

Climate & Security Politics

2024 was the first year to cross the 1.5-degree-Celsius threshold of global warming. The same year saw large wildfires and hurricanes in the US, floods in Eastern and Central Europe, and heat waves in Africa and Asia. The practical consequences of **climate change** – and with it the initiation of irreversible processes, particularly through reaching the so-called **tipping points**, – have become central to people and governments worldwide.

Next to its impact on daily life and the world's ecosystems, among others, climate change also impacts security. Termed as “climate-security nexus”, the topic has been widely studied and picked up by international organisations such as the United Nations or the European Union. Most people examining this nexus agree that climate change is no immediate source of conflict: There will be no “climate wars”, as conflicts always have more than one reason. However, climate change indirectly interacts with conflicts and security questions in three central ways.

Firstly, climate change makes climate-related disasters or hazards such as floods (e.g. in Nepal), droughts (e.g. in the Mediterranean), or hot and cold waves more likely, which directly threatens the personal security of humans.

Secondly, climate change and its consequences act as aggravating factors for conflicts. Because of climate change impacts, there are new and more reasons for conflicts to start: Climate change exacerbates conflicts about resources such as water (e.g. in the Nile basin), energy supply (e.g. in Greenland), or agricultural land (e.g. in Darfur).

If access to resources is shared between countries, such as rivers that cross borders as does the Jordan River, conflicts might arise between these states. The impacts of climate change also can aggravate or prolong existing conflicts and intensify humanitarian crises within conflict areas, as for example in Syria. Also, because of rising sea-levels and emerging uninhabitability of areas, e.g. in Vanuatu, forced migration and displacement occur, which can result in global conflicts about land and citizenship.

Thirdly, consequences of climate change directly impact the capacities of armed and security forces of states. These include changing operational requirements in more extreme weather conditions, or, for example, military bases that might disappear in the sea due to rising sea levels.

As climate change and global warming will most likely continue, the future seems dire. However, many non-governmental organisations and other experts argue that these consequences of climate change for human security and state security are not inevitable. Rather, mitigation and adaptation to climate change as well as measures to create resilience might lessen these effects. In addition, many local communities and groups such as indigenous peoples have long taken measures against climate change impacts which the world might learn from.

Future political action, be it at the EU, the UN, or the Munich Security Conference, will need to address questions such as:

- How can collaboration and learning between states and people from the Global North and the Global South be enhanced?
- How can climate change and, with it, mitigation and adaptation measures as well as costs, be addressed in a just manner?

Important specialist terminology

Climate change describes long-term changes in the Earth's climate that are warming the atmosphere, ocean and land, mainly human-driven (UNDP).

Tipping points are thresholds after which changes caused by global warming become irreversible, even if temperatures decrease in the future, e.g. the destruction of rainforests (UNDP).

Mitigation is action taken to reduce or prevent greenhouse gas emissions or to enhance removal of these gases (UNDP).

Adaptation is action that helps reduce vulnerability to current or expected impact of climate change (UNDP).

Resilience is the capacity of a community or environment to anticipate or manage climate impacts and recover after it (UNDP).