Emily Gerlach

FURSCA 2021 - End of Summer Report

This past summer I had the opportunity to research the relationship between climate change and conflict. More specifically, I wanted to examine the following question: how does climate change affect the likelihood of armed conflict in developing nations? As an International Studies major with a focus on transnational environmental issues and an Environmental Biology minor, I wanted to explore the ways in which environmental factors interact with social, political, and economic factors within and among nations. The adverse effects of climate change--which include both increased flooding and increased drought, unpredictable and more intense weather patterns, temperature rise, and sea level rise--impact all countries across the globe. Developing nations, however, tend to be the most vulnerable to these effects due to political instability, lack of adequate infrastructure, reliance on agricultural production, and more.

At the start of this research project, I hypothesized that climate change acts as a threat multiplier in developing nations, exacerbating existing tensions that could ultimately lead to armed conflict, particularly *intra*state conflict. Since this field of research is relatively new, spanning only the past couple decades, I spent the summer conducting a thorough literature review to understand what research has been done so far, and where gaps in our understanding of the relationship between climate change and conflict still remain. Ultimately, I hoped to spend time investigating one or two specific case studies and linking my findings back to policy needs on both national and international scales.

At the conclusion of my ten-week research period, I achieved my primary goal of surveying the existing literature, compiling approximately fifty sources in an annotated bibliography. Although I did not dig deeply into the circumstances of any one case study, I was able to acquaint myself with and analyze a broad range of case studies, mainly spanning the Middle East and Africa, but including cases from Southeast Asia, Europe and Latin America. Conflict as defined by these studies ranges from local, non-state conflict to intrastate conflict, or civil war, to, occasionally, interstate conflict. Intrastate conflict is the most common type of conflict assessed, however, and will likely remain at the center of my focus.

Based on the sources I compiled, I have established that, although skepticism about the links between climate change and conflict remain, most scholars and policymakers agree that climate change acts, to varying degrees, as a threat multiplier. Global powers such as the United States, as well as international organizations like the United Nations, are already incorporating climate change in their discussions and policies regarding security. This caused me to undergo a major perspective shift. Although I had planned to focus on developing countries only over the course of my research, I discovered that the climate-conflict nexus is just as relevant for developed countries. Developed countries may have more tools to weather the consequences of climate change, but this does not remove them from the picture. The U.S., for example, has rising concerns about the security of their military bases in different parts of the world. Additionally, the U.S. and other global powers such as China, Russia, and Canada are all eyeing the Svalbard archipelago of Norway from a military and economic standpoint as Arctic sea ice retreats. Now, the question is not *if* climate change plays a role in conflict, but *how*. Furthermore, although policies regarding climate change and national security exist, they are still underdeveloped.

I plan to expand on this project during the upcoming academic year, my final year at Albion College, by filling in the gaps surrounding current policy, both at the national and international levels. I will perform a statistical analysis on a chosen case study to examine the effects of climate change on social, political, and economic factors in that region. Then, I will analyze policy at the national level for my case study and compare that policy with international policy, and how the two can work in tandem to help populations effectively adapt to the adverse effects of climate change. The research completed this summer and throughout the school year will become my Honors thesis, and I plan to present my findings at the Elkin R. Isaac Student Research Symposium in the spring. This was my first experience working on a long term research project outside of a structured class, and I could not have asked for a better gateway into academic scholarship. I hope that the research I accomplished this summer and beyond will direct my research in graduate school and set me up for success in my future career.

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