

ESEMINAR SUMMARY

Centre for Security Governance

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CSG eSeminars assemble leading experts and practitioners to discuss global security issues and challenges in an open and interactive virtual space.

CONTEMPORARY DEBATES ON PEACEBUILDING AND STATEBUILDING: NEW CHALLENGES, SHARP DIVISIONS



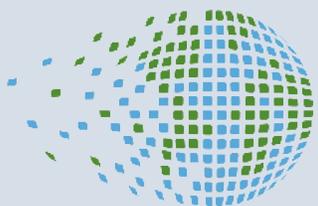
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Climate Change, the Environment and Peacebuilding

On February 26, 2016, the Centre for Security Governance (CSG), in cooperation with the Balsillie School of International Affairs (BSIA) and Wilfrid Laurier University's (WLU's) Department of Global Studies, hosted the fourth in a series of eight online seminars focusing on the theme of "Contemporary Debates on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding."

The eSeminar brought together a group of experts — scholars, researchers and practitioners — to examine issues related to the effects of climate change on global peace and security dynamics. Climate change poses a series of catastrophic threats to the planet, from rising sea levels that could swallow coastlines to the increasing prevalence of drought that could devastate agriculture and fresh water supplies. While these direct environmental challenges are clear and omnipresent, less attention is paid to the secondary effects of climate change, such as its impact on peace and security dynamics. Climate change is already emerging as a major driver of conflict and insecurity in many parts of the world, and this phenomenon will only worsen in the future as the environmental impacts of the changing climate become more pronounced.



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This presents new challenges to the global peacebuilding architecture that have yet to be fully addressed by its key stakeholders. As we enter an era that could be marked by climate-driven war and instability, it is important to explore the potential impacts of climate change on global peace and security and how the existing peacebuilding agenda can be adapted to confront them. The event considered different strategies to effectively manage and balance future environmental threats in conflict-affected and fragile states, highlighting several critical questions surrounding the issue:

- What are the potential impacts of climate-driven war and instability?
- How can the existing peacebuilding agenda adopt a climate-sensitive approach?
- What role can the security sector play in developing early warning mechanisms that identify environmental threats?
- What, if any, best practices exist in integrating climate sensitivity into peacebuilding?
- Is there a local demand for climate change interventions in peacebuilding contexts and what are the challenges of making these interventions locally owned?

About the eSeminar Series

The Centre for Security Governance eSeminars are a series of virtual meetings that bring together experts and practitioners from around the world to discuss security sector reform (SSR) and related themes, issues, and case studies. The eSeminars are open to the public, and includes an eSeminar Summary report and eSeminar Videos. For information on upcoming eSeminars, please visit <http://www.secgovcentre.org/events>.

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About the CSG

The Centre for Security Governance (CSG) is a non-profit, non-partisan think tank dedicated to the study of security and governance transitions in fragile, failed and conflict-affected states. Based in Canada, the CSG maintains a global, multi-disciplinary network of researchers, practitioners and academics engaged in the international peace and security field.

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Introduction

Dr. Mark Sedra, executive director of the CSG, moderated the eSeminar. His introductory remarks focused on three themes that emerged in the presentations of all panellists: the impacts of climate change on global peace and security, the global peacebuilding architecture and practices on the ground, and strategies to address global warming in peacebuilding contexts. The challenges surrounding the need for early warning mechanisms and environment-sensitive approaches in conflict-affected countries were addressed by the panellists using a variety of case studies and perspectives.

Anna Brach, senior program officer in the Emerging Security Challenges Programme at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), presented climate change as an existential threat multiplier that impacts both state and human security. Brach discussed six examples of existing security threats exacerbated by climate change.

Dr. Richard Matthew, founding director of the Centre for Unconventional Security Affairs, discussed the relationship between climate change and peacebuilding and the importance of building local capacity to manage the environmental risks.

Dr. Simon Dalby, CIGI Chair in the Political Economy of Climate Change at the BSIA and

WLU, centred his discussion around managing future disasters by building more innovative and resilient institutions and infrastructure that can adapt to future environmental challenges.

Summary of Presentations

Speaker 1 – Anna Brach

Anna Brach focused her presentation on climate change as a threat multiplier exacerbated by a lack of good governance and political leadership. As global warming increases, so does the risk of climate-related social unrest. Brach highlighted six existing security threats intensified by climate change: the security of maritime boundaries, natural disasters and extreme weather conditions, water security, food security, housing security and irregular migration. All of these threats are global, multidimensional and interconnected, creating new challenges and constraints for peacebuilding actors.

While recognizing that climate change is often not explicitly recognized as a direct cause of conflict, Brach highlighted a 2014 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, which concluded that “climate change can indirectly increase risks of violent conflict in the forms of civil war and intergroup violence by amplifying drivers of conflict such as poverty and economic shocks.”¹ She argued that almost all contemporary conflicts have an environmental component to varying degrees.

While recognizing the impacts of climate change on conflict, Brach argued that climate change alone does not cause conflict. It is instead a lack of good governance and poor political leadership that exacerbates environmental crises that can drive violence. Referencing an oft-cited study on the relationship between drought, population movement and the conflict in Syria, she noted that it was not the record-breaking drought itself that was responsible for triggering the Syrian uprising in 2011; rather, it was poor governance and unsustainable agricultural and environmental policies that had catalytic effects.²

Speaker 2 – Dr. Richard Matthew

Dr. Richard Matthew opened his remarks with a definition of peacebuilding from the UN Secretary-General’s Policy Committee: “peacebuilding involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development.”³ He went on to argue that climate change can trigger violent conflict through a variety of indirect ways, including disruptions to agricultural outputs, energy supplies and access to water. Building the capacities of a country to manage such risks is therefore an integral component of sustainable peace and development.

Matthew drew on the Kellet and Sparks estimate that half of the world’s population affected by natural disasters lived in conflict-affected areas as of 2012.⁴ He highlighted a 2013 report by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) that found natural disasters exacerbate pre-existing conflicts, deepen grievances, present economic opportunities for criminal activity and change the feasibility of conflict.⁵ In light of these important connections, Matthew argued that building capacity without attention to managing potential environmental stresses is irresponsible. Since peacebuilding operations have become long-term operations, he believes there is a strong argument for integrating environmental considerations into peacebuilding.

Peacebuilding planning typically includes many trade-offs, for example, cheap energy is often a crucial component of creating jobs and jump-starting the economy, and states need the capacity to understand what these trade-offs mean over the long term. However, the required expertise and data to conduct these evaluations is often missing in conflict situations. Matthew concluded that the priority must be to rebuild these capacities quickly “so all decisions made can be filtered through some lens of climate awareness.”

Speaker 3 – Dr. Simon Dalby

Dr. Simon Dalby focused on how to manage an expected increase in climate change-related disasters by building resilient institutions and

infrastructure. He argued that the design of future infrastructure must anticipate the unknown. Dalby referenced the case of Syria to highlight how an inappropriate response from the political elite to an environmental disaster — drought and the subsequent migration — fuelled the conflict. If state institutions had existed to anticipate the population displacement and implement effective responses, the Assad regime could have had the capacity to avoid crucial policy mistakes.

Our increasingly dynamic world, marked by rapid climate change, is putting strain on traditional forms and patterns of governance. Dalby argued that the Westphalian state system founded on the principle of state sovereignty is not compatible with the climate change context. The typical response to environmental disasters is for people to move, often across borders, into safety. How we deal with this mobile and fluid problem using fixed territorial jurisdictions is “at the heart of the global governance crisis.” Global governance, he argued, needs to be restructured and reformed to decrease the “vulnerabilities of people who need to move out of harm’s way.”

Dalby cautioned against simple understandings of the relationship between climate and peace. Peace, which often brings large foreign investments, can also bring environmental disaster unless investments become climate sensitive. However, “the one simple truth in this issue is that rapidly reducing carbon emis-

sions will make everything easier.” He concluded that our institutions are not ready for the speed at which the environment is changing, therefore slowing climate change is the best option to give policy makers time to plan for adaptable, environment-friendly solutions that can reduce the risk of violent conflict.

Discussion Questions and Key Themes

Following the presentations, the panellists engaged in a lively discussion on climate change, the environment and peacebuilding. Three overarching themes framed the Q&A period: impacts of climate change on global peace and security, the global peacebuilding architecture and practices on the ground, and potential strategies to address global warning in peacebuilding contexts. This section provides a summary of the main elements and takeaways from this discussion, highlighting key questions and answers from the audience and the panellists.

Theme 1 – Impacts of Climate Change on Peace and Security

We are still in the process of understanding the relationship between climate change and conflict. However, we are seeing an increase in droughts, cyclones, floods and other environmental strains caused by climate change around the world that are affecting conflict dynamics in important ways. The panellists were

asked to give specific examples where we see how a climate change-driven event helped spur conflict to provide general context for the issue.

All panellists mentioned Syria as an example where a drought caused by climate change led to migration that, in turn, acted as a conflict driver. Matthew drew on the example of the Philippines, where the 2012 and 2013 cyclones impacted rebel activity. Similarly, he highlighted how the conflicts in India and Nepal cannot be understood outside of consideration of water scarcity and agricultural pressures that are expected to worsen in the coming years.

Dalby focused on the need to consider domestic consequences of international decision making. He cited the case of Tunisia, where the state of the international food market was at least partly responsible for a national food crisis. He highlighted the conventional argument that the 2010 drought in Russia caused Russia to temporarily block the export of wheat, leading to a spike in international food prices, which triggered a food crisis in Tunisia and sparked the Arab Spring. In light of the expected increase of impacts from global warming on agricultural production, Dalby argued that the international grain trade needs to be restructured so we can anticipate shortages and preemptively find international solutions to avoid adverse outcomes such as that in Tunisia.

Brach argued that it is not necessarily these environmental pressures that spur conflict; rather, it is the government's response to them. She explained that in many countries, we see large-scale rural to urban population movements without repressive government responses. Brach argued that it is primarily the quality of leadership and internal governance capacity to address crises that will determine the susceptibility of a given country to conflict, rather than climate change as an independent variable.

Theme 2 – Global Peacebuilding Architecture and Practices on the Ground

The panellists were then asked how the global peacebuilding architecture has responded to environmental concerns and what constraints, if any, they operate under. This led to a discussion on the kinds of practices already in place, as well as the need to develop new best practices and preventative mechanisms.

Dalby highlighted poor policies that have exacerbated challenges on the ground. One broad example is the policy of “land-grabbing,” where states and large corporations purchase large tracts of land in developing countries for agricultural use. They do this out of concern that their own food security will be disrupted by climate change, often dispossessing small-scale farmers and local and indigenous communities. He also referenced drug eradication programs in rural Afghanistan following the

2001 invasion. Due to a lack of local consultation, donors wiped out a local cash crop without providing alternative crops that could yield similar financial opportunities for local farmers. The program made local populations increasingly vulnerable to disasters and conflict by causing poverty and migration instead of rebuilding local economies through the introduction of environmentally sensitive crops.

Matthew cautioned that the current peacebuilding apparatus does not have a proactive, preventative mandate to take action prior to the outbreak of conflict. However, he argued that an ideological shift is occurring that has seen policy makers beginning to discuss how to use power more effectively through preventative interventions. He argued that the most pressing challenge is developing a system that can manage the stress of the tens of millions of people expected to be displaced each year by environmental disruptions and crises. Referring to Syria, he highlighted how quickly environmental-induced displacement can trigger strong political resistance that mobilizes into a security threat on a national and global scale.

Brach asserted that there is increasing interest from private companies to address these issues and highlighted an initiative by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) that is producing an atlas of climate-induced migration.⁶ The panellists appreciated an emerging trend of building expertise to collect and utilize big data sets, so states have the capacity to

assess their own climate vulnerabilities and make informed decisions about their futures. They stressed that these initiatives are still in the experimentation phase so best practices are not yet clear. While Matthew argued “we may be on the verge of a new generation of early warning systems” that are sensitive to local contexts, Dalby questioned whether these systems will generate the political will and permanent funding to mount effective responses to warnings that emerge.

Theme 3 – Strategies to Address Global Warming in Peacebuilding Contexts

The final portion of the discussion focused on what the role of the international security sector should look like going forward in light of potential climate-induced challenges. The role of economic elites as a partner in sensitization and environment mitigation strategies was also considered.

Brach stated that while the security sector is not the actor to mitigate climate change, the security industry can play an adaptive role in supporting and influencing states addressing environmental threats. As one of the largest institutions in many countries, Brach argued that militaries can set an important example of an institution capable of going green and adopting cleaner sources of energy. Dalby concurred that militaries can be very useful in early warning systems over the next few decades if they learn how investments into technology like

solar panels can make their operations more flexible and effective. Matthew argued that the security sector is the modern institution designed to consider long-term threats, including the environment. He stated that the security sector institutions need to devise “a grand strategy for a world that is safe where the biggest threats may come from climate change.”

Matthew also highlighted that while many conflict-affected states have a demand for climate change mitigation, these resources are rarely prioritized by peacebuilding initiatives. There are many trade-offs in post-conflict contexts and the focus is usually on building a reconciliation process and jump-starting the local economy. However, an environment-sensitive approach must recognize the long-term impacts of those crucial decisions. For example, states and investors need to recognize what investing in coal-powered electricity means for the future of a country making a difficult war-to-peace transition. Infrastructure that is adaptable and flexible to fluid and volatile environmental and economic conditions is crucial for sustainable economic growth. Matthew suggested that risk analyses should be conducted in all investment decisions to identify how climate and conflict risks interact.

Building infrastructure capacity and expertise through private and public investments was identified by all panellists as a crucial component of addressing global warming. Brach argued that investing in the internal technical

capacities of conflict-affected countries is critical. Matthew expressed a word of caution concerning how we define “expertise.” He used the case of Liberia to highlight how private/public partnerships in conflict-affected countries often rely on the “expertise” of “Westerners” who lack the local knowledge to devise effective infrastructure solutions and may not always prioritize the interests of the local populations.

A common message of the panellists was that donors need to work more closely with local communities to identify risks and needs. Brach explained that at the GCSP there is growing demand from war-torn states to participate in courses and training dealing with crisis and security management. Matthew has also witnessed growing demand at the local level to learn how to deal with environmental challenges and avoid having solutions imposed by foreign donors. Empowering people on the ground is an important component of sustainable peace and development. He stressed: “we need to continually listen to these communities and improve our understanding of the challenges they face.”

Conclusion

The eSeminar highlighted some of the challenges for the security sector in adopting environmentally sensitive approaches to peacebuilding. While the panellists addressed several key dimensions, including the emerging literature connecting conflict and global warm-

ing, current practices and challenges, and strategies to more quickly respond to potential environmental- induced threats, additional research is required to further explore the connections between climate change and conflict. Starting from a variety of perspectives and case studies, the panellists shared similar views and discussed four key areas of action where investment can greatly increase the benefits of security sector responses to climate change: building expertise and utilizing big data sets to better detect and understand environmental risks; leveraging public-private partnerships to spur innovative responses; developing environmentally sensitive institutions able to quickly identify and respond to trans-boundary environmental threats; and increasing collaboration and resources to build local capacities in line with locally identified needs. Reducing the impacts of climate change on peace and security dynamics is a difficult task, especially considering the limited attention it receives. It is nonetheless an important consideration for the peacebuilders to ensure they are supporting processes and institutions that can withstand growing environmental threats.

Notes

¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2014). *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*. Available online at: www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg2/.

² C. Kelley, S. Mohtadi, M. Cane, R. Seager and Y. Kushnir (2014), "Climate change in the Fertile Crescent and implications of the recent Syrian drought". *PNAS* 2015 112 (11) 3241-3246.

³ Decision of the Secretary-General's Policy Committee, May 2007, cited in *UN Peacebuilding: An Orientation* (2010). Available online at: www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/pbso/pdf/peacebuilding_orientation.pdf.

⁴ J. Kellet and D. Sparks (2012). *Disaster and Risk Reduction: Spending where it should count*. Global Humanitarian Assistance, Somerset, UK: Development Initiatives.

⁵ K. Harris, D. Keen and T. Mitchell (2013). *When Disasters and Conflicts Collide: Improving Links between Disaster Resilience and Conflict Prevention*. London, UK: ODI.

⁶ For additional information on the IOM's work on "Migration and Climate Change" see: www.iom.int/migration-and-climate-change.

About the Presenters

Dr. Mark Sedra is the Executive Director of the Centre for Security Governance. Mark teaches in the Department of Political Science at the University of Waterloo and is a faculty member of the Balsillie School of International Affairs. Prior to joining the Centre for Security Governance, he was a senior fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) and the leader of CIGI's Security Sector Governance project.

Anna Brach joined the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) in 2006. She is Senior Programme Officer in the Emerging Security Challenges Programme. In this capacity, she is involved in developing and leading a number of training, outreach and research activities, mainly in the area of human and environmental security.

Dr. Simon Dalby is a CIGI Chair in the Political Economy of Climate Change and Professor of Geography and Environmental Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University. His published research deals with climate change, political ecology, geopolitics, global security, environmental change, militarization and the spatial dimensions of governance.

Dr. Richard Matthew is Professor of International and Environmental Politics in the Schools of Social Ecology and Social Science at the University of California at Irvine, and founding Director of the Center for Unconventional Security Affairs. He studies the environmental dimensions of conflict and peacebuilding, and climate change adaptation in conflict and post-conflict societies.

Archived video of the event is available online at:

<https://youtu.be/l-hxRNt50hY>

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