



Climate change and conflicts

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"For centuries, wars have been fought for territorial expansion, ideological or religious dominance, and national pride. In the future, as climate change progresses and its effects become more pronounced, conflicts between states ...could increasingly take centre-stage."

- Byers & Dragojlovic

The very succinct quotation above alludes to the upcoming challenges of climate change. Undoubtedly the forces of nature are unpredictable, dangerous and devastating. They have far-reaching implications and heart-wrenching impacts. Science itself attests to the fact that throughout the ages, the Earth has experienced climate changes and consequent natural disasters - even on epic scales. Throughout the world today, we are witnessing the growing frequency of climatic anomalies such as flooding, storms, droughts or persistent forest and bush fires. They can have dramatic consequences for those affected, entailing loss of property and livelihood, famine and life threatening situations.

Recently, studies and journalistic investigations have focused on one particularly chilling potential social consequence of climate change: an increased frequency of armed conflicts around the world. By studying the link between various climactic factors and rates of historical violence, researchers have speculated that the climate trends we will experience over the next century -- hotter overall temperatures, more erratic rainfall patterns and a rising sea level -- could make conflict and war more common in the future. Now, in the most comprehensive analysis of the work on climate change and armed conflict to date, a team from UC Berkeley has found that these climate trends are indeed likely to significantly



increase the incidence of armed conflict. Their paper, published in *Science Magazine*, examined 60 studies to aggregate sets of data on events, spanning from 8000 BCE to the present, which examined climate variables and incidences of violence in all major regions

of the globe. For example, one of the source papers focused on temperature changes and violent crime in the US from 1952 to 2009, while another looked at the number of conflicts in Europe per decade from 1400 to 1999 as a function of precipitation. Cross-

comparing these studies with the same statistical methods revealed patterns that, when projected into the future, suggest that by 2050 we could see 50 percent more instances of mass conflict due to the effects of climate change. In two separate studies presented

four years apart, David Zhang and his colleagues looked at the period between 1500 and 1800 to understand the social and political effects of climate change. They used time series data from the Northern Hemisphere,

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