

Climate Change – The Evolution of the Security Perspective



Dr Tobias Feakin, Director National Security & Resilience

Sustainable Development & Climate Change

New Delhi, September 24-25, 2009

Outline of talk

- Academic origins
- Political impetus behind the debate
- Key security impacts of climate change
- Responding to climate-driven instability
- Implications for defence
- Conclusions

Academic origins

- 1970s - Richard Falk (1971) – Highlighted the interrelated nature of nations coping with environmental degradation, and the limited amount of time to deal with serious environmental issues.
- 1980s – *International Security and Foreign Affairs* – Both carry articles exploring the effects of environmental stresses upon security agendas.
- 1990s – End of Cold War Optimism – Robert Kaplan (1994) – ‘It is time to understand ‘the environment’ for what it is: the national-security issue of the 21st Century’.
- The ‘Toronto Group’ and ‘Zurich Group’.
- 2000s – The widespread acceptance of the climate change agenda

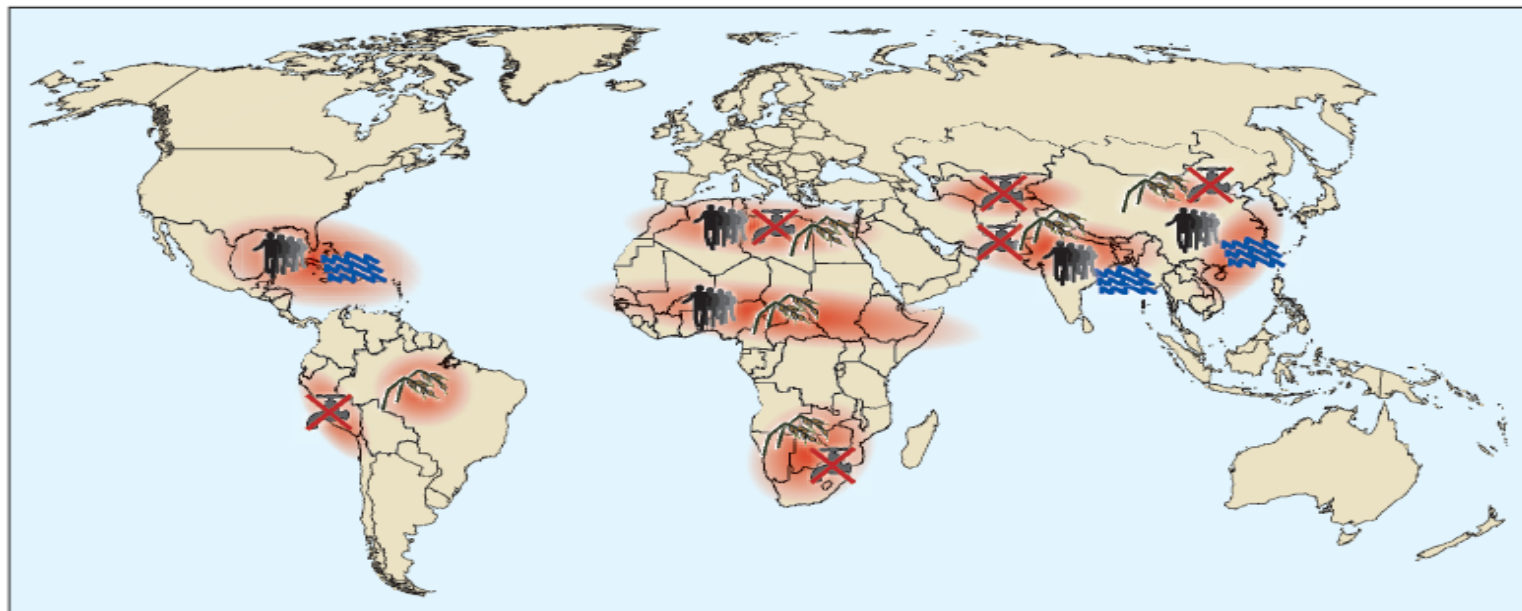
Political impetus behind the security debate

“This [climate change] is a matter of urgency and of national security and it has to be dealt with in a serious way (Obama, 2009)”

- April 2007 – UN ‘Thematic’ Debate on the security impacts of climate change.
- April 2007 – CNA Corporation Report
- April 2008 – RUSI Report – ‘Delivering Climate Security’
- June 2008 – US National Intelligence Assessment
- 2009 – IDSA Report – ‘Security Implications of Climate Change for India’



The key security impacts of climate change



Conflict constellations in selected hotspots



Climate-induced degradation of freshwater resources



Climate-induced decline in food production



Hotspot



Climate-induced increase in storm and flood disasters



Environmentally-induced migration

Food security

“A hungry man is an angry man (Barton, 2008)”

- Increased temperature rises means fertile regions of the world become infertile and useless.

- Examples:

- Mexico City 2007
- Haiti – 2008
- Somalia – 2008
- Egypt – 2008
- Cameroon - 2008



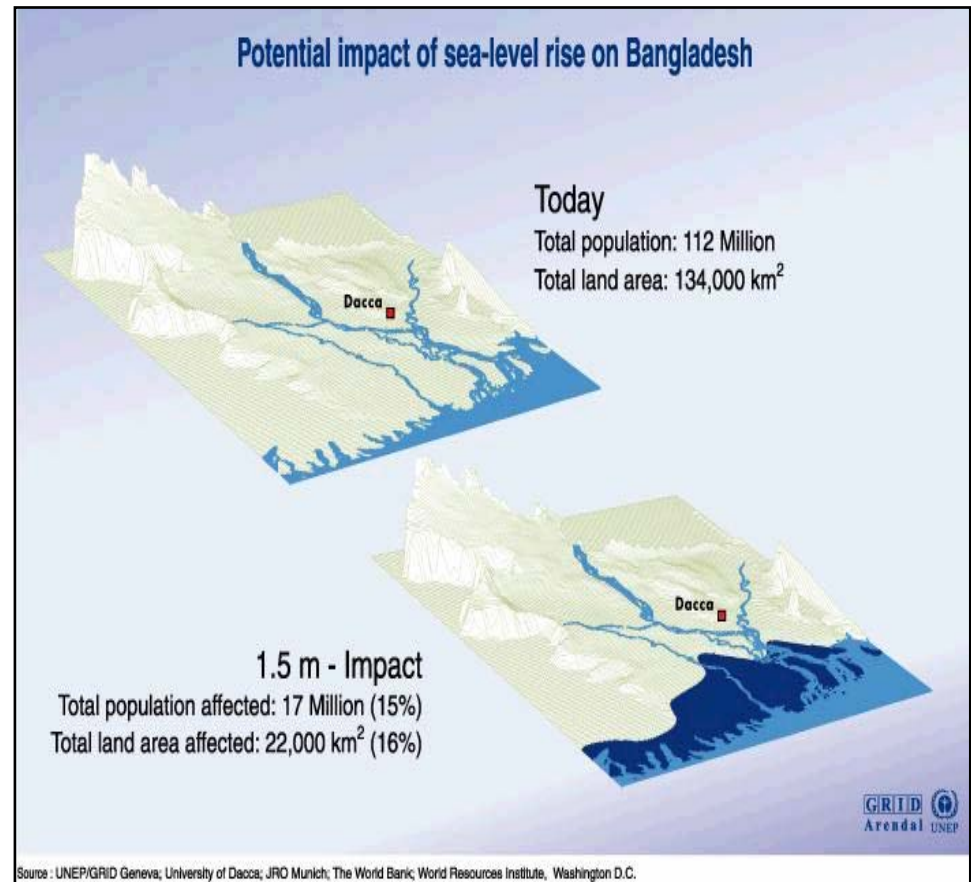
Mass migration

- The potential movement of millions of people from areas of scarce food and resource supply to regions of accessible resources .
- Places strain upon social cohesion.
- Belize – Migration shifts due to flooding.



Mass migration

- Bangladesh – 1.5 metre rise in sea level = 16% of land mass being flooded.
- Movement of displaced population across the borders.



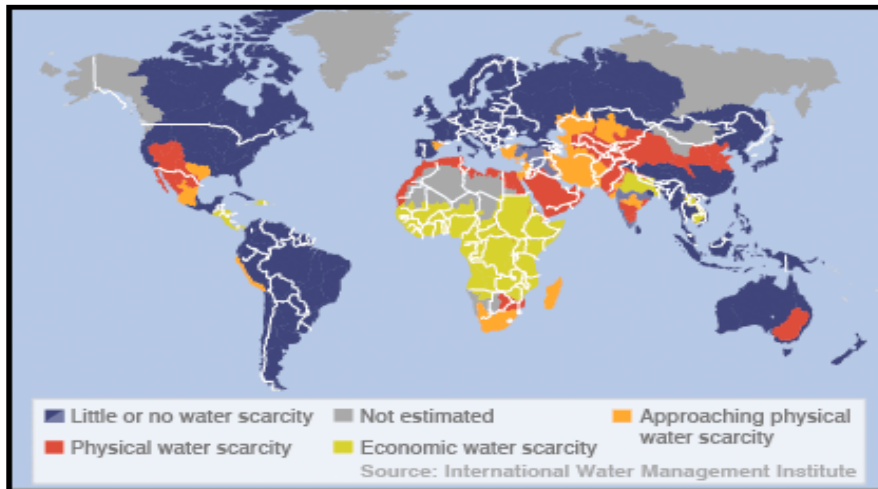
Mass migration

- Guatemala – lack of Government control in Petén. Increasing control of region by organised crime gangs.
- Movement of displaced population across borders
- Migrants not provided for in international law



Water security

“Water is linked to the crises of climate change, energy and food supplies and prices, and troubled financial markets. Unless their links with water are addressed and water crises around the world are resolved, these other crises may intensify and local water crises may worsen, converging into a global water crisis and leading to political insecurity and conflict at various levels (United Nations, 2009).”



Responding to climate driven threats

- Networked/Comprehensive responses across various policy areas
- Research and decision support – Generating information that can be used to make decisions.
- Urgency of acting despite uncertainties – Use of ‘No-Regrets’ or ‘Low-Regrets’ policy measures.

Implications for Defence

- Changes in the types of missions faced by military
- Defence adaptation – Equipment changes
- Engagement in mitigation discussion – Acknowledge ‘worst-case’ scenarios.



Conclusions

- The international response to climate security threats so far has been **'slow and inadequate'** and nations need to integrate climate change into their security policy to prepare for worst case scenarios.
- A failure to acknowledge climate change security threats is **as dangerous as neglecting the risks of terrorism or nuclear weapons proliferation.**
- The need for **'dramatically increased investment'** – in line with counter-terrorism spending.
- Call for intelligence agencies and the military to **'not just prepare to respond to the security challenges of climate change; they must also be part of the solution'**.

