 2021.

This is a trend that is mirrored around the world. For example, in the past six months, militaries have been involved in flood and wildfire response, not only in the UK but in Australia, Canada, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Emirates, France, Germany, Greece, India, Iran, Italy, Mexico, Morocco, Pakistan, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, US, and Uganda.

Other military climate interventions in the past six months have included Polish troops being deployed to clean up dead fish, the Swiss army being called in to airlift Alpine livestock due to heat exposure, and the Mexican Air Force attempt cloud seeding in an attempt to stimulate rainfall. Make no mistake, militaries are already on operations around the world because of climate change.



This is an escalatory trend. These challenges are going to get worse. They're going to diversify as climate change worsens, and as it configures the environment and constrains responses. Climate change depletes and shifts demand for resources. It makes capabilities obsolete, and strains infrastructure and equipment. It also amplifies risks which can be exploited by adversaries and competitors. These are huge problems for everyone – military and civilian - to think about and act upon.

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