

Introduction

The aim of the Global Security Defense Index on Climate Change is to determine to what extent governments around the world consider climate change to be a national security issue, and how their militaries and national security communities have begun to plan for the effects of climate change.

The preliminary results, that were published last year, were stark: about 70% of nations in the world explicitly stated that climate change was a national security concern. Almost all nations that have official military planning have stated that their government considers missions like human assistance and disaster relief as critical responsibilities of their armed forces.

This updated Global Security Defense Index includes far greater detail for a sample of individual nations. Ultimately, this index will contain analysis of every nations' perception and response to climate change.

The Link Between Climate Change and National Security

The climate is changing – the shift in global climate is scientifically proven, though the extent of the projected change is a subject of debate. Predictions of weather and climate only tell us part of the story, though. The geopolitical consequences of climate change will be determined by how it affects and interacts with local political, social, and economic conditions as much as by the magnitudes of the climatic shift itself.

Climate change is usually termed by defense planners as a “threat multiplier” or an “accelerant of instability” because of how it influences a range of other, already existing threats. For example, a food shortage exacerbated by increased temperatures and population could lead to conflicts over resources, which may drive human migration to a more resource-rich area. This may increase stress on food and water resources in that region, beginning the process again.

Although climate change is just one variable in this long chain of events, it is important, even if it is never the sole cause of any specific problem.

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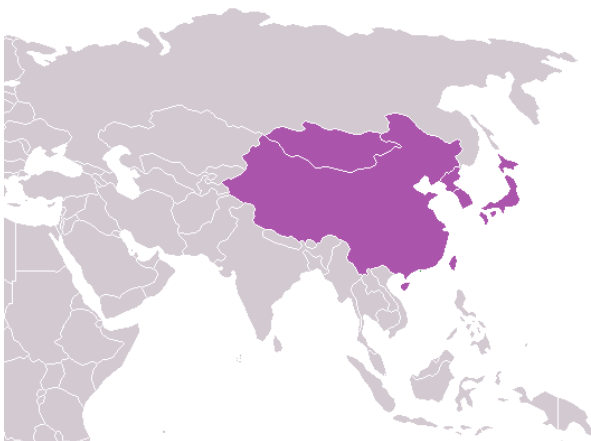


Regional Differences in Planning for Climate Security

The near-term impacts of climate change are likely to have a disproportionate effect on poor countries with weak governance structures, particularly in Africa and Asia. However, the countries with the most detailed planning for climate security tend to be concentrated in Europe, North America, and East Asia. It seems the more likely cause of differences in detail for military planning for climate change comes down to the amount of detailed planning the military actually does, as opposed to any sense about the dangers of climate change.

However, there are some notable differences among the regions that are drawn out below.

East Asia



Traditional rivalries in East Asia ensure that every country in the region already has a full slate of traditional national security challenges – like nuclear weapons proliferation, contested maritime and land borders, and greatly expanding conventional military forces. Nevertheless, the countries of the region overwhelmingly identify climate change as threat to security, placing it among other ‘non-traditional’ national security threats as potential causes of conflict.

For countries that clearly have a full range of already existing threats, East Asia’s approach to planning for the security threats of climate change should be a model for the rest of the world.

Europe



As one would expect, given their leadership on climate issues, most of the nations of Europe have actively integrated climate change into their national security strategies. Only a handful of smaller countries like Moldova, Albania, or Cyprus do not take into account the threats of climate change.

The most interesting divide in Europe comes between larger countries with global interests. While the United Kingdom, France, or Germany, see climate change as a threat to security because of its effects on conflict around the world, more locally-focused nations like Finland, Greece, or Austria see climate change as a local threat.

Middle East and North Africa



The countries of the MENA region have done little to prepare for the threats of climate change. Meanwhile, many countries actively oppose the ‘securitization’ of what they see as an environmental issue.

Perhaps an explanation of this is the continued political and military strife in the region. However, as a region that is also one of the most threatened by climate change – especially with regards to changes in water availability – the countries of the MENA region must do more.

North America



The military and national security establishments of Canada and the United States strongly link climate change to security, citing the links between climate change and conflict. The Canadian government exhibits a concern about the link between climate change and development, while American documents stress the threats of climate-related conflict.

The most important divide within these countries is between the national security establishments and the political leadership. In places where skepticism about climate science is still strong, politicians still must fight that.

Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean are included in the Latin America section.

Southeast Asia and Oceania



The regions of Southeast Asia and Oceania are threatened by climate change due to the combination of sea level rise and extreme weather, along with densely packed urban areas in low-lying coastal zones.

The Pacific Island States have probably been the most vocal of all countries in expressing the threat of climate change, with some of them preparing for their land masses to cease to exist. The more developed militaries around the periphery of the region, like Australia, Singapore, Vietnam, and New Zealand expect that the effects of climate change will hit the Pacific particularly hard, and are preparing for disaster response and conflict prevention throughout the region.

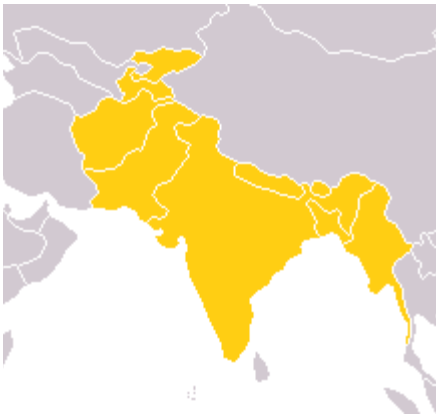
Latin America and the Caribbean



The islands of the Caribbean and the smaller states of Central America overwhelmingly fear that climate change, featuring sea level rise and more frequent storms, poses an existential threat to their countries. However, the larger countries of South America continue to express an opposition to the ‘securitization’ of climate change.

For instance, Brazil demonstrates the predominant view in South America, expressing direct opposition to labeling climate change a security threat. For these countries, climate change is a domestic environmental issue.

South Asia



South Asian countries overall see climate change as a threat to their national security, with the notable exception of the largest country, India. Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and others have detailed strongly worded statements about the threats of climate change.

They express it most commonly as threats to their own internal security. However, perhaps because of their historical leadership of the non-aligned movement, the Indian government sees climate change through the prism of UN negotiations. Consequently, any expression of ‘securitization’ of climate change is a threat to move the issue from the UN General Assembly to the Security Council.

Sub-Saharan Africa



Africa is most at risk from climate change because of the confluence of poverty, extreme environments, and a history of conflict. As is befitting a large region with 45 countries, there is a diversity of views. The countries split evenly into three parts, with an almost equal number of countries who list climate change as a security threat, those who see it as a purely environmental issue, and those for whom no information is available. Many explicitly acknowledge the environmental components of conflict. For others, climate change’s impact on development is its most important aspect.

Methodology of the Report

There are four aspects of climate change that planners should prepare for: disaster response, adaptation, homeland security threats, and breaking the links between climate and conflict. For each country, ASP has listed the specific climate threats that it faces in each category, and then the preparation that the country has done on it. The country's overall ranking is based on how well it has prepared for these threats..

For each individual country, ASP ranks the country in four categories: its vulnerability to climate change, how it perceives the threat of climate change, its capacity to deal with the threat, and its preparedness. These are placed on a five-point scale: "weak," "adequate," "medium," "good," and "excellent." The category of "perception of climate change" refers to whether the country views climate change as a national security threat, an (non-securitized) environmental problem, or not as a problem at all. These are then synthesized together into an overall assessment. By its nature, this exercise is subjective. Placing countries into specific categories is always going to involve judgments. Instead of seeing all these categories as definitive, it is important to understand that these are all necessarily slightly vague.

About the Authors

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