

**Summary:** The impacts of climate change — drought, rising sea levels, melting glaciers, extreme weather — threaten to further destabilize already fragile states. To address the resulting security risks, EU and U.S. decision makers should build a strategic partnership that involves the foreign and security policy communities as well as the development community. The appropriate response to the risks of climate change will not be limited to one country or to the military domain; rather, it must be both multilateral and multifaceted, encompassing the full range of available policies including development cooperation, conflict prevention, and humanitarian assistance, as well as climate change adaptation and mitigation. The development of adaptation strategies, efforts to reduce deforestation, and the preparation of low-carbon development strategies all offer promising ways to help reduce the security threats of climate change. By designing these instruments in a conflict-sensitive way, the transatlantic partners can help bring climate change concerns into mainstream development, foreign, and security practices.

## Future Landscapes of Conflict or Cooperation? Climate Security Needs Transatlantic Leadership

by Dennis Tänzler and Alexander Carius

### The Challenge

Climate change represents a vital challenge for international politics. Flooding, droughts, a shift of climate zones, and increasingly frequent and intense extreme weather hazards will have serious economic and social consequences for entire regions. There is a broad consensus that countries with low adaptation capacities will be hit the hardest. A number of analyses from both sides of the Atlantic reveal a growing potential for conflict and an increase in social tension as a result of the impending changes in the climate.<sup>1</sup> Conflicts may arise as a result of water and food shortages, caused in turn by an increase in extreme weather events and climate change-induced mass migration. Weak and fragile states are considered particularly vulnerable because of their already limited political capacities. The main assumption is that a further weakening of the

key services provided by the public sector is likely to lead to national and regional destabilization, with societal and political tensions potentially developing into violent conflict.

However, we should avoid one-dimensional causal explanations when assessing whether there will be an increase of violent conflicts related to the distribution of natural resources such as water and land. Possible conflicts will not be caused by climate change alone; rather climate change is seen as a factor that multiplies the deficits in other areas such as poverty, a lack of rule of law, and social and economic injustice.<sup>2</sup> In addition, a worsening of conflict situations as a result of climate change is only one possible pathway. Another is the peaceful avoidance of new conflict situations through early action and cooperation. The latter interpretation is based on research findings about how environmental cooperation toward common challenges could

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Campbell, Kurt M., Jay Gullede, J.R. McNeill, John Podesta, Peter Ogden, Leon Fuerth, R. James Woolsey, Alexander T.J. Lennon, Julianne Smith, Richard Weitz, and Derek Mix, 2007: "The Age of Consequences: The Foreign Policy and National Security Implications of Global Climate Change," available at [http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/071105\\_ageofconsequences.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/071105_ageofconsequences.pdf); CNA 2007, "National Security and the Threat of Climate Change," available at <http://securityandclimate.cna.org>; WBGU 2007, "World in Transition — Climate Change as a Security Risk" (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer).

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Carius, Alexander, Dennis Tänzler, and Achim Maas, 2008: "Climate Change and Security — Challenges for German Development Cooperation" (Eschborn: GTZ).

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support confidence-building between former antagonists and support peace-building efforts.<sup>3</sup>

## The Need for Transatlantic Leadership

Apart from an appropriate reflection of potential security-related impacts of climate change, there is an urgent need to design appropriate policy measures timely enough to avoid a further destabilization of already weak or fragile states. Such approaches must be both multilateral and multifaceted, encompassing the full range of available policies, including development cooperation, conflict prevention, and humanitarian assistance, as well as climate change adaptation and mitigation. The transatlantic partners need to take the lead in this debate, especially given the low prospects for progress in the international climate negotiations. Climate security diplomacy will require new strategic alliances beyond the conference halls of Copenhagen or Cancún. Political processes on climate change and international security already initiated can serve as a starting point not only to move from risk analysis to preventive action but also to integrate climate change concerns into development, foreign, and security policies.<sup>4</sup> To this end, two ongoing processes may be particularly interesting for U.S. policymakers from the foreign, security, and development policy fields.

## The EU on the Search for International Partners for Climate Security

An early approach to address the potential security implications of climate changes was initiated by the European Union. Under the 2007 German EU Presidency, the European Council and the European Commission were asked to prepare a joint paper on climate change and international security. This report, published in March 2008, summarized potential security risks associated with climate change.<sup>5</sup> Broadly, climate change has the potential of becoming a “threat multiplier,” exacerbating existing tensions and potentially creating new ones over time. Among the main security-relevant threats of climate change that the EU iden-

tified were conflicts over depleting resources such as water and food and the economic damage and risks caused by an increase in sea levels and in the strength and frequency of extreme weather events. Situations of fragility and radicalization may become exacerbated due to the amount of environmental stress and a lack of coping capacity.

Against the backdrop of these risks, the Council stated in its conclusions from December 2009 that climate change and its international security implications are part of the wider EU agenda for climate, energy, and its Common Foreign and Security Policy.<sup>6</sup> It stressed the need to strengthen the EU’s comprehensive efforts to reduce emissions as one aspect of conflict prevention. The main focus of the EU’s activities has been directed to enhance EU capacities for early warning on one hand and to foster international cooperation with the aim to create dialogue and a common awareness in relevant international forums, including the United Nations, on the other. However, the establishment of a strategic transatlantic dialogue between U.S. and EU policymakers from the development and foreign and security policy communities is still missing.

## Small Islands, Big Effect

At the UN level, the issue has also gained more and more attention in recent years. In 2007, the UN Security Council held a debate on the impact of climate change on global peace and security. The discussions among UN member states revealed broad uncertainty regarding the question of an appropriate international framework for action on responding to the security risks of climate change. The General Assembly of the UN on June 3, 2009 adopted a resolution on “Climate change and its possible security implications” (A/63/281), which was proposed by the Pacific Small Island Developing States. The resolution was adopted by a consensus and 101 states supported it. For the first time in the history of the UN, the United States cosponsored a climate-protection resolution. The resolution urged the UN bodies to strengthen their efforts to combat climate change and to avoid intensifying potential security risks. This was also the first time that a UN resolution established a direct link between climate change and international peace and security.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) 2009: “From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment”; Conca, Ken and Geoffrey Dabelko (eds.), 2002: *Environmental Peacemaking* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press).

<sup>4</sup> For an overview on key relevant policy documents, see [www.ecc-platform.org](http://www.ecc-platform.org).

<sup>5</sup> High Representative and European Commission, 2008: “Climate Change and International Security. Joint Paper to the European Council,” Brussels.

<sup>6</sup> Council of the European Union 2009: “Council conclusions on Climate change and security,” 2985<sup>th</sup> FOREIGN AFFAIRS Council meeting Brussels, December 8, 2009.

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## About Threat Multipliers and Minimizers

On the basis of 35 contributions from member states and relevant regional and international organizations, the UN Committee for Economic and Social Affairs published a comprehensive report in September 2009.<sup>7</sup> The report defined “security” in a broader sense, where vulnerable individuals and communities are the primary concern and security is understood in terms of protection from a range of threats, i.e. disease, unemployment, political repression, disasters, and violence. It further acknowledged that the security of individuals and communities was important in shaping the security of nation states, which is typically framed in terms of threats of external aggression. The most important aspect of this report was the strong focus on potential threat minimizers such as climate mitigation and adaptation, economic development, democratic governance and strong institutions, international cooperation, and preventive diplomacy and mediation. In addition, it highlighted the importance of timely availability of information and increased support for research and analysis in order to improve the understanding of links between climate change and security and to build up early warning capacities.

## Towards a Strategy on Climate Security?

The definition of available threat minimizers may open the door to move from the stage of risk analysis to one of policy formulation and implementation, for which the parallel processes on this issue at the UN and EU levels can be used. Both offer the transatlantic partners the opportunity to engage in a process of strategy formulation as to how to deal with this challenge of climate security. Again, this will not be solely a matter of international climate negotiations but demands the involvement of a broad spectrum of partners. So far, further progress on conceptualizing and implementing climate security measures has been limited since the fall 2009. There are a number of reasons for this delay:

- new institutional developments at the European level with the establishment of the External Action Services;
- newly elected governments in important EU member states such as Germany and the United Kingdom; and

- the failure of the conference in Copenhagen to establish a strong framework for a global climate protection approach for the coming decade and beyond.

Hence, new momentum is needed and some of the political developments mentioned may serve as entry points in this regard, e.g. based on some progress in the establishment of a framework for adaptation governance or programs to push for a low-carbon transformation. To this end, further processes like the preparations for the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro can also be helpful.<sup>8</sup>

## Building Transformative Pathways

The concept of a low-carbon economy is relevant for the climate and security debate because it aims to address different political key priorities: climate protection, energy security, and economic and social development. Most recently, a 2010 report by the Center for Naval Analyses outlined the potential opportunities for U.S. national security that could result from the transition to a clean energy technology-based economy. According to the authors, innovation and commercialization of clean, low-carbon energy will directly contribute to America’s future economic competitiveness and bolster national security.<sup>9</sup> Comprehensive activities to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions in industrialized and developing countries are also needed to limit the risk of climate-induced conflicts and allow the global economy to shift towards lower emissions. Such transformative pathways should not only ensure compliance to ambitious climate change targets but also support sustainable growth and the creation of new employment opportunities.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, well-designed mitigation policies have the potential to link climate protection, development, and conflict prevention to serve together as threat minimizers. To this end, however, some of the key mitigation questions need to be answered, e.g. how mitigation efforts will be distributed among the different countries and how they can be

<sup>7</sup> UN General Assembly, Sixty-Fourth Session, “Climate Change and Its Possible Security Implications. Report of the Secretary General,” September 11, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. UNEP 2010: “Green Economy Report: A Preview,” available at [www.unep.org/greeneconomy](http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy).

<sup>9</sup> CNA 2010: “Powering America’s Economy: Energy Innovation at the Crossroads of National Security Challenges,” Alexandria: Center for Naval Analyses.

<sup>10</sup> Ellis, Karen, Bryn Baker, and Alberto Lemma, 2009: “Policies for Low Carbon Growth,” London, Overseas Development Institute.

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organized to support poorer countries especially to link technological progress in strategic key areas such as energy supply, infrastructure development, or transportation with a low-carbon development pathway. The development of sustainable energy options is especially important to avoid locking in high-carbon technologies while the demand for energy rises and in turn often leads to costly energy import dependency. In addition, decentralized grids are likely to offer co-benefits between sustainable energy production and improved access to energy. To ensure that mitigation activities are designed in a conflict-sensitive way, one key requirement is to consider that the impact of mitigation policies will vary significantly by country due to varying sectoral composition, such as the energy supply or transportation infrastructures.

## Designing Conflict-Sensitive Climate Policies

This shows that the discussion about appropriate policy frameworks is of strategic value and that the development of low-carbon growth strategies needs further guidance and international cooperation. One possible option to support countries entering such a strategic discourse is to use the revenues generated from auctioning emission permits in carbon-trading programs.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, a conflict-sensitive approach requires that international donors and recipient countries ensure funding is spent transparently and effectively to avoid the increasing of governance deficits such as corruption.<sup>12</sup>

Apart from the energy sector, land use and forest protection have received increasing attention and can serve as another example how climate mitigation may be linked to development and stability. Efforts to systemically address the cost-effective emission reduction potentials in the forest sector have led to various approaches to conceptualize REDD, a UN initiative to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. REDD can, in principal, contribute to economic recovery by generating new sources of income in the forest sector for often marginalized social groups. Depending on the concrete design of benefit-sharing agree-

ments, central governments as well as local communities can receive income and use it, e.g. for building infrastructures and services. Additional employment opportunities may also be created for forest monitoring and law enforcement.

However, whether sustainable forest management and extractive logging is compatible with REDD regulations will only be seen after an international agreement on REDD has been adopted. In addition, implementation of REDD requires excellent governance capacities. Governments, communities, and project implementers need to develop sound concepts and implementation capacities to address the drivers of deforestation. When it comes to compliance with any future international agreement, countries need to provide the enforcement of forest protection (e.g. curb illegal logging) and build up sufficient capacities for measurement, reporting, and verification of their commitments. Last but not least, sophisticated benefit-sharing mechanisms are needed in order to avoid conflicts on the national and local levels concerning the distribution of revenues generated through any kind of REDD mechanism.<sup>13</sup>

## Learn to Adapt

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines adaptation as “adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities.” Seen through a more political lens adaptation requires empowering people, securing their livelihoods, and building institutions to strengthen their resilience. Adaptation will require both effective local action and national and regional coordination for the design and implementation of appropriate action. To this end, international cooperation is needed, especially in the case of the most vulnerable developing countries, to provide for adequate resources.<sup>14</sup>

The idea of adaptation has taken centre stage in the debate on the security-related implications of climate change —

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Tänzler, Dennis and Sibyl Steuwer, 2009: “Cap and Invest: Why Auctioning Gains Prominence in the EU’s Emissions Trading System,” Report on behalf of the Washington Office of the Heinrich Boell Foundation, Washington, DC: Heinrich Boell Foundation.

<sup>12</sup> See for a general reflection, see Hammill, Anne, Alec Crawford, Robert Craig, Robert Malpas, and Richard Matthew, 2009: “Conflict-Sensitive Conservation: Practitioners’ Manual,” Winnipeg: IISD.

<sup>13</sup> See for a more comprehensive debate on potential risks “Rights and Resources Initiative 2010: The End of the Hinterland. Forests, Conflict, and Climate Change,” available at [http://www.rightsandresources.org/documents/files/doc\\_1400.pdf](http://www.rightsandresources.org/documents/files/doc_1400.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> See for a comprehensive discussion, Tänzler, Dennis, Achim Maas, and Alexander Carius, 2010: “Climate change adaptation and peace,” *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews Climate Change*, DOI:10.1002/wcc.66.

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in part, because greenhouse gases emissions to date have already triggered irreversible global warming. Adapting to a changing environment should help avoid negative effects such as water or food scarcity and consequently also social and political tensions. Ongoing activities have already made some progress in creating strategic support for future adaptation processes — including in some conflict-prone countries: More than 40 least-developed countries have submitted national adaptation programs to the UNFCCC; of these, 16 were countries that, according to the 2008 analysis by the Fund for Peace, are failed states at high risk of becoming destabilized. In other words, schemes do exist on the international level for introducing climate change adaptation measures in conflict areas. However, there is only a slow initiation of concrete projects, which not only illustrates a yet insufficient funding but also contributes to an increasing loss of credibility for international climate protection measures in those countries most severely affected by climate change.

### Building and Strengthening Institutions for Climate Security

A coherent implementation of adaptation measures is likely to be facilitated by an institutionalization of responsibilities. If an appropriate national authority does not exist, this not only jeopardizes the integration of adaptation measures into other development processes but also makes it extremely difficult to incorporate conflict-sensitive considerations into national planning processes. As we learn from the research on environment and security, cooperation over scarce resources, such as shared waters, harnesses a great potential to facilitate sustainable development and political stability in riparian nations as well as within countries. One key factor for success is the establishment of strong institutions such as river commissions and other transboundary institutional arrangements.<sup>15</sup> Cooperation between countries with bordering watersheds has long been a focus of the international donor community. As a result, it is often possible to make use of existing structures — also to address future adaptation needs.

However, an assessment by GTZ (the German development cooperation agency) of donor activities in transboundary

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Houdret, Annabelle, Kramer, Annika, and Alexander Carius, 2010: "The Water Security Nexus. Challenges and Opportunities for Development Cooperation," Eschborn: GTZ.

river areas in Africa suggests that funding is limited to just a few catchment areas and preexisting institutions and that conflict-torn regions are barely integrated at all.<sup>16</sup> Yet it is just these politically sensitive regions that need to become the focus if future water distribution conflicts are to be avoided. Furthermore, the stabilizing and trust-building potential often demonstrated by transboundary cooperation in the water sector is not reflected prominently in existing national adaptation activities. This suggests that there is a need to more systematically link and coordinate national and regional processes to provide for climate security, which also may be facilitated by appropriate institutions.

### Cancún and Beyond: Prospects for Climate Security

The impacts of climate change and individual threats will be felt differently across the world, but no region will be able to avoid all of them. Moreover, feedback loops between different threats across regions, converging trends, and global interconnectedness requires concerted and global action. The options of the transatlantic partners to address climate security concerns are not limited to the UN climate negotiations.

However, EU and U.S. policymakers negotiating the next steps in the international climate arena should be aware that the ongoing debate on "targets and timetables" must not delay the establishment of a comprehensive framework for adaptation governance and support for initiating the development of low-carbon growth strategies. These elements are likely to benefit from a reenergized global process in order to facilitate the mainstreaming of these issues in relevant national and regional processes and to provide a basis for further activities to ensure climate security.

Beyond the international climate change process, there are further entry points to ensure that the responses to climate change are designed in a conflict-sensitive way. Here representatives from the fields of development, foreign, and security policy from both sides of the Atlantic should engage in a strategic partnership to address the following issues:

- Governments and nongovernmental stakeholders should use ongoing risk analysis processes to identify

<sup>16</sup> GTZ: "Donor activity in transboundary water cooperation in Africa. Results of a G8-initiated survey 2004–2007," Eschborn: Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), 2007.

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sectors critically affected by climate change, especially in conflict-prone areas. This will also help to ensure coherency and coordination with the other planning processes of the transatlantic partners. One possible means would be to expand the use of peace and conflict assessments to consider the impacts of climate mitigation and adaptation activities.

- Aid agencies active in the transatlantic context should initiate conflict-sensitive mitigation and adaptation processes using a multi-dimensional system that incorporates administrative and societal perspectives. Involving representatives from the partner countries in risk analysis and strategy formulation will probably increase acceptance for the transformation processes necessary to secure the supply of food, water, and sustainable energy and to improve disaster preparedness.
- The establishment of national and regional steering committees in conflict-prone regions can support the monitoring of mitigation and adaptation programs, coordinating public authorities and external stakeholders such as donor organizations, and establishing mediation bodies. To this end, a substantial increase of capacities on a national and regional level is needed that can be supported by the transatlantic partners in cooperation with relevant UN agencies.
- The support for adaptation and mitigation processes, especially in already fragile countries, should be integrated into the larger regional context. The establishment of the European External Action Service offers a chance to further expand international cooperation with third countries to commence dialogue, create awareness, share analysis, and cooperatively address the challenges of climate change. Such activities should be pursued in close cooperation with the U.S. partners active in relevant regions.

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## About the Transatlantic Climate Bridge



This paper would not have been possible without funding from the “Transatlantic Climate Bridge,” an initiative jointly launched by the German Federal Foreign Office and the German Federal Environment Ministry to connect and support those working to address the challenges of climate change, energy security, and economic growth at the local, the state, and the federal level in the United States and Germany.