

Climate-related security risks require foreign policy leadership from around the world

Berlin Climate and Security Conference Background Paper

By emitting greenhouse gases and degrading the natural world, humanity is destabilizing the Earth system

- Exponential growth of human environmental impacts has pushed the planet deep into the Anthropocene, undermining the basic conditions for improving human well-being and threatening to reverse the advances achieved in human development to date.
- Out of the nine Planetary Boundaries identified, which define a safe operating space for humanity, four Planetary Boundaries have already been transgressed in the areas of climate change, biodiversity loss, land use change, as well as interference with global biochemical flows. If current trends continue unchecked, individuals, communities and societies around the world will be severely impacted by extreme climate events, sea level rise, heat waves, new disease patterns, water scarcity, and resource scarcity resulting from ecosystem collapse. Crossing key tipping points could trigger potentially irreversible changes that destabilise the climate system and push the planet towards a Hothouse Earth, where in the long run parts of the world would become uninhabitable.
- Two complementary strategies will be essential to counter these threats: **managing the Global Commons in a fair and efficient way while keeping humanity within the safe operating space as defined by the Planetary Boundaries.** Taken together, *planetary stewardship* is an urgent and vital task for maintaining a liveable planet – and thus an essential duty for foreign policy leaders.

A destabilized Earth system implies unconscionable risks for peace and security

- The scientific community and our political leaders have emphasized that climate change is one of the biggest risks of the 21st century. The latest IPCC report states that 'limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society'.
- Foreign policy plays a critical role in this endeavour, because of the global nature and asymmetric impacts of climate change, the interdependence and urgency of efforts in combatting it, and the predicted consequences of climate change for global security and prosperity.
- Therefore, foreign ministers need to strongly and explicitly support ambitious mitigation efforts in domestic and international debates – as a matter of safeguarding international peace and security. Failing to limit global warming to 1.5°C increases the risk of potentially catastrophic risks, whether as a direct result of natural impacts or the indirect, socio-

economic or political consequences of these. Foreign policy needs to prepare for the challenge of rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes that current pressures on the ecosystems underpinning civilization risk bringing about. Prevention will be easier and cheaper than having to respond.

Climate security risks need to become a central foreign policy priority

- The planet's limited resources are under huge pressure. Demand for food, water, and energy is increasing. In regions already affected by conflict or fragility, persistent inequality, marginalisation, and perceptions of unresponsive governance can increase the potential for instability and conflict. Not one single conflict-affected context is untouched by climate change. The addition of climate impacts multiplies existing pressures and strains capacities to cope.
- The impacts of climate change interacting with other stresses can overburden societies, potentially spurring social upheaval, making peace and stability harder to achieve and sustain, and even contributing to new violent conflicts. This challenge exists not only for fragile or developing countries, but could potentially overwhelm even seemingly stable states.
- Therefore, the UN Security Council needs to send a strong signal acknowledging the threat that climate-related security risks pose to peace and stability, including but going beyond specific regions.

Maintaining peace and stability requires ambitious and integrated responses

- Foreign policy needs to plan for how to respond to climate-related security risks, both in terms of prioritizing support to vulnerable and fragile regions as well as systemically, in terms of reconsidering and strengthening the international architecture to enable it to avoid the unmanageable and manage the unavoidable, i.e. deal with the looming challenges regarding food security, displacement, and shifts in relative power and interdependence.
- The traditional sequencing of foreign policy in humanitarian aid first, then stabilization, then development, then climate change is often wasteful and even counterproductive. Foreign policy makers need to think and plan these sectors together to help identify synergies and trade-offs between them, from a human as well as a wider Earth system perspective. They also need to ensure that the resulting insights on broader public goods inform sectoral policy-making – across security policy, trade, investments, development cooperation and beyond.

More systematic dialogue is necessary

- Governments need to ensure their actions reflect the urgency that IPCC assessments convey; they also need to prepare global risk & foresight assessments that evaluate the entire cascade of foreign policy risks emanating from climate change and other macro-stresses on the environment, as well as response opportunities and entry points.

- The international community needs to ensure greater inclusion of, and give a stronger voice to those governments whose countries are most strongly affected by climate-related security risks.
- Governments need to set ambitious agendas at all relevant national, regional and global institutions to ensure their work is informed by climate security risk assessments and focused at achieving synergies between climate policies, peacebuilding and sustainable development. Recent work by major central banks that stressed the need to integrate monitoring of climate-related financial risks into day-to-day supervisory work, financial stability monitoring and board risk management provides an example to that end.

The global resilience agenda needs to be strengthened and integrated, linking efforts on international security and peacebuilding with sustainable development and climate policies

- Governments need to overcome their internal sectoral barriers that continue to feed into fragmented international approaches, e.g. by insisting vis-à-vis government counterparts, multilateral organizations as well as their own implementing agencies that climate and conflict sensitivity are part and parcel of their core work, not dispensable add-ons.
- The international community needs to support those states most affected by climate-fragility risks, e.g. by established dedicated funding windows and additional incentives for investing in those states and regions. At the same time, adaptation to climate change in fragile contexts requires sound strategies of conflict sensitivity.
- The foreign policy objectives of peace and stability need to inform domestic policies. Appropriate policy instruments which effectively curb emissions and allow an equitable and socially-just transition towards enhanced resilience and sustainability need to be implemented as globally as possible. Financing infrastructure in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement requires a reallocation of resources towards climate-friendly investments. Phasing out fossil fuel subsidies and adopting carbon pricing could provide many countries with the means to finance universal access to clean water, clean electricity, sanitation, roads and transport services, strengthening social cohesion and both the likelihood and sustainability of 'positive peace'.

Achieving greater resilience will also depend on engaging actors at the subnational level, across civil society and the private sector. Foreign policy can play a critical role in nurturing and strengthening such partnerships to improve local resilience to climate fragility risks. Given the urgency and the scale of the foreign policy challenges that are already emerging and will inevitably intensify as the world heats up, the Berlin Climate and Security Conference is a call for action to every foreign policy institution to urgently reflect on what it is doing to address one of the greatest global security and foreign policy challenges of the 21st century, and whether these actions are commensurate to the challenge.