

Finland: Views on the Possible Security Implications of Climate Change

Security Aspects of Climate Change

In a globalising world, the UN agenda is crowded with new cross-border threats such as climate change, international terrorism, organised crime, infectious diseases, energy and food security as well as uncontrolled migratory flows.

The rate and intensity of climate change has proved difficult to forecast. Whereas some changes are immediate, others occur in the medium or even extremely long term. While the problem is global, its local effects vary a great deal.

Climate change may significantly compound the consequences of natural disasters and conflicts as well as the global redistribution of resources. It also impacts food production and access to freshwater resources. It may also spread diseases to areas in which they were hitherto unknown. The environmental effects of climate change are closely associated with poverty and may seriously harm especially the states that are already fragile.

Due to extreme and unpredictable weather conditions, e.g. drought and floods, as well as sea level rise, climate change may cause mass migrations and extensive immigration in the long term. This would result in increased instability in already volatile border regions and large changes in the ethnic makeup, more unequal population distributions among states as well as humanitarian crises. Environmental and natural resource issues may also spawn conflicts that could contain military dimensions. If one nation were to contaminate the area of its neighbour, cross-border pollution could create tensions between states. Water rights in border areas could also become a point of contention. This could cause increased migration flows e.g. from North Africa to Europe.

Finland's security environment

By definition, global questions such as climate change, scarcity of energy and water resources and population movements do not constitute security threats per se to Finland. If left unsolved, they could cause widespread destruction or destabilise societies and escalate into violent conflicts, thereby indirectly impacting the Finnish security environment.

Finland combats global warming and actively participates in solving climate change and energy-related issues both within the European Union as well as in global fora. Finland regards it as important that security questions related to the environment and climate change be addressed in the UN as well as in other relevant security fora. Finland supports a comprehensive approach in dealing with environmental and climate-related security factors under the auspices of the UN system. This requires reforming the UN system and strengthening the co-operation within it.

Finland promotes multilateral cooperation in combating threats related to the environment and climate change. The most important topics include the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as well as the ongoing negotiations on a comprehensive climate change convention for the post-2012 climate regime. Finland actively strives for the climate pact.

Arctic regions

Climate change may spur a race for energy rights and other natural resources in the Arctic region. On the one hand, climate change improves access to oil and gas reserves as the receding sea ice opens up transport corridors in Arctic regions. On the other hand, it also increases the likelihood of disputes over rights to these resources. This may also have security policy and military implications.

The importance of energy resources in the Arctic is growing. It is estimated that the Arctic regions contain 13% of previously untapped oil reserves and 30% of undiscovered natural gas reserves. The

race for the area's energy resources is intensifying. There are also many unresolved international legal questions which relate to the utilisation of natural resources in the sea bed.

Determined Cooperation Needed

Climate change and the financial crisis that shakes the very foundations of the global economy show how vulnerable nation-states are on their own. Globalisation increases interdependence between states and cross-border problems cannot be solved without cooperation. The common global security agenda includes the reduction of poverty, climate policy, food crises, crisis management and prevention of the proliferation of WMDs as well as counterterrorism.

Without determined action global warming with greater pace is inevitable. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has estimated that the climate should not warm up more than two degrees centigrade compared to the pre-industrial era levels so as not to put the earth's ecosystems and mankind at risk. To prevent this from happening the growth of global greenhouse gas emissions should be halted within the next 10–15 years and emissions cut by well over half by 2050.

Climate change exacerbates extreme meteorological and oceanic phenomena. The threats as well as adjustments to the changes of climate change shall be taken into account in land use planning and other activities related to zoning as well as in training, and rescue service procurements.

Regarding crisis management, Finland supports the inclusion of questions related to climate and the environment in crisis prevention and resolution as well as in post-conflict management. Finland also supports the adaptation of the poorest and most vulnerable countries to the consequences of climate change.

Climate Change as a Gender Issue

The Finnish National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 was adopted in September 2008. The overall objective is to reaffirm women's role and power in the prevention of conflicts, crisis management, peace-building and in stabilization of society in post-conflict situations. The goals of the Action Plan are promoted at the national, international, and at the local level, inter alia, by engaging in crisis management activities, participating in development co-operation, providing humanitarian assistance and technical training, as well as through diplomacy. Gender and climate change is named as one of the core themes in the Finnish National Action Plan.

Climate change raises serious questions of climate justice and equity, especially in the developing countries. As noted above, the linkages between climate change issues and security are numerous. In order to achieve success and meet the rising challenges, gender sensitiveness is required. It is central to comprehend the different consequence climate change has to the lives of women and men, girls and boys. The worst impacts of climate change will be on the poorest regions and people, who have the fewest resources to tackle increasing droughts, floods or storms. Of these people the majority are women. It is the women and girls who are mainly responsible for collecting firewood, cooking, cultivation and agriculture in general, food security and water management. All these issues are tightly interlinked to climate change.

It is imperative to see the women not only as victims, but as powerful agents of change. Measures to mitigate climate change (e.g. through sustainable household energy or planting trees) can be easily realized by making use of women's skills and more awareness raising. The effectiveness of our common efforts will be enhanced by empowering women in all stages of planning, decision-making and in implementing measures to fight climate change.

Reference: Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2009, Government Report, Prime Minister's Office Publications 13/2009