A climate and resource security dialogue for the 21st Century
Thursday 22 – Friday 23 March 2012 | WP1167

Held at Lancaster House, London
Conference report

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This conference was hosted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in partnership with Wilton Park.

“The resources over which we fight in the future will not be oil, gold and diamonds: the wars of the future will be fought over water, food and land.”

President Ali Bongo Ondimba

Executive Summary

“Our ability to create problems for ourselves, as we have with carbon emissions, is matched only by our ability to create solutions.” Edward Davey

A Climate and Resource Security Dialogue for the 21st Century focused on the emerging threat climate change poses to global security and prosperity, and the national and international policies needed to address this challenge. The conference was the next contribution in the growing international debate following on from the United Nations Security Council debate in July 2011 and the Berlin conference on Climate Diplomacy in Perspective held in October 2011. The UK Foreign Ministry held this conference to reinforce and develop the messages established at the Berlin event, with the objective of establishing concrete recommendations for foreign policy makers and the international community to take forward.

Edward Davey, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, opened the conference and President Ali Bongo of Gabon gave the keynote address. Karl Hood, Foreign Minister of Grenada, Jaime de Bourbon Parme, Special Envoy, Natural Resources from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), John Ashton, UK Special Representative for Climate Change spoke. Senior officials from the German, Dutch and French MFAs also spoke alongside senior representatives from the Pentagon and Centre for Naval Analysis in the US, NATO, the EU Military, the UN, and retired military officers from Australia, India, and Bangladesh.

Participants included diplomats, military staff, Members of Parliament, Non-government organisations and academics from a range of institutions and countries including the United Nations (UN), European External Action Service (EEAS), Mexico, Japan, Korea, Kenya, Tanzania, Angola and New Zealand.

As the conference highlighted, the world is witnessing the impacts of climate change, particularly in already stressed parts of the world such as Africa and Asia; climate change is a threat now, not just a “far-off” problem for future generations. Existing and predicted climate problems are set to be exacerbated by the challenge of population growth, urbanisation and migration.

Climate and resource security is recognised as a new non-traditional threat which lacks an institutional home; there is thus a need to establish a new model for tackling this threat. The international community, institutions, governments and organisations at all levels need to develop a collective approach and shared narrative to tackle the food – water – energy
nexus, integrating public, private and non-governmental institutions. Climate security should be treated by governments as an issue of sustainable development, including fairness, development and solidarity.

The climate change threat requires a solution involving the whole of society, not just governments, thus creating the need for a “new diplomacy”. There are calls to restructure existing institutions and imbue them with the resilience and the capacity to tackle the climate threat at the national and regional level. This will necessitate dialogue between new networks of actors based on common understanding and shared knowledge.

This new diplomacy must be freed from bureaucracy in order to create a new political space to move the debate forward. Such new diplomacy should include a broader base of participants and stakeholders, including governments, business, social entrepreneurs, NGO’s, knowledge institutions and internet based groups. There is also a need for greater interaction between stakeholders to create and share best practices.

Regional co-operation is key and thus regional bodies must be encouraged to work together more readily on the threats posed by climate change. Regional institutions can build the trust and credibility needed to form coordinated responses and often with less political conflict than at the UN level.

Military communities in a number of countries are assessing the issue as a strategic threat, calling on governments to make long-term plans to tackle it. This involves “securitisation” of the issue, but not “militarisation”. Climate security does not have a military solution. The military can play a role in providing humanitarian support, disaster relief, resilience building and enabling communities to adapt and help themselves. The military can also act as role models for sustainable practices and provide technical and strategic support to vulnerable communities through data sharing, developing a threats knowledge base, building early warning and assessment systems, and in reconstruction and development.

The responses to climate change and resulting security threats need to come through policy action, behavioural change and an end to the ‘business as usual’ cycle. It requires a collaborative and comprehensive effort across diplomacy, development and defence agencies at all levels. This demands leadership and advocacy.

At the international level there were calls for greater leadership from the United Nations Security Council and for a climate and resource security envoy to be appointed by the UN Secretary General.

In summary, participants stressed the need for:

- a new international framework and model for tackling the non-traditional threat of climate and resource security;
- new institutional frameworks to collectively address the climate - food – water - energy stress nexus in a timely and pragmatic manner;
- integrated and comprehensive approaches to tackle the problems (defence, diplomacy and development working together);
- a dialogue involving new networks of actors, beyond traditional diplomacy, integrating the public and private sectors and NGOs and using new mediums for debate;
- greater public awareness and understanding of climate security impacts through effective advocacy and champions to raise awareness around the world;
- increased sharing of technical analysis and data, building consensus on the impacts of and responses to climate change.

The global challenge – a perspective from Gabon

1. President Ali Bongo, speaking on the record, noted that climate change is a security threat that Africans have had to deal with all their lives, and yet is a particular challenge to Africa in the 21st Century given the confluence of rapid economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability. He recognized that analyzing climate
change will change from primarily one of impact on sustainable development to the "proliferation of armed conflict that has the potential to impact all of us, not just those living in countries directly affected. Whether it is the cost, both financial and political, of increased military engagement in African conflicts, or the direct threat of increased Western focused African terrorism". He noted the Africa Progress Panel predicted in 2009 that in the future: “climate change currently affecting Africa will cause armed conflicts in 23 countries and political unrest in another 13”. He highlighted The Sahel - the growing threat of extremist terrorism against the backdrop of droughts, failing crops as the Sahara advances and Lake Chad recedes. This could lead to a mass movement of environmental refugees, leading to the destabilization of countries further south such as Gabon. He feared this would lead to wars over access to scarce resources.

2. He called for increased preventative diplomacy with greater efforts to reduce climate change and conserve the natural environment, while not limiting economic opportunities. He noted that this challenge requires new models of doing business and called on others to consider the shock of climate change as a wake-up call and opportunity to develop a new model of development and international cooperation.

3. He outlined Gabon’s National Climate Change Action Plan and the new Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, highlighting the need to build strong institutions, promote good political, economic and environmental governance and achieve sustainable growth.

The current situation

4. It is estimated that there have been 350,000 climate related deaths, $100 million in economic losses, and considerable soil degradation to date. If no action is taken to reduce the impact of climate change figures will rise to 1,000,000 climate related deaths, $3 billion in losses, and a 10 fold increase in degradation.

Food

5. There is currently great volatility in world food prices. During the recent world economic contraction commodity prices fell and it is becoming increasingly difficult to predict what is likely to happen in the next 20 years. The economic contraction did, however, stop the ‘business as usual’ cycle and demonstrated the potential to scale down emissions and "live more within our means". The more modest levels of consumption, lower prices and decreased emissions were an example of what is needed. Recognising the costs and implementing the lessons learned for a future model that results in a more sustainable management of global economic resources, was one of the unintended consequences of the crisis.

6. Developing countries are faced with the difficult balancing act of achieving the Millennium Development Goals with sustainable development goals; developed countries have a responsibility to employ equal effort in confronting the climate change challenge it is argued. It was noted that "we share the burdens and the opportunities"; climate change is a global issue requiring a global response.

7. Africa contains many of the world's most vulnerable societies. Achievements in development and economic growth could be reversed as a result of climate change. The recent famine in the Horn of Africa has shown the importance of increasing resilience and implementing adaptation strategies in vulnerable communities.

Water

8. Water use is growing twice as quickly as the global population. In fifteen years’ time it is estimated that 1.8 billion people will live in areas suffering from absolute water scarcity. With the rise of water use populations are becoming increasingly dependent on desalination processes, themselves using substantial energy.

9. There is potential for civil unrest and wars between states over securing water, for example in the Nile basin. Already there is tension between Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan over the building of dams upstream. Similar tensions exist over the
Tibetan plateau which feeds 12 rivers, involving 12 countries which are home to 60 per cent of the world’s population. Delegates also noted the opportunities for cooperation and agreement over water sharing. Diplomats and others are urged to look at these tactical issues when attempting to negotiate collective responses to water scarcity.

10. The conference discussed the role of water in energy production, noting the likely increased demand for water for extraction of new fuels such as shale gas and biofuels. Water is a vital ingredient in energy production and power generation; the production of new fuels such as shale gas and shale oil and biofuels and traditional fuels such as the extraction of coal or oil all use significant amounts of water whilst the production of gas and renewables generally use less water. In developing new energy sources such as shale gas water assessments are critical. The continued development of nuclear power stations cooled by sea water was suggested. Some delegates also noted the need for large emitters to reform their energy policies working with industry to achieve this.

Climate change and security

The view from the military

11. Speakers from the military community stressed how national and international military institutions will be affected by climate change. For example, the Pentagon’s Quadrennial Defence Review report concludes that climate change will shape the US military’s ‘operating environment, roles and missions’. Military experts felt there was a need for greater cross-border co-operation, and global and regional institutions need to be getting smarter and more resilient as the current institutional response is uncoordinated.

12. Why do the military have an interest in tackling global climate change? Participants stressed that there were no calls to militarise the climate change issue. But the security implications of the climate change impacts mean that the military will inevitably be involved, for example in securing and maintaining accessibility to sea lanes, communications and trade routes. It was suggested that the military should also act as a role model for reducing emissions whilst maintaining capacity; the US military, for example, are already making extensive use of solar power in the field.

13. The military is expected to become increasingly focused on the prevention of climate related disasters, providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in response and assisting in the longer-term recovery. Supporting prevention efforts can include developing a threats knowledge base, building and optimising early warning and assessment systems and enhancing resilience of communities at risk. The responsive action can involve humanitarian aid, mitigating effects and taking early action. The recovery phase meanwhile includes supporting reconstruction efforts, development and disaster relief. There is scope for joint planning between national responders and those communities affected, to increase resilience and adaptability.

14. National military forces can also play an important role on the ground as information gatherers and confidence builders in local communities. Removing them from this role could desensitise the military to the human effects of climate change.

15. The international military has increasing experience in ‘disaster diplomacy’, for example the US cooperated and provided support to Indonesia in the aftermath of the 2004 Tsunami. The joint recovery effort helped to build a long term relationship. There is further potential for Military to Military bilateral contact and coordination, sharing information and best practices.

16. Panellists expressed concern that many Governments focus primarily on more traditional and immediate threats, rather than investing in the future. As one delegate said, “don’t eat your seed corn!”
Developing alternative models of diplomacy?

17. There is no blueprint or “one size fits all” solution to climate change or the security impacts it is likely to create. It was noted, however, that “the decisions that will shape the decades to come are being taken now…”

18. There were calls for a new form of diplomacy to tackle climate change and its impacts, creating a new political space freed from bureaucracy which could move the debate forward based on common ground and avoiding traditional power dynamics. Such new diplomacy should consist of a broader base of participants and stakeholders, including governments, business, social entrepreneurs, NGO’s, knowledge institutions and internet based groups. New ideas can be developed using different platforms, networks and social movements than traditional diplomatic mechanisms. Involving these actors would break down institutional barriers and help to share best practice and develop an integrated and comprehensive framework for action, based on common understanding and a shared narrative.

19. At the international level it was recognised that there is no single institutional home which can respond to the impact of climate change. There was a strong feeling that existing institutions need to be restructured rather than creating new ones. There is a need for a more coordinated UN response; the Secretary General’s office at the UN allows for some horizontal coordination, but greater collaboration between agencies is critical to ensure a coordinated international response. Questions need to be addressed such as which agency has the mandate to enforce? How can we ensure policy and funding for long term strategies and support the greatest need? How can international institutions support regional and national institutions?

20. It was suggested that climate security issues should be included on the UN Security Council (UNSC) agenda and it was recommended that the UN Secretary General speak on climate security issues. The establishment of a Special Representative on Climate and Security was also suggested, for instance through a resolution of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted by a majority of Member States or appointed by the Secretary General (UNSG) with the full support of member states. The mandate of the Special Representative would be to advocate and assess the implications of climate and security in developing nations.

21. It was also recommended that a High Level Panel or Council for Sustainable Development be created to sit above UN agencies and ensures all inter-agency action adheres to sustainable development criteria.

22. Other international organisations can also play a role in responding to the threats and challenges posed by climate change; the World Trade Organisation (WTO) with regard to supply chains and trade routes, for instance, if the Arctic opens up. The management of resource competition and land-grabbing may also fall under their auspices.

23. Regional co-operation is critical and regional bodies are encouraged to focus on the threats posed by climate change. Each region has a unique set of circumstances: climatic; environmental; demographic; economic; social; political and geographical. Regional institutions can build the trust and credibility needed to form coordinated responses, often with less political conflict than at the UN level. The UN should enable and enhance regional work including collaboration between them both.

24. Greater coordination is also needed between international, regional and national institutions. International and regional institutions should provide solutions to encourage trust and cooperation rather than seeking to penalise.
25. The panel discussed the degree to which the climate change and security debate can be depoliticised at the international level. However, some argued this would risk presenting the issue as purely technical. The international community should, however, target the main issue of reducing CO2 emissions with appropriate solutions, not least through sustainable development, mitigation and adaptation.

26. The near-term challenges need to be highlighted with specific threats identified. Developing a cohesive way to visualise the threats would be beneficial. Investment is then needed in reducing the impact of climate change. For example, building long term capacity in preventative and resilience measures. One suggestion was the development of a comprehensive global early warning mechanism. The profile of the Platform for the Promotion of Early Warning (PPEW – UNISDR) could be raised and the creation and use of early warning mechanisms in developing countries enhanced. This can be encouraged and developed with the expertise of international institutions sharing knowledge and technical expertise with regional institutions and national agencies.

27. Alternative models could be developed such as the establishment of a National Resource Policy, river regimes and peace parks for example.

**Getting the message across**

28. The conference asked: Who are the climate security champions? Where are the models? There is a call for leaders who can develop a shared narrative linking long-term issues to near-term challenges, encouraging action on climate change now rather than as a threat many consider to be far into the future.

29. There is also a need to improve the dialogue by explaining the urgency to the public and mainstreaming climate change and its security implications into public discourse. The media play an important role in this, not least by presenting the complex causal relationship in a more understandable way to the general public, linking climate change with food, water, energy and conflict. It was recommended that grass roots activism be “ignited” to raise broader public awareness. It was suggested that viral videos, such as that created on ‘Kony 2012’, be made to advocate climate action.

30. Civil society and NGOs can also help get the message across to the public. Raising the public profile of climate change and security will increase pressure on governments and leaders to take a stand.

**Policy responses**

**Concrete recommendations for policy action**

31. The conference identified possible national, regional and international policy frameworks and practical recommendations for addressing this 21st century challenge.

**National strategies**

32. Questions aimed at developing national strategies include how to ensure climate considerations are embedded in cross-government policies and how governments should mainstream climate and resource security issues into their national security strategy planning. Delegates identified a need for:

i. **Leadership and high level political will** to ensure climate security becomes a cross-government issue. Leadership is also needed to ensure climate security becomes a core security issue; security policies place climate change in the centre of strategic policy debate.

ii. **National platforms for dialogue involving a whole of society approach** to advocate and raise awareness of the climate and resource security linkages; the dialogue should include the private sector, NGOs and civil society, with a goal of common understanding of what responses are needed.

iii. **Strategic policy guidance** which can be provided through white papers or
action plans to be shared across government departments as a means of maintaining cohesion and an integrated approach. This must include follow-up assessments that go beyond traditional thinking.

iv. **Climate national security assessments** settling out the threats/risks knowledge base which feed into a vulnerability assessment. Such assessments would use a wider knowledge base than usual and establish how risks are perceived and foster common understanding.

**Regional approaches**

33. Regional approaches can be developed by answering questions such as: how countries can share experiences and expertise regionally; how to link national responses within regional security cooperation frameworks; and how to improve cooperation and collaboration through regional fora to ensure coordinated and effective regional responses. Suggestions included:

i. **Strengthening existing regional fora, recognising where there are institutional weaknesses.** Develop greater regional capacity to mediate and facilitate regional solutions. Provide regional assessments and data on opportunity and threat mapping; looking at migration, water, conflict flashpoints for example.

ii. **The initial depoliticisation of the issue in order to lay a foundation of trust.** It is important to build this trust based on evidence and there is a need to define boundaries to the problem, both geophysical and political. These issues should transcend politics. Non-political actors including those in affected communities need to be a part of the dialogue; solutions and good practice should be shared from different countries in the region and beyond.

**International frameworks**

34. What should international institutions do next? Recommendations included:

i. The United Nations should take on a leadership role, giving a higher and more visible priority to climate change as a security issue, within the: UNSC, UNGA, UNSG and Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD).

ii. The UN should establish a **Special Representative on Climate and Security**, the mandate of the Special Representative would be to advocate and assess the implications of climate and security in developing nations.

iii. **International Organisations** should emphasise technical support to regional, national and local actors, for example providing: monitoring and risk assessment at local, national and regional levels; technical help (on infrastructure), data sharing, institutional strengthening, capacity building, conflict mediation, facilitation and arbitration.

iv. **Greater Leadership** is needed from Heads of Government to provide policy impetus to action on the issue.

v. Governments should consider this as a **Sustainable Development issue**; encouraging the transformation of economies and developing a multidisciplinary platform to support this.

vi. The **role of Foreign Ministries** should be to improve the links between security and development.

vii. **Strategic horizon scanning** by international organisations is required to coordinate long term analysis of the threat and propose action.

**Conclusion**

These policy recommendations and the conference itself are intended to be a first step in mainstreaming the climate change and security issue into cross government discourse and policy, while further encouraging coordination, leadership and advocacy at the national, regional and international level.

It was noted that climate and resource security is an issue which is so expansive that its
impacts belong to various agencies and institutions, making coordination difficult. It is therefore important for governments and organisations to continue the global dialogue on climate security, ensuring it has a home in existing institutions, organisations, departments and boardrooms, and that new frameworks are developed. The aim should be to foster an environment where a commitment to these policy recommendations is not only encouraged but desired by all actors.

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Wilton Park | May 2012

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