Online First Book Review, 24 February 2026: 1-4
https://doi.org/10.33458/uidergisi.1895237

Climate Change, Conflict and (In)Security: Hot War

Timothy CLACK, Ziya MERAL and Louise SELISNY (eds.)
London, Routledge, 2024, 402 pages, ISBN: 9781032455792 (Paperback)

Nazan CÖMERT BAECHLER
Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Marmara University, İstanbul
E-Mail: nazan.baechler@marmara.edu.tr
Orcid: 0000-0002-0242-542X

Climate change is already happening, but at an accelerating pace that is surprising even the experts responsible for tracking its progress. The world is far from ready to cope with its impacts. This is particularly true of the defense and security sectors, which have not yet come to terms with the fact that climate change amplifies the risk of conflict. The academic world began to become aware of these links in the 1990s. Thomas Homer-Dixon, a pioneer in this field, points out in chapter 16 (pp. 356-364) the prescient nature of his work: environmental disruptions will not trigger conflicts directly, but will act as threat multipliers through their impact on access to key resources, the well-being of populations, and the cohesion of social groups.

This edited collection by Clack, Meral and Selisny explores the extent to which climate change is linked to the risks of conflict. Overall, this objective is achieved: Spanning 16 chapters, the book covers a wide range of issues with a specific focus on regions (Antarctic, Arctic, Levant, etc.), key players (NATO, British government, etc.), and specific climate change risks (international migration, short or long-term risks, etc.). The authors clearly demonstrate that addressing these challenges will increasingly require a focus on hard power in a multipolar world that is becoming more fragmented and conflict-ridden.

The chapters illustrate these links in three interconnected ways: climate risks, which are multiplying (extreme weather events, the resurgence of infectious diseases, rising sea levels, etc.); exposure to these risks, which varies from one country to another (depending on climate, the level of economic development, etc.); and vulnerability to the risks, which depends on preparedness for their impact. The introduction reminds the reader that among the 25 countries most vulnerable to climate risks, 14 are also those most exposed to the risk of conflict. Until now, these have mainly been intra-national conflicts (tensions between population groups over access to specific resources, such as land or water, or the recruitment of idle populations by terrorist groups, etc.). It is only a matter of time and the intensity of climate change before the international dimension of conflicts is affected. Among the major powers, China is probably the one that has best integrated these elements into its defense concept.

Identifying the links between climate and security risks is a monumental intellectual challenge, given the complexity of the phenomena involved. These impacts are multidimensional, spanning a wide range of timescales (extreme weather events are unfolding before our eyes, while rising sea levels will unfold over centuries), and are intertwined in ways that make analysis extremely challenging. The book provides ample illustrations of these impacts, which manifest themselves on three levels: strategic, tactical, and operational.

It is at the strategic level that the relative power of nations is forged. Several chapters address how climate change will impact access to key resources (energy, water, food) and the strategic competition between states that this access determines. The impact will not be systematically negative (access to specific resources will increase in the Arctic and Antarctic, as illustrated in Chapters 2 and 3); however, the potential for geopolitical tensions will always be part of the picture. The migratory impact of climate change (Chapters 6 and 9) will be decisive between now and the end of the century (the United Nations (UN) talks of a billion people potentially displaced). It will have an impact on the relative power of economies depending on their ability to adapt to it, with a strong potential for growing tensions between the global North and South.

At a tactical level, the conditions under which armed forces intervene in conflict situations or in peacekeeping operations will increasingly require capacities for mitigation or adaptation to climate change, based on two dimensions that are clearly emerging: conflict prevention through management of the climatic factors that determine them (competition for specific resources, mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, etc.); increasing capacities in conflict situations by taking into account the climatic parameters on which they indirectly depend (reducing the energy intensity of operations e.g.). Some players, such as NATO (Chapter 8) or the United Kingdom government (Chapter 9), have already made these principles a priority. The maritime response to climate change (Chapter 10) is an ongoing process. The UN aims to establish a database on climate risks that impact the success of its peacekeeping operations in Mali (Chapter 12). Certain army corps (Chapter 13) are assigned explicitly to protect biodiversity (which reduces climate risks).

In operational terms (Chapter 7), we can expect an increase in the number of extreme climatic impacts on defense infrastructure, many of which are in coastal areas. The design and use of weapons, like warships or aircraft, will be affected by rising sea temperatures or falling air density. Efforts to decarbonize the military-industrial complex, which will be challenging given the sector's high energy intensity and its reliance on fossil fuels, will increasingly inform the design of equipment and operations, contributing to innovations in the energy sector. These operational impacts are already being felt in terms of the attractiveness of the armed forces for recruiting young people who are increasingly concerned about the climate change.

The challenge taken up by this book is twofold: to identify the transmission belts between climate and security risks, and to demonstrate how these belts operate, and if possible, with what intensity. On the first point, the authors have achieved their objective. The book is a state-of-the-art analysis of the phenomena involved. The wide range of cases studied and the

wealth of examples used to illustrate them provide the reader with a clear understanding of the problems at stake. On the second point, the quality of the chapters is somewhat uneven. Some chapters go to great lengths in describing the phenomena involved, such as chapter 12 on the UN mission in Mali and the importance of a database on climate risks to prevent conflict, featuring interviews with the key players; chapter 13 explores the role of armies in protecting biodiversity. Other chapters leave the reader wanting more, notably chapter 6 on the issue of migration in Central America, where climate change remains a backdrop, and chapter 4 on the Levant, which is relatively lacking in analytical depth, even though the region is both one of those most likely to be impacted by climate change and one where the potential for conflict is exceptionally high.

The issue is vast and is only just beginning to be tackled systematically by the academic world. This inevitably results in shortcomings. For example, the book overlooks the key point about the relationship between mitigation and adaptation policies. The less we mitigate, the more we need to adapt to climate change impacts (to the point where the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report[1] suggests that we have reached the point where adaptation has become more decisive than mitigation for the future of sustainability). It is inconceivable that this issue will not have an impact on climate strategies adopted at the government level or for players such as the armed forces. Perhaps even more fundamentally, we need to account for climate risks that not only lead to increased risks of conflict but also create opportunities for greater cooperation between states. We are already seeing this phenomenon in the management of cross-border water resources. Overall, the book is a valuable contribution to the emerging field of research, alongside studies like that published by Baysal and Karakas in *Uluslararası İlişkiler* in 2017.[2]

1 IPCC. 2022. *Summary for Policymakers*, P.R. Shukla et al. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

2 Baysal, B. and Karakaş, U. 2017. Climate Change and Security: Different Perceptions, Different Approaches. *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 14, 57: 21-44.