



# THE WORLD CLIMATE AND SECURITY REPORT 2021

A Product of the Expert Group of the  
INTERNATIONAL MILITARY COUNCIL ON CLIMATE AND SECURITY

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The International Military Council on Climate and Security (IMCCS) is a group of senior military leaders, security experts, and security institutions across the globe dedicated to anticipating, analyzing, and addressing the security risks of a changing climate.

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The IMCCS Expert Group consists of IMCCS leaders committed to driving analysis, policy and communications on climate and security, including through the development, publication and endorsement of the World Climate and Security Report, as well as other timely analysis driven by demand signals from the IMCCS. The IMCCS Expert Group currently consists of representatives from four institutions:

- The Center for Climate and Security (CCS), an institute of the Council on Strategic Risks (CSR)
- The Planetary Security Initiative at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations (Clingendael)
- *The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS)*
- The French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS)

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# KEY RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The key risks and opportunities identified in this section are drawn from the full report, and represent an overview of the document's main conclusions and recommendations. On the risk side, the report finds that the world is facing "significant or higher security risks under current circumstances" - importantly, across all regions of the world. On the opportunity side, the report's authors present a "path forward for security cooperation on climate change" that includes moving decisively from acknowledging climate security risks in concepts, plans and strategies to implementing measures to concretely address those risks.

## KEY RISKS: Significant or Higher Risks to Security Under Current Circumstances

- 1** The convergence of climate change and other risks creates compound security threats for states and societies. As the COVID-19 pandemic has so starkly demonstrated, many countries are unprepared to manage multiple crises simultaneously. For example, the confluence of COVID-19 lockdowns, subsequent economic shocks, and climate change-related droughts and flooding increased food insecurity globally, risking greater instability and conflict in many parts of the world.
- 2** Climate security risks will continue to intensify across all regions, with new disasters hitting before societies can recover from or adapt to the impact of previous ones. Fragile regions of the world will continue to face the most severe and catastrophic security consequences of climate change, yet no region is immune, as demonstrated - for example - by the unprecedented wildfires in the United States and Australia in 2020.
- 3** Militaries will be increasingly overstretched as climate change intensifies. As the pace and intensity of extreme weather events increases, countries are increasing their reliance on military forces as first responders. While direct climate change effects regularly threaten military infrastructure and threaten to reduce readiness, the most pressing security threats will come from climate change-induced disruptions to social systems.
- 4** Proposed climate security adaptation and resilience solutions that do not account for local dynamics or integrate perspectives from local communities risk inadvertently contributing to other security risks.
- 5** The global governance system is ill-equipped to deal with the security risks posed by climate change. In some cases international law is modeled on outdated understandings of climate change impacts and therefore mismatched to future challenges, while in other cases, international law or norms to manage certain climate security risks do not yet exist.

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES: A Path Forward for Security Cooperation on Climate Change

- 1** The world must take advantage of the return of the United States to the international stage on climate issues. The Biden Administration's stated commitment to climate change as a national security priority will present a range of opportunities for allies and partners to advance international cooperation on climate security issues, including at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change COP26.
- 2** Increased EU and NATO leadership on climate security issues can set an example for defense and security forces around the world. Given Europe's bold decarbonization commitments, its security services are well placed to lead on climate security risks and resilience. The implementation of the EU Climate Change and Defense Road Map in 2021 is one opportunity for militaries in Europe to better integrate climate change into their planning, including the development of foresight tools and early warning systems.
- 3** Climate-proofing development for fragile or brittle states should be a priority for conflict prevention. Assistance should be aimed at climate resilience challenges such as water security, food security, and disaster preparedness, as well as 'green recovery' mechanisms that encourage investments in renewable energy and adaptive capacities.
- 4** The international community should embrace predictive modeling and climate risk assessment methodologies to better prepare for and prevent climate security risks. These types of assessments should be integrated into militaries' regional security plans and force readiness assessments.
- 5** Security institutions around the globe should act as leading voices urging significantly reduced greenhouse gas emissions, given recent warnings about the catastrophic security implications of climate change under plausible climate scenarios.
- 6** States and international actors must take urgent action to update and develop international law and mechanisms to include environmental and climate security impacts. In particular, multilateral negotiations to establish currently non-existent international mechanisms to govern climate intervention science, commonly referred to as "geoengineering," should be pursued urgently in multilateral fora.