



# Climate Security: From Agenda-setting to Policy

By Steen Nordstrøm

Research Paper



Fakultet for Strategi og Militære Operationer

Forsvarsakademiet Ryvangs Allé 1 2100 København Ø [www.fak.dk](http://www.fak.dk)

## Climate Security: From Agenda-setting to Policy

By Steen Nordstrøm

*About the author:*

*Steen Nordstrøm is affiliated with the Institute for Strategy at the Royal Danish Defence College. Steen has researched the role of natural resources in armed conflicts and is currently studying the implications of climate changes on security policy..*

*Comments and reflections can be submitted to [ifs@fak.dk](mailto:ifs@fak.dk) or by phone at +45 3915 1215*

Institute for Strategy - [www.fak.dk/fsmo/ifs](http://www.fak.dk/fsmo/ifs)  
Faculty of Strategy and Military Operations  
Royal Danish Defence College PO Box 2521 DK-2100 Copenhagen



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Royal Danish Defence College

Ryvangs Allé 1

DK-2100 Copenhagen

Denmark

Phone: +45 3915 1515

Fax: +45 3929 6172

Editor: Director, Institute for Strategy, Nicolas T. Veicherts,

ifs-01@fak.dk, phone +45 3915 1210

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## 1. Introduction

*“Climate change is the pre-eminent geopolitical and economic issue of the 21st century. It rewrites the global equation for development, peace and prosperity. It will increase pressure on water, food and land... reverse years of development gains... exacerbate poverty... destabilize fragile states and topple governments.”*

So spoke UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his opening address to the UN Climate Change Summit, held in New York in the margins of the 2009 UN General Assembly (Ki-moon 2009). The summit was attended by nearly 100 Heads of State who offered widespread applause.

September's events in New York are testimony to the broad agreement among politicians that global warming will have security implications and hence that climate policy should be linked to security policy. Climate change has, in other words, been securitized (Wæver 2009). Few speeches at the General Assembly or elsewhere have, however, offered much guidance about the next steps needed to ensure climate-related security problems are avoided. In fact, one might suspect that so far climate security has primarily been used in instrumental ways to heighten the attention paid to climate change.

Despite considerable political attention, the climate change summit in Copenhagen, COP-15, yielded few tangible results, save for a watered down political accord (UNFCCC 2009). Even a binding multilateral agreement would, however, have been ineffective from a security standpoint. Climate policy is not a very effective security policy. States might commit to reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emission over time but the build-up of greenhouse gases is likely to continue for decades because of the lagged effects associated with global warming (IPCC 2008). Only if we believe that international commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emission is likely to succeed in the short run, and that climate related security problems will not materialize for another couple of decades, can we consider current efforts sufficient for achieving climate security. Otherwise, it is time to start thinking about a strategy for climate security.

Contrary to the numerous alarmist claims about looming climate wars made by politicians and interest groups, a more nuanced understanding of the causal links between global warming and security issues keeps evolving. In policy circles, and increasingly in academia, there is now widespread agreement that climate change is a threat multiplier (Center for Naval Analyses 2007; IISD 2009; IISD 2009; Møller 2009). That is, climate change can intensify existing tensions or prolong conflicts but is unlikely to cause wholly new security threats. There is, however, some disproportionality between the understanding of climate change as a threat multiplier and the attention afforded to this relatively small part of future conflict dynamics. Why is so much awareness paid to a threat multiplier

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that is hard and time-consuming to prevent, while factors such as small weapons proliferation that have much more direct bearing on conflicts receive scant attention?

Even if climate security is mostly about putting climate change solidly on the political agenda and building coalitions, it does not mean the topic can be ignored from a security point-of-view. Threat multipliers should of course be understood and afforded a reasonable amount of attention. How then, do we deal with climate-related threats? How is it ensured that emerging threats are addressed in the best possible way?

This report seeks to answer these questions by looking at climate security through comparative lenses. Throughout history states have seen the face of threats change; in the post World War II era, the threat from nuclear weapons had to be reined in. More recently it has been the threat from failing states and terrorism that has captured the agenda. Responses to new threats are hard to get right. One might argue that policymakers and strategists occasionally overshoot the target and adopt more draconian measures than necessary. This might follow from unilateral better-safe-than-sorry-logic or it might be a consequence of the inherent difficulty associated with analyzing new problems in the context of missing information and tight deadlines.

Arguably, climate change is a different story than other recent threats that have made it onto the international security agenda. On the one hand, climate change has a global scope, which suggests it should be addressed at the strategic level. On the other hand it lacks the intentionality associated with most of the other threats states typically address. It also differs from traditional security issues by (potentially) being very distant in time. No matter what action is taken today, it will be decades before warming stops. While this implies that the threats may not affect us until years from now, it also indicates that climate change is a threat multiplier we will need to deal with for a very long time. The lag between human action and possible consequences makes climate change a very odd security problem to address, and might suggest that it should be treated primarily in policy realms capable of such long-term engagement. Moreover, climate change is not a new threat, but a new *threat multiplier*, which calls for a different approach to limiting its potential effects. A single, direct threat can be countered by traditional security means. A threat multiplier, on the other hand, frequently requires a multitude of policies that work together; foreign, trade, development and security policies must be coordinated to fully address the problem.

In the report, I make the argument that despite these anomalies climate change is comparable to known threat multipliers like economic malaise or demography, which are almost exclusively treated as either independent problems (by e.g.

national governments, the World Bank or development agencies) or background variables that are included in most comprehensive analyses of security threats. These existing threat multipliers have not been elevated to the status of security threats per se, but included in the analysis of traditional security problems precisely because it is important to understand how much they might magnify these problems, rather than to paint alarmist pictures of future conflicts.

Based on the above, the report suggests that the next step for climate security should be to treat climate change no differently than other threat multipliers states wrestle with. There is a need to lift the issue out of its current privileged position and to devise a strategy for addressing the challenges with effective policies. Currently there are ongoing efforts to securitize climate change (Wæver 2009, see Scott 2008 for a slightly dissenting view). The recommendation made in this report is not to fully de-securitize climate change but to scale down the securitization efforts and start addressing the challenges rather than just raising awareness. The report compares climate change with other challenges to determine where to focus policy efforts and how to develop a strategy that spans multiple government institutions.

At the national level, a policy for promoting climate security could entail developing the concept paper about climate change and foreign policy written by IISD (2006) for the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs into a more comprehensive strategy. Such a strategy could combine the multiple efforts needed to address the potentially adverse security effects of climate change. Another compatible and fruitful approach would be to include climate security in one of the annual security policy reviews envisioned in the 2010-2014 defense agreement (Forsvarsministeriet 2009). Institutionally, the Swedish model where climate security is coordinated between the ministries of Environment, Foreign Affairs, Defense and the Prime Minister's Office offers inspiration.

At the international level several institutions will be dealing with climate security in the near future. NATO will finish its new strategic concept in 2011 and the EU is considering updating its 2003 security strategy. Both are likely to include references to climate security. Yet excessive securitization in the wake of these processes should be avoided. The primary international forum for dealing with climate security ought to be the UN, albeit not the Security Council, but a body with broader representation assisted by an office that can draw on the expertise hosted in the various UN departments. Efforts to achieve climate security, including promoting peaceful adaptation in vulnerable countries, can be partly financed by the fund envisioned in the Copenhagen Accord.

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## 2. Characteristics of the current climate security debate

Climate change made it onto the academic agenda as a security issue in the early 1990s as a subset of the then booming environmental security literature (Homer-Dixon 1991; Homer-Dixon 1994; Soroos 1994). Only in 2003 did the topic break out of the academic confine and into the spotlight when Pentagon's renowned Office of Net Assessment ordered a scenario of climate-related conflict. The resulting study was worst-case scenario focused on a very unlikely breakdown of thermohaline circulation and subsequent dramatic cooling of northern Europe and related global effects (Schwartz and Randall 2003). Much attention resulted and climate security since spilled over into popular culture and films like "The Day After Tomorrow".

In the last couple of years the connection between climate change and security issues has entered the mainstream political debate. This development has been facilitated by the debate of climate security in the UN Security Council and the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2007. Last summer, the UN General Assembly (2009) unanimously adopted a resolution that asked the Secretary General to report on the possible connections between climate change and security and the UN Secretary General (2009) issued his report in September.<sup>1</sup> During the rest of the run up to COP-15, the issue stayed firmly on the agenda with notably Britain, EU, Pacific Island states and Denmark pushing the issue.

Currently, the debate about the possible security implications of climate change fits the template for many contemporary security discussions; the threat under consideration comes not from states but from the absence of states, absence of control and absence of international coordination. Contemporary security challenges with such characteristics are frequently viewed as risks rather than specific threats (Breitenbauch 2008).<sup>2</sup>

The focus on risks rather than traditional security threats results in new demands to political and military leadership. First, multiple policy areas have to be integrated to manage the kind of risks we are likely to face in the future. This is especially true for climate change, which is potentially going to have global effects and consequently will affect natural systems, societies and humans on the planet. Secondly, political leaders have to prioritise between the risks and furthermore ensure that policies to mitigate the risks stay in place over time. Risks

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(1) For an analysis of climate change's move into the international political spotlight see Wæver (2009) and Trombetta (2008).

(2) In fact, one might consider climate change a risk multiplier rather than a threat multiplier. While the distinction between risk and threat is crucial in some branches of security studies, it is of little relevance here and therefore I have chosen to use the term threat multiplier, which is frequently used in the climate security literature.

are more elusive and changing than traditional, intentional threats from nation states or other easily identifiable actors. To respond to climate change and comparable challenges integration of policy areas and broad strategies are needed. Few, if any, countries have this in place, when it comes to climate security.

Getting climate security on the agenda was perceived by many as a necessary first step both towards an international agreement at COP-15 and better future security policies. These securitization efforts have been scrutinized carefully and Trombetta (2008) and Wæver (2009) explicitly make the cases that successful securitization of climate change has already taken place. Yet, raising political awareness is not enough. More is needed in terms of incorporating the climate-related problems into national security strategies and ensuring that multilateral fora have the tools to address the lurking challenges.

### **2.1 Is climate change a security threat – to whom, where and when?**

Besides the current political focus on climate security, there is considerable academic attention devoted to establishing *if*, *how* and *where* climate change might affect security issues (Haldén 2007; Buhaug, Gleditsch et al. 2008; Busby 2008; Cilliers 2009). Given the many effects climate change will have around the globe on both societies and natural systems this is a substantial task with room for numerous disagreements.

Regarding the overall question of whether climate change has security implications or not, there is now widespread acceptance of the view that climate change can adversely affect security, albeit through a long causal chain and not directly as frequently reported in the media. There is also agreement about climate models being incomplete and that especially social responses to climate change are not all well understood (Salehyan 2008). It seems reasonable to suggest that only under very specific and adverse conditions is climate change capable of multiplying the risk of conflict. Buhaug, Gleditsch et al. (2008) point out that climate changes must interact with socio-political factors to increase the risk of conflict. More specifically, they identify five problematic socio-political conditions: resource scarcity that leads to loss of economic activity, resource competition in heterogenic societies, declining political legitimacy as a result of dwindling resources, use of climate change issues by political actors, and mass migration due to environmental degradation. While these conditions are not unheard of, they are certainly not common in most states, and hence the risk of climate induced conflict remains relatively low.

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The questions that remain revolve around establishing how and where climate change might cause insecurity and, importantly, how likely these adverse outcomes are? These questions are far from settled and numerous research efforts are currently being launched to shed more light on them.<sup>3</sup>

Climate change can cause security problems in various ways. One might argue that it can obtain different causal roles in the processes that lead to conflict. In a previous report, I have argued that climate change in relation to conflict is best understood as a mechanism, i.e. as the processes that link a cause (climate change) with an effect (the specific responses to a perceived security threat). Elsewhere I have identified three such mechanisms, namely climate change as a catalyst (threat multiplier), a channel or a trigger of violence (Nordstrøm 2009). The catalyst mechanism resembles dynamics described by Buhaug, Gleditsch et al. (2008) above. Climate change acts as a conflict channel when it serves as an issue politicians use to promulgate violence in a society. Finally, climate change can serve as a trigger if it causes sudden and dramatic change that leads population groups to take up arms against each other.

Rarely can climate change be said to cause entirely new conflicts that would not have occurred had global warming not taken place. The most frequent link between climate change and security problems occurs when climate change acts as a catalyst. It can under some circumstances intensify or multiply existing stresses such as water or food shortages and thereby increase the risk of local hostilities that might escalate to national or even international skirmishes. This is evident in the Horn of Africa region where numerous unsettled conflicts possibly could reignite partly due to such stresses (Cilliers 2009).

The mechanism-based understanding of climate change's role in conflict dynamics suggests that many responses to the challenges are possible. For climate change to have any bearing on armed conflict a long series of events need to take place and, indeed, go wrong. Increased intelligence gathering and understanding of the mechanisms at play in this process is a prerequisite for further action. A second step towards preventing climate change from acting as a catalyst is, of course, to monitor potential security problems and short-circuit them as early as possible. If negative interaction between various stresses is diagnosed in time, traditional foreign policy tools such as financial and humanitarian aid might easily and relative inexpensively prevent the problem from escalating to a level where military involvement is needed. Hence, increasing the monitoring of societies that are vulnerable to political, social, economical and climatic stresses is an important first step.

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(3) The Swedish Minister of Defense has, for instance, recently tasked the Swedish Defense Research Agency to carry out further analysis of these questions.

Regarding the questions of where climate change is likely to cause security problems most studies point to Africa and Middle East as the most vulnerable regions (Cilliers 2009; IISD 2009; IISD 2009). The primary reasons are that countries in these regions have relatively high reliance on natural resources and relatively low institutional capacity to cope with the coming challenges. Moreover, several countries suffer from existing tensions with either neighboring states or between population groups within countries. Taken together these conditions serve as a necessary pretext for climate change to obtain its threat multiplying potential.

Others point towards the Arctic region as a place where climate-related disputes are likely to occur. The reasoning here relies on the high importance states are expected to assign to the allegedly substantial oil and gas resources present in the Arctic and to the new transit routes that will become available when the ice recedes. Of course, the Arctic states all have high institutional capacity and have openly committed to resolving their differences through diplomatic means and the use of the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea framework. The risk of open or unintended conflict in the northern polar region is arguably very low but the stakes are high (Backus and Strickland 2008).

In sum, climate change is primarily a catalyst which will likely intensify tensions in vulnerable parts of the world. This in turn will lead to new functional and organizational demands to military institutions. A strategy for climate security must be broad enough to encompass these changes.

## **2.2 Instrumental use of climate security**

The connection between climate change and security discussed above centers on real-world changes, i.e. the presumed fact that global warming will carry with it social effects and in some cases possibly conflict. There is, however, a more political side to climate security. Arguably, securitization efforts that couples climate change and security have in part been driven by a desire to create a win-win situation and mobilize resources (Trombetta 2008). By linking these issues more political weight is placed on reaching global agreement about addressing climate change.

Climate security can be a bridge builder between interest groups that focus on climate and interest groups that focus on security politics. The former has typically included decision-makers and NGOs connected with environmental challenges, whereas the latter primarily has been decision-makers from the defense realm and national security experts. These two communities may seem strange bedfellows, but they have joint interests and their combined effort increases the support for action against climate change. For some environmentalists, the linking of climate change and security helps underpin the message that addressing climate change is not only a matter of ensuring green space and biodiversity,

but also a matter that will (dramatically) affect humans. For parts of the security community the linkage might sound appealing because it demonstrates the continued need for military organizations and procurement to an audience not traditionally receptive to this idea. In addition, it offers a positive narrative focused on preventing conflict and instability rather than the traditionally more politically divisive security narratives about friends and foes. The absence of intentionality in the perceived threat from climate change thus facilitates a close relationship between otherwise mutually distrustful interest groups. It is paradoxical that the absence of an enemy aids cooperation on climate change while at the same time inhibiting any traditional solutions to this new security issue. Witness for instance how the International Union for Conservation of Nature teamed up with think tanks closely related with the military under the heading 'climate change and the military' to promote a comprehensive agreement at COP-15.

Instrumental use of the climate security nexus has primarily been carried out by politicians and NGOs, who have promoted specific agendas over the last years and especially in the run-up to COP-15. However, institutions like the EU have also realized that the issue might fit well with its goals. The EU made reference to climate security in its European Security Strategy (2003) and developed its position in much more detail in a joint report by the High Representative, Javier Solana, and the Commission (2008). These steps fit well with EU's self image as an actor with a unique ability to combine hard and soft power. EU sees itself as a polity with the capacity to comprehensively address climate security, i.e. to both facilitate development in resource scarce areas and to use harder power if need be. Moreover, the EU looks to promote more cooperation between regional organizations, including the African Union, to minimize the threat associated with climate change.<sup>4</sup>

At the national level, Danish ministries have addressed climate security in different ways that serve their interests without being overtly instrumental. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has highlighted the threat multiplying effects of climate change and its implications for Danish foreign and security policy. To that effect the Ministry has commissioned several studies of regional impacts of climate change in the Middle East and Africa (IISD 2006; IISD 2009; IISD 2009). Likewise, the Prime Minister's Office has made note of connections between climate change and security. In this case, the focus has been almost entirely on energy security and the possibility of creating a win-win situation where greater energy security coincides with reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. It is remarkable that the Ministry of Climate and Energy, which was tasked with the preparing the COP-15

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(4) Helga Schmid, Director Policy Unit at the Council Secretariat of the European Union, made this point at a conference on Environment, Climate Change and Security in Stockholm on October 15, 2009.

negotiations, has refrained from pushing the linkage between climate change and security.

It is hardly surprising that climate change is used instrumentally in policy processes and especially not in the process that precedes a high-level event like COP-15. Yet, the direct coupling of climate and security calls for careful consideration. While turning an issue like climate change into high politics might increase the attention it gets, such a profile comes at a cost (Wæver 2009, see Trombetta 2008 for the opposite view). It is much harder to obtain widespread international agreement about high politics, such as defense issues, than over so-called low politics, such as environmental issues. Witness e.g. the development prior to COP-15, where a formal treaty was abandoned in favor of a 'political agreement' – a term that aims to capture a non-binding agreement or framework, which may and may not be developed into a binding treaty in the future. This is not to suggest that efforts to securitize climate change is to blame for the difficult negotiation process at COP-15 but to illustrate that when climate change becomes high politics it can easily move out of the multilateral UN forum and into smaller and more closed circuits such as the Major Economies Forum, G8 or the select group of 27 countries that brokered the Copenhagen Accord to the dismay of some other nations at the summit (Nielsen 2010).

Should climate change rather be de-securitized? It is hard to consciously change any sophisticated discourse and it will be hard for decision-makers to backtrack on the dramatic pictures painted of future climate wars. However, in the interest of developing sound security policy, it should be acknowledged that climate change should not be elevated to a position out of touch with its likely role and consequences. Climate change should, in other words, be treated like any other threat multiplier. To find out how to deal with threat multipliers, the following sections take a comparative look at how existing problems like economic development and demography is understood and addressed.

### **3. Dealing with threat multipliers**

The assessment of climate change as a threat has been carried out in many ways. Some analysts have relied on scenario-building and others on statistical projections of historical trends to suggest likely futures (Schwartz and Randall 2003; Burke, Miguel et al. 2009). Despite the use of advanced methodological tools it remains a difficult task to create detailed pictures of future problems and envisage suitable ways to prevent the problems from arising. One avenue that has been comparatively little explored is to look at how similar problems from the past have been addressed in meaningful ways. Hence this report takes a look at two prominent and well-described threat multipliers – namely economic development and demography – in order to identify suitable strategies for addressing

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climate change from a security perspective. Other threat multipliers are e.g. ethnic fractionalization of societies, small arms and light weapons proliferation, and weapons of mass destruction (WMD). These phenomena do not cause conflict by themselves but alter the calculus of political actors in a direction that sometimes makes war more likely. Scott (2008) explicitly compares climate change with WMD when investigating securitization in the UN Security Council and its legal implications. Yet, in the context of this report I have found economic and demographic problems more suitable for comparison because the issues they raise, such as regional spill-over and immigration, transcend borders much the same way climate induced problems are likely to do.

Is economic development and demography fully comparable to climate change? There are at least three reasons to think that the answer is yes: All three threat multipliers can be said to have wide-reaching societal implications and hence shape the incentive structures of both decision-makers and populations in states across the globe. They are also relatively slow-changing conditions that can only be gradually turned around and only by massive investment and effort. Moreover, all these phenomena are linked to security through long and non-linear causal pathways. It might be argued that there are notable differences between the two other threat multipliers and climate change and that climate change might have more direct bearing on Western security interest. Bear in mind, however, that climate change will have few direct security consequences in terms of spurring armed conflict. Rather, it will destabilize already unstable societies, which is precisely what economic problems and demography threatens to do. To the extent climate change will affect the West directly, for example in the Arctic region, the challenges are quite similar to the ones posed by different economic growth levels. It is the strategic power balance that is at stake. In sum, the threat multipliers are comparable for the purpose of this report.

### **3.1 Economic development**

Economic conditions have long been recognized as a factor that exacerbates existing tensions in and between societies. At the international level poverty or impeded economic development has been identified as a threat multiplier that can affect the traditional power balance between major powers (Gilpin 1983). Hence, it is a factor that potentially increases the risk of international instability. The realist argument behind this line of reasoning holds that relatively poor countries will try improving their situation and, given a belligerent political leadership and an opportune moment, they will be willing to use force. Consequently, changing (economic) power levels are viewed with suspicion and realists find empirical support for their arguments by analyzing German behaviour prior to World War I, where the country adopted bellicose policies in search for options for further economic development (Gordon 1974; Porch 2006). In a contemporary setting, the shift in power balance concerns the strategic relationship between the Western world

and upcoming powers such as China and India. Clearly, the different growth rates between powers are not about to cause conflict but it takes little imagination to envisage a future where the newfound riches of China and India make them more assertive internationally. Some have even interpreted China's behaviour at COP-15 as a sign of such assertiveness (Nielsen 2010).

Also at the intra-state level economics multiply threats. GDP per capita, for example, remains highly correlated with the onset of civil war (Collier, Elliott et al. 2003). The literature about economic agendas in contemporary civil wars have shown that low levels of economic activity and widespread poverty creates conditions wherein population groups become prone to taking up arms. More specifically Collier and Hoeffler (2001) have demonstrated how the lack of economic opportunities, lack of education and presence of valuable natural resources greatly increase the risk of rebellion in developing countries. Initially this has only regional implications, but the suspected climate induced conflicts such intra-state wars can in turn have regional and even global consequences.

Even at the individual level economy plays a role in security issues. Terrorism research offers some of the most prominent and controversial examples of this dynamic. For instance Blomberg, Hess et al. (2004) argue that poor economic performance increases the risk of terrorism in a country because small individuals find it rational to join radical organizations that carry out attacks (an argument much akin to abovementioned recruitment into rebel groups in civil wars). Along the same lines of inquiry, it appears that countries where large numbers of young men face dim economic prospects seem to suffer disproportionately from the presence of terrorist organizations on their soil (Ehrlich and Liu 2002). Other researchers find that links between poverty and terrorism have been exaggerated and, in the words of Krueger and Maleckova (2003:119) that "any connection between poverty, education and terrorism is indirect, complicated and probably quite weak." While there is clearly some disagreement about the role poverty plays, few dispute the fact that it does act as a (weak) threat multiplier and should at least be considered when trying to address terrorism.

It is fair to conclude that economic development and poverty has been firmly linked with security problems. Yet, these economic problems are correctly recognized as threat multipliers rather than security problems in themselves. Witness e.g. how the challenges posed by poor economic prospects are addressed in most security strategies, long-term analysis and intelligence assessments. These typically include poverty when analysing state stability. The Quadrennial Defense Review Report (2006:40) clearly states that "in Latin America, there has been steady progress toward political and economic development over the past several decades. Still, slow economic growth, weak democratic institutions and continuing stark economic inequality have led to a resurgence of populist authoritarian

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political movements in some countries, such as Venezuela. These movements threaten the gains achieved and are a source of political and economic instability.” Along the same lines the European Union (2003:2) has identified that “Sub-Saharan Africa is poorer now than it was 10 years ago. In many cases, economic failure is linked to political problems and violent conflict.”

Furthermore, multiple international institutions have been created to alleviate poverty and promote economic development with an underlying understanding that international security would also improve. For instance, security concerns and the combined desire for better economic development and formation of political ties played an explicit role in the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community that preceded the establishment of the European Union. Even institutions such as various UN development agencies or the World Bank, whose creation did not address security concerns directly, are frequently recognized as important tools for creating and ensuring continued political stability in fragile regions. The aspect to note is that poverty and economic development are treated as complex phenomena with tangible connections to security, but not as security issues themselves.

### **3.2 Demography**

Demography plays a role comparable to the one of economic development when it comes to conflict dynamics. Since Malthus (1826 (1798)) wrote about the social upheaval that would follow from rapid population growth and lack of food, demography has been on the security agenda to varying degrees. Malthus’ initial ideas have disproved themselves empirically over time as societies have grown and managed to support ever larger populations without much upheaval.

Nowadays it is *neo-malthusian* reasoning that dominates the field. In short, the theory holds that demography affects security via interaction with different types of resource scarcity. This can result in dire conditions that will make groups take up arms to reduce the perceived injustices. For neo-malthusian minds intra-state conflict is of greatest concern. More specifically, neo-malthusians suggest that demography and scarcity of e.g. water and arable land will interact to produce situations where either the ecologically marginalized fight for access to remaining resources or well-off groups pursue so-called ‘resource capture’ to increase their wealth (Baechler 1999; Homer-Dixon 1999).

In relation to international conflicts demography is also of some concern. At the grander scale of great power politics demography has always played a role. It is indeed one of the factors that Waltz (1979) and other realists look at when determining state strength in order to understand power balances. Related to this line of thinking, quantitative studies of security issues often use population size as a crude proxy for state power which consequently is considered a factor that

affects strategic decision-making in foreign policy (Bennett and Stam 2003) . In a contemporary setting, demography affects Western security much in the same way as climate change. It puts further stress on vulnerable countries, primarily in the so-called Arc of Instability, and while internal conflicts in these countries have limited effects on Western societies, they drain some military resources and have wider regional effects.

In sum, there are complex, yet well-theorized and empirically founded links between demography and security. However, rarely are demographic changes securitized without paying attention to the context. This is for example the case in both strategic analysis and in many policies adopted by security institutions. The National Intelligence Council (2008:43) has for instance coined the term 'identity demography' in its report about the trends that will shape the world in 2025 to describe future tensions resulting from situations where "ethno-religious groups have experienced their transition to lower birth rates at varying paces, lingering ethnic youth bulges and shifts in group proportions could trigger significant political changes". It is only in a given ethnic and political context demography obtains security implications.

The institutional responses by the international community to demography problems resemble the strategies and institutions put in place to mitigate economic problems. UN bodies such as the Population Division under the Department of Economic and Social Affairs have been created and tasked with providing data and policy advice to regional and specialized agencies working with population and development issues. In addition to multilateral efforts, bilateral development aid frequently aims to curb potentially negative effects of rapid population growth by aiding family planning programs and promoting education. Finally, it should be noted that some states and regional organizations respond to demographic challenges in neighboring regions by implementing more restrictive immigration policies. These are occasionally seen as a means of preventing demographic imbalances from spilling over and thus promoting internal stability.

#### **4. Three steps towards climate security**

Demography and economic development discussed above are recognized as threat multipliers with perhaps even more direct effect on global security than climate change. Economic malaise raises the risk of both international and internal strife, which might in turn result in increased demand for military intervention around the globe in order to curb hostilities and minimize negative spill-over effects. Likewise, demographic trouble is very likely to spur migration just like analysts think climate change will. These threat multipliers are also somewhat distant from the onset of diplomatic tension and outright armed conflict and hence comparable to climate change in other important ways. As discussed,

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these challenges are routinely addressed in- and outside the security realm by e.g. ministries, intelligence agencies and multilateral organizations. Neither demography nor economic problems are usually elevated to a level where they are viewed as threats to international stability or sole causes of conflict. Climate change should be treated the same way.

One might argue that economic and demographic problems have not been dealt with successfully and that securitization of these issues would have resulted in the resources needed to fully address them. While more resources are always useful, the main lesson to draw from dealings with economic and demographic conditions appears to be that addressing such long-running challenges requires both well-designed processes and thorough assessments, not alarmist pictures of the future. A related second lesson is that the process of addressing such challenges requires continuous attention to 1) obtaining knowledge, 2) deciding on viable strategies and 3) creating national and international institutions tasked with minimizing the threat multiplier. This is exemplified by the approach to economic challenges taken by international financial institutions, notably the World Bank and IMF, and various national institutions in cooperation.

Denmark and comparable small states have a role to play in the development of international efforts to address the security implications of climate change. When security is about long-term risks rather than imminent threats small states have room for strategic manoeuvre (Breitenbauch 2008:14). In other words, there are choices to be made. Wivel (2009) has demonstrated how climate politics has been instrumentalized in Danish foreign policy and suggests that small states obtain room for manoeuvre when they focus on specific issues that are perceived as common interest and certainly not detrimental to the interest of major powers. Such issues will often belong to the realm of low politics. Given the reluctance of major powers such as China, and to a lesser degree the US to prioritise the climate security nexus, Denmark and other small states face an uphill battle, if they want to ensure that the issues stay on the agenda and policy gets developed and implemented. Jacobsen (2009) has, however, demonstrated that even when it comes to security issues, small states can affect international political outcomes. This is the case when small states are recognized as leaders on a given policy issue, when they back initiatives with good arguments and engage in coalition-building, and finally support implementation with significant resources. In such cases, major powers might decide to free-ride on the policy initiatives of small-states rather than blocking their efforts. Denmark or other small states with ambitions to promote climate security need to place themselves in a trusted position to have a chance to succeed. Alternatively, policy initiatives can be launched via the EU, which stand a better chance of exercising leverage on powers less interested in climate security.

On the basis of these observations and the ways comparable threat multipliers are being dealt with, this report makes the argument that the next step for climate security should be to lift the issue out of its current position and take three steps towards creating a strategy for climate security.

#### **4.1 Step one: improve knowledge of the climate-security nexus**

The first step in most, if not all, policy processes is to start obtaining knowledge needed to develop policies and make decisions. When it comes to climate security, we are in the middle of this step already. Knowledge about the security implications of climate change has grown exponentially over the last couple of years, yet as alluded to in section 2.1, consensus on some key issues is still absent.

While true consensus will probably never emerge in the scientific discussion of a complex topic such as climate security, it is fair to say that more must be known about social responses to different climatic developments in various societies before comprehensive strategies can be successfully designed. Moreover, much of the existing knowledge generation bears more resemblance with advocacy work than with systematic attention to evidence for and against hypotheses about different aspects of climate security.

Further research efforts cannot and should not be controlled or directed from political institutions or from the political level that is currently preoccupied with deciding how and if to deal internationally with climate change. It is independent research, not more advocacy work, which is needed to move beyond agenda-setting and towards solutions.

Some pointers can be made regarding the climate security related topics that are ripe for further research:

- Improve knowledge of the social response mechanisms most likely to couple climate change with armed conflict. Especially interdisciplinary approaches that combine knowledge from social and natural sciences appear to be lacking.
- Identify new types of vulnerabilities. Future security challenges need not look like the ones we know. There is some preliminary evidence that short-term bursts of violence in the wake of natural disasters and extreme weather events might become more frequent. The use of scenarios, systematic case-studies and risk assessments are possible ways to improve knowledge of this field.
- Develop knowledge-sharing venues. Even with a better understanding of the mechanisms that link climate change and conflict, it will be nec-

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essary to put the knowledge into context. Databases, conferences and journals that cover climate security should be promoted.

- Strengthen cooperation between scientific communities and military agencies on the issue of climate security. Climate experts and social scientists can work with military institutions to better our understanding of key trends and key regions. The recent US National Intelligence Assessment on the security implications of climate change took this approach (Director of National Intelligence 2008).

#### **4.2 Step two: develop climate security strategies**

Security strategies are meant to create transparency and facilitate prioritization in the day-to-day security dealings of states. To do this, they must rely on long-term analysis of potential challenges and the kinds of knowledge described above. Strategy will enable decision-makers to determine when enough has been done, and if we are achieving our security goals. Without a strategy, there will be no limits to the demands for improved security.

A climate security strategy could fit into this picture as either a single independent document or part of a bigger strategy. Given the choice between a larger security strategy, and a strategy for dealing with the foreign policy implications of climate change, should primarily focus on the latter. This would help bring climate change into its right position among other threat multipliers and to devise tools for addressing challenges. Even with the knowledge of climate security we have today, it is clear that most tools will come from the foreign policy toolbox rather than from traditional defence policy. In the long run, climate security could be included in national security strategies when/if its implications become clearer.

Which fora should devise climate security strategies? Given the global reach of climate related changes, not to mention the global dispersion of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, it is quite obvious that Denmark and other comparable nations would gain little from addressing climate security independently. A comprehensive and multilateral approach is needed. The EU is looking to update its 2003 Security Strategy and NATO is due to produce a new strategic concept by 2011. Both might include climate security in these endeavors, but the real question is which global fora should spearhead the efforts to achieve climate security; an informal group (say G20) or the formal UN system?

After the UN Security Council debated climate change on April 17, 2007 much attention has been devoted to the Council's possible future role in promoting climate security. The UN is the right organization, but the Security Council is the wrong forum for dealing with climate security. There are at least two reasons for this. First, China and numerous developing nations have opposed the Council's

role in dealing with climate change. Even the US has abstained from backing British efforts to promote the Council's involvement (UNSC 2007). These divisions between Council members and even within the permanent members lead Scott (2008) to conclude that securitization of climate change in Security Council has failed so far. The divisions would likely continue to hamper efforts to adequately address climate security in this forum. A second reason for placing the responsibility for climate security elsewhere concerns legitimacy. Many of the problems that might follow from global warming are likely to hit developing countries the hardest and hence they demand to be fully included in the processes that seek to mitigate the challenges. With 15 member states and no permanent African members, the Security Council suffers from a lack of legitimacy in the eyes of many developing nations. A better solution would be to place climate security formerly under the aegis of either the General Assembly or Economic and Social Council and to develop a secretariat that could draw on the relevant expertise which is already present in the UN system, including the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, UN Development Programme and UN Environment Programme.

International efforts to develop climate security strategies need to trickle down to the national level in order to have an effect. Recent years have brought a series of new or revised security strategies. The Netherlands and Canada have for example developed national security strategies and France and Britain have updated their strategic guidelines. Despite this proliferation of security strategies, Danish politicians decided against developing a specific Danish security strategy in the recent defense agreement that will guide Danish defense policy in the coming five years.

Even with a national security strategy out of the question in the immediate future national efforts are possible. Such efforts could entail developing the IISD/Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (IISD 2006) paper about foreign policy implications of climate change into a national strategy for addressing all these issues, including ways to mitigate potential adverse security effects of climate change. This would be a productive step since it would put climate security into context with threat multipliers and foreign policy challenges. In November 2009, the Danish Parliament held a hearing on climate security and decided to ask the government to provide a review of its efforts to address the security implications of climate change (Folketinget 2009). The review is due in June 2010 and it could serve as a stepping-stone for a broader strategy or a national policy on climate security.

Alternatively, the defense agreement stipulates that the Danish government should provide an annual review of security policies to be discussed in Parliament. While climate security or other timely topics could certainly feature in such a debate, it would hardly be the best way to provide for a comprehensive national

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strategy on climate security. An annual review meant for political debate is more likely to single out specific threats or issues than to combine existing knowledge and prioritize challenges.

#### **4.3 Step three: build (only relevant) institutions and coordinate policy**

With national and multilateral climate security strategies in place, future challenges can be addressed much more systematically than is currently the case and, importantly, climate related issues can be compared with other security challenges to prioritize the resources allocated to solving the problems.

In his recent report, the UN Secretary General introduced the concept ‘threat minimizers’ as the policies we need to pursue to address climate change as a threat maximizer. A threat minimizer is defined as ‘conditions or actions that are desirable in their own right but also help to lower the risk of climate-related insecurity’ (UN Secretary General 2009:2) The threat minimizers discussed in the report include climate mitigation, adaptation, economic development, democratic governance, institution strengthening, international cooperation, diplomacy, information-sharing and improved research. These threat minimizers clearly suggest that it will be necessary to look beyond traditional security institutions to obtain climate security. Security politics consists of other measures too and there is a need to determine which means are best used to address climate related challenges. One of the most pressing needs is to strengthen the adaptation capacities of developing countries.

Financially, the threat minimizers could be promoted via the fund created at COP-15 for financing adaptation, mitigation and technology transfer. Arguably, the fund is a new and necessary multilateral step in the direction of better climate security. However, one fund will not suffice and it should be recognized that in the near future, the main effort to promote threat minimizers would have to come from existing institutions and programs rather than from new ones.

To really get some effect climate security needs to be incorporated into international and national development policies, which are likely to be responsible for the vast majority of funds available for adaptation in the short run. Therefore, climate security issues should be addressed in national development plans and in cooperation with multilateral agencies rather than through specific climate security institutions. That is the only way to ensure a sufficiently broad approach to climate security that incorporates e.g. development, trade and migration perspectives, which will be crucial in countries most likely to suffer from climate change related security problems.

Coordination of efforts becomes central when multiple institutions are to address the same issue. Not least nationally can policies be coordinated and duplica-

tion of efforts avoided if a few steps are taken. In order to ensure that multiple government institutions work together, Sweden has created an inter-ministerial working group with participants from the Prime Minister's Office and ministries of Environment, Defence and Foreign Affairs that aim to address climate security policy issues.

It has been suggested that the Danish Prime Minister's Office should be amended to include a security cell that coordinates policy (Breitenbauch 2008:31). If such a cell would be created, it would be well placed to mimic Swedish efforts on climate security coordination. Alternatively, coordination efforts should be headed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is already coordinating efforts in many security related areas. This is for example the case when it comes to managing the Danish comprehensive approach in Afghanistan. No matter who is in charge of coordination of climate security it should be noted that climate security will require integration between civilian and military parts of government and that ongoing integration in this field will have to be increased.

Early warning systems are another frequent suggestion in the debate about creating climate security institutions. It is difficult to argue against early warning, but experience from situation centers, intelligence agencies and academia suggest that pinpointing future conflicts well in advance with any reasonable precision is very, very difficult. The complex dynamics underlying climate-related security issues will hardly be any easier than existing conflicts to predict. Hence, early warning in order to fully prevent conflicts might not be possible, but monitoring of security problems remains crucial for other purposes, not least to facilitate mediation efforts and possible interventions. For monitoring to be effective, it should be recognized that climate change only creates conflicts under very specific and very adverse political conditions and that other factors than climate change is in the driving seat of conflict dynamics. Hence, it would be more effective to strengthen existing warning capacities with climate expertise than to create entirely new early warning agencies centered on climate problems.

## 5 Conclusion

Climate change is at the top of the international agenda and its possible connections to security have helped getting it there. However, if we are serious about climate security we need to take steps towards developing knowledge and strategies rather than reinforcing the omnipresent images of threatening climate wars.

In this report, I have argued that a view on comparable threat multipliers such as poor economic development and demography yields important lessons for climate security. Three steps should follow the agenda-setting phase we have now passed. First, we need to improve our understanding of the social responses

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to climate change, which could cause conflict. Second, climate security strategies need to be created. This entails both national and international rethinking of strategy development so that climate security can be put in context with other threat multipliers and addressed comprehensively, but not elevated to an unwarranted threat level. Third, existing institutions should to a large degree be given the task of implementing climate security strategies. This will require extensive coordination between civilian and military organizations, between different ministries and between national and international institutions.

Achieving climate security will be costly and the process to get us towards the goal is likely to be filled with surprises given the complexity of the issue. The adverse effects of global warming might appear before they are expected or differ from their initially presumed location and magnitude. The perhaps single most important point in moving forward from agenda-setting to climate security policies is to create a process that allows for continuous input of new knowledge.

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