

Confronting the correlation between environmental change and violent conflict

[Business](#)



Climate change is an issue that influences many facets of modern society.

Although in the past environmental change was associated solely with environmental concerns, disasters motivated by climate change often lead to the destruction of the political stability and human security of nations. The severity of the repercussions of climate change on the social, political, and economic stability of areas such as sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, Central and South America, and the Middle East has worsened in recent years. The effects of environmentally-driven political instability in said regions have had an overwhelming impact on the human security of populations, as evidenced by an escalation of sexually, racially, ethnically, and religiously- motivated violence. Violence in these regions tends to result from famines driven by a loss of resources such as food, water, and cattle, and an increase in the formation and propagation of radical terrorist organizations. The threat of climate change to the human security of historically vulnerable regions is projected to steadily increase if the responses to this crisis are not modified.

A key aspect of human security, which refers to the extent to which an individual is free of the fear of violence, is the political and social stability of one's country. In the equator region and the Middle-East, nations have been subject to years of constantly shifting governmental systems and social injustice. For instance, Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, and Lebanon have suffered politically in recent years due to the Arab Spring, a revolution which began in Tunisia in 2011 that set in motion the toppling of dictatorial governmental powers across the Middle-East and North Africa. Furthermore, the political instability of many countries in Latin America, such as Brazil, Venezuela and Colombia, coincides with an increase in violence in the region. As of 2015, <https://assignbuster.com/confronting-the-correlation-between-environmental-change-and-violent-conflict/>

Latin America in its entirety was declared to be the most violent region in the world- a statistic that was determined based on homicide rates and personal safety. Additionally, the climate in these areas has continued to rapidly fluctuate, with 2015 being the warmest year on record.

While political instability has been on the rise, temperatures have surged. As a result, scientists have speculated that there is a link between environmental change and a lack of human security. The idea that climate change could aggravate political instability through drought, refugee crises, and fights for dwindling resources continues to gain popularity in scientific and political communities. United States President Barack Obama discussed the subject during a speech at the Coast Guard Academy in 2015. He acknowledged, “ Climate change constitutes a serious threat to global security, an immediate risk to our national security.

Politicians who say they care about military readiness ought to care about this as well”. Additionally, the Pentagon began investigating a potential correlation between climate change and political instability in early 2015, and released a report detailing the security risks of global warming. In their report, they projected that climate change “ will aggravate problems such as poverty, social tensions, environmental degradation, ineffectual leadership, and weak political institutions that will threaten stability in a number of countries”. In their statement, the Pentagon confirmed that climate change degrades living conditions, human security, and the ability of governments to be able to provide for the basic needs of their populations. They added that communities and states that have historically experienced political,

social, and economic vulnerability are more likely to experience disruption as a result of the effects of climate change on their already scarce natural resources, which proves that agricultural disruption harms the social and political stability of nations. However, the interconnectivity of climate change and political instability is not a new phenomenon.

In 1966, the theory that climate change played a role in the decline of ancient civilizations such as the Bronze Age, a period known for the use of bronze and other signs of urban advancement, began to surface. The Journal of Archaeological Science discovered that during the final decades of the Bronze Age, there were severe droughts that shattered the economic stability of Mycenaean Greece. Furthermore, as Caroline Wazer, a writer and historian states, “ The Sea Peoples, both the refugees and the invaders, were not the cause of the Bronze Age Collapse—instead, they were a symptom of a deeper problem that the great kingdoms never attempted to fix”. Similarly, environmental change has been established as an underlying issue when it comes to the collapse of governments in modern society. The violent conflict that often results mirrors what was seen in ancient Greece thousands of years ago. There is a direct association between the weakening of agricultural production as a result of climate change and an increase in violent conflict.

The earth is projected to have an average global temperature increase of 5 degrees Celsius; the consequent rise in sea levels would lead to flooding in coastal areas and more violent storms, which would eventually have a devastating impact on the agricultural production of many countries. The

correlation between water and food scarcity, political instability, and violence was further emphasized upon by Kimberly Flowers, the director of the CSIS Global Food Security Project, in her journal titled Food Insecurity, Conflict, and Stability. She argues that "...investments in sustainable agricultural development are critical to political stability and national security". In her journal, she claims that violent conflict is often a result of water and food insufficiency, which highlights the relationship between the political instability that plagues the Middle-East and North Africa and the effects of climate change on the natural resources of vulnerable countries. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper also alluded to the idea that water scarcity in dry regions like the Middle-East due to environmental change impacts the human security of populations, as evidenced when he stated that " extreme weather, climate change, and public policies that affect food and water supplies will probably create or exacerbate humanitarian crises and instability risks". Additionally, many crises that the world is facing coincide with declining agricultural production due to environmental change.

Therefore, climate change is intimately intertwined with food insecurity and violent conflict. The Syrian civil war, which resulted from a terrible drought, is evidence of the correlation between environmental change and a lack of human security. The Fertile Crescent region in the Middle-East, which includes Syria and Iraq, has experienced intermittent droughts for many centuries. Recently, global warming has increased the probability of more severe, continuous droughts across the region. Between 2006 and 2009, there was an extreme drought in Syria, which many scientists believe was worsened by environmental changes resulting from human interference. The

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drought aided in fostering civil unrest in the country, as it forced Syrian farmers to abandon their crops and flock to cities.

The disorder heavily contributed to the Syrian civil war that continues to kill hundreds of thousands of people. The Syrian civil war and subsequent refugee crisis remain an issue: around 220, 000 people have been killed and 12. 8 million people are in critical need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria, while more than 50% of Syria’s population is displaced. Continued conflict in East Africa has been speculated to be the result of drought driven by climate change. Journalist Christian Parenti writes in his novel, *Tropic of Chaos*, which details the correlation between climate change and violence in Africa and Asia, “ The East African conflict system is a specific and evolving political economy of violence that links pastoralists, militias, organized crime, political elites, markets, and changing climatological patterns”.

Such conflict is a result of the persistent drought taking place in the Horn of Africa, which acts as the basis for the food crisis that affects roughly ten million people in countries all across East Africa, including parts of Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia. According to Marshall B. Burke, a renowned professor that specializes in food security and the environment at Stanford University, there is historical evidence of a connection between temperature and civil war in African countries, with the higher the temperature, the greater likelihood of war. He states in his journal, titled “ Warming Increases the Risk of Civil War in Africa,” that the rise in temperature suggests an approximate 54% increase in armed conflict by the year 2030, with an additional 343, 000 deaths as a result of these wars if they continue to be as

deadly. If his projection is correct, then the amount of violent conflict in countries in Africa and beyond will increase with time, eventually resulting in thousands of deaths worldwide. In many African countries, climate change is not a distant threat; it already completely alters people's lives.

The United Nations determined in 2006 that Africa was projected to be impaired by climate change since it is the world's "poorest and most badly governed continent". Since many countries in Africa are classified as developing nations, they are not equipped to handle the increase in environmental disasters that coincide with climate change, and have experienced heightened amounts of violence, civil warfare, and water and food crises. In 2009 approximately 23 million people within seven East African countries were dependent on aid agencies for meals after a decade of poor rainfall. The drought completely decimated agricultural growth in the region; people were desperate for food, water, and livestock, all of which were their main source of livelihood. As people continued to die from starvation, there was an increase in resource-related violence. One of the most-affected areas was the Turkana region in northern Kenya, which has experienced ongoing violent conflict in recent years.

There have been many consequent civil wars between heavily armed pastoralists over cattle, land, food, and water in Northeastern Kenya, which represents how agricultural instability often instigates violent conflict. The collapse of the State of Somalia in the early 1990's likely resulted from drought and famine caused by human interference. Somalia has been in a state of failure since its central government completely disintegrated in

1991. Siad Barre, military dictator and President of the Somali Democratic Republic, was overthrown by rival clans in 1991, in the midst of the brutal drought that caused the great Somali famine, which lasted from 1991 until 1992. Following the breakup of the State of Somalia, there were many unsuccessful attempts by clans to take over the government.

A subsequent two decade civil war followed, which had shattering impacts on the human security of the Somali people. The country is now known for its anarchical governmental structure, despite being in the process of building a republic. Moreover, the Somali civil war destroyed both its rural and urban economies. Currently, the country is coping with a famine that is an immediate result of severe drought. Nearly 260, 000 people died during the drought and famine in Somalia that took place from 2010 to 2012; roughly half of them were children under the age of five. The famine was worsened by violent conflict that has been taking place between rival tribes fighting for power in the region.

If not for the drought that took place in 1991 that caused the fall of the Somali government at the time, Somalia could have attained a semblance of political stability in the 1990's and have avoided the current violence between rival tribes in the country. Furthermore, the association between violent conflict, political instability, and drought in Somalia demonstrates the ways in which environmental change and political instability intersect. Environmental change acts as one of the stimuli for the rise in the formation and propagation of radical terrorist organizations in the Middle-East and Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2014, about 32, 700 people were killed in attacks

worldwide, a number that doubles the amount of fatalities in 2013. Four groups were “ responsible for most of them: Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria; Boko Haram in Nigeria; the Taliban in Afghanistan; and al-Qaida in various parts of the world”.

The rise in terrorist attacks and the formation of new terrorist organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle-East in the past few decades corresponds with the fact that terrorist organizations thrive in regions where there is governmental instability. This connection is evidenced by a report made in 2014 by the United States Department of Defense, which declared that climate change enhances threats such as terrorism, as they take issues that could potentially threaten the human security of a country, and intensifies the damage that they can cause. The report also determines that climate change acts as the foundation of governmental instability that catalyzes refugee crises, harms the infrastructure of nations, and leads to the spread of deadly diseases. The U. S.

Department of Defense states, “ These gaps in governance can create an avenue for extremist ideologies and conditions that foster terrorism,”. The report thus concluded that climate change influences the political stability of nations and therefore creates an environment in which terrorist ideals and organizations can develop. A rise in political instability fueled by environmental change in the Middle-East and sub-Saharan Africa escalates sexual violence and the oppression of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, as well as the deterioration of the social, political, and economic stability of populations. Sexual violence is often used as a systematic weapon of war in

conflict. For example, in Syria and Iraq, ISIS militants use the kidnapping and the sexual exploitation of women and girls as a means for them to gain more power and recruits. In Nigeria and Somalia, Boko Haram extremists captured hundreds of young women in order to prevent them from becoming educated.

Violent conflict resulting from climate change has devastated the ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity of nations across sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and the Middle-East. Whether it be the smashing of ancient 2000 year-old statues by the Islamic State in Iraq, or the institution of the law that anyone who converts from Islam to any other religion is to be executed in Afghanistan, radicals often destroy cultural diversity both figuratively and literally. Therefore, the human security of women, girls, and religious, racial and ethnic minorities living within the Middle-East and sub-Saharan Africa is dependent on the vulnerability of the climate in which they live, as environmental change drives social conflict. Many responses have been made by governments to end human interference in climatological cycles, however they are often insufficient. For example, leaders in African countries have started to focus on building infrastructure and sustainable development in the hopes of slowing the process of environmental change and protecting the human security of their populations.

In the United States and China, laws have been instituted that reduce carbon pollution from power plants, accelerate clean energy leadership, encourage clean energy strategies, cut energy waste, and reduce greenhouse gases such as hydrofluorocarbons and methane. Despite this, many companies find

ways to get around carbon emission laws. Furthermore, as the Earth's population continues to grow, the world's carbon footprint only increases. Additionally, according to the Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century (REN21), the "share of renewables in the overall energy mix is still under 20%". It is imperative that this changes in order to end CO2 pollution by nonrenewable energy sources and to give countries access to clean, modern renewable energy services.

Subsequently, while there have been attempts by countries to stop carbon emissions and to increase renewable energy production, guidelines are often inconsequential when it comes to companies that ignore CO2 regulation laws and countries that refuse to change their energy production to renewable resources. Consequently, climate change heavily influences the human security of populations living within environmentally and politically vulnerable regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Middle-East. The effects of global warming have a devastating impact on developing nations' political stability, which subsequently enhances the likelihood of social conflict in the region. As a result, violence escalates, which is illustrated by a rise in violent conflict in countries such as Syria and Somalia. Racial, sexual, ethnic, and religious tensions and violence in affected areas have increased as well. While governments and companies have addressed the issue of climate change, many solutions have been ineffective due to a rising population and loopholes in CO2 emission laws.

If the responses to climate change are not reformed, the temperature will continue to rise, disasters will destroy the political stability and human

security of populations, and thousands of peoples' personal safety will be at risk. However, the cycle of violence sustained by environmental change also hinders the progression of society by destroying the histories and cultures of people. Therefore, the advancement of modern civilization is dependent on the prioritization of ending human interference in climatological cycles, as violence and political instability only set society back.