

# SECURITY

## SOLUTIONS

# Climate Change

Is It The **Greatest Security Threat**  
Of The 21st Century?

**Why  
Terrorism  
Doesn't Work**

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# CLIMATE CHANGE

## National & Regional Security Threat Multiplier for Australia

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# CHANGE:



**R**emember Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) – the threat of nations being mutually annihilated through nuclear warfare? The Cold War turning ‘hot’ was the source of that danger, but what of nations like Tuvalu amid the global warming event? Their entire nation is in danger of being swallowed by the ocean.

Tuvalu’s mainland is only about 3,300km from Australia (Williams), and they are familiar enough to use the Australian dollar as their national currency. Is global warming only a national threat for Tuvalu and their immediate regional neighbours or for Australia too? It is not just about geography – it is necessary to consider the effect of global warming on world health, migration, defence policy, trade and, ultimately, the threat of foreign conflicts, organized crime and terrorism.

To understand the risk, climate change and greenhouse gas (GHG) concepts need to be understood. Climate change is a variation in the climate that is directly or indirectly related to human activity that increases the concentration of GHGs in the global atmosphere. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the World Bank, such human-induced change occurs in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.

GHGs affect the amount of the sun's energy that reaches the earth's surface. Greater concentrations of radiation are now reaching the earth's surface because a number of gases, some of which stem entirely from human activities, increase the absorption rate of outgoing radiation, trapping heat in the atmosphere (Ibid). Some estimate that global mean surface air temperatures will increase by between 1.1 and 6.4 degrees Celsius by the end of this century (ABARE, November 2005). Principally around the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the danger exists because when global temperatures elevate, sea levels rise. Hotter temperatures mean that more water evaporates into the air, increasing the danger of severe droughts.

By way of example, Tuvalu's highest elevation is five metres, but most of the island nation is less than a metre above sea level. Increasingly, 'king tides' are washing over the island's main roads and croplands, contaminating the soil and plants with saltwater. In fact, many experts already assume that in the next fifty years, if rising sea-level predictions prove accurate, Tuvalu's 12,000 residents will have to be evacuated (Pate, April 2006).

Islands like Kiribati, Vanuatu, the Marshall Islands, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands might also be living on borrowed time. Rising sea levels increasingly haunt their homes, schools, farms and factories. In densely populated low-lying coastal areas in Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, there is also a looming danger.

Aside from the risk of villages and nations being swallowed as in the cataclysmic Platonean account of the destruction of Atlantis, changing temperatures and rainfall patterns will produce extreme climactic events like droughts, floods and cyclones in southern Australia, the Mediterranean and central Europe during the next century (ABARE, November 2005).

**Australia must act immediately and responsibly to dilute the chance for terrorists to hijack climate change for malevolent purposes.**

What does this mean for Australia? It constitutes a national security threat for three broad reasons of mass forced migration, epidemics and terrorism; weak states faltering and requiring Australian intervention; and trade route and resource challenges.

**1. Mass Forced Migration and Terrorism**

Climate change has the capacity to test Australia's humanitarian credentials as potentially millions of poor and unskilled regional neighbours come begging for a new



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life (The CNA Corporation, 2007). Unskilled workers seeking a new life, coupled with high-demand migration conditions, also raise the risk of people-smuggling syndicates targeting Australia.

Aside from forced migration, food production shortfalls in other countries will continue to cause health problems like obesity and diabetes. This is exacerbated by non-nutritious food imports.

Malaria, dengue fever, and the more dangerous form of the disease – dengue hemorrhagic fever (DHF) – will result in increased seriousness of epidemics influenced by stagnating water, variability in temperature, moisture and solar radiation (Patz et al, 2005). The World Health Organization (WHO) is reported as saying that warmer temperatures and heavy rain in South Asia have led to the worst outbreak of dengue fever in years (Eilperin, 2005). Mosquito-borne illness infected 120,000 South Asians in 2005 and killed at least 1,000 (Ibid). Already, global warming is estimated to contribute to more than 150,000 deaths and five million illnesses each year, according to WHO, a toll that could double by 2030 (Boxer, 2003).

Disease threatens tourism in all nations and creates an imperative for climate change victims to flee their nation state for Australia as their living conditions and economic opportunities decline. Importantly, a failure to accommodate climate change refugees may enable terrorist organizations to manipulate the disenfranchised and homeless victims of climate change to their own brutal agenda. Al Qaeda affiliates or other organizations borne by nations suffering climate change stress might blame the developed world for disproportionately contributing to climate change. And there is some truth in that claim.

The Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Saufatu Sopoanga OBE, has said, “Why powerful decision makers in countries who can make a difference continue to downplay the threat posed by global warming is beyond our understanding”. Australia must act immediately and responsibly to dilute the

chance for terrorists to hijack climate change for malevolent purposes. It is necessary to convince others that Australia is serious about tackling climate change and thereby thwarting terrorists exploiting the suffering of climate change victims.

Terrorist groups could target Australians travelling overseas, orchestrate a terrorist attack upon Australia as retribution for the perceived damage to their environment, or attack Australian shipping in the Malacca Straits region. Piracy is already a significant threat in Australia’s northern sea routes, without any additional incentives to target vessels (International Chamber of Commerce, October 2007).

Admiral T. Joseph Lopez, the former commander-in-chief of US Naval Forces Europe and of Allied Forces Southern Europe, also sees the interplay between climate change and terrorism. He said, “Climate change can provide the conditions that will extend the war on terror. In the long term, we want to address the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit, but climate change will prolong those conditions. It makes them worse”. (The CNA Corporation, 2007)

The risk is obvious, yet the environment precursors that might fuel terrorism have been largely ignored. It must be accepted that climate change is multidimensional – national security and climate change are closely related.

## **2. Weak States Faltering**

Climate change will exacerbate existing environmental crises such as drought, water scarcity and soil degradation, and intensify land-use conflicts. Rising global temperatures will jeopardize the bases of many people’s livelihoods, especially in the developing regions, increase vulnerability to poverty and social deprivation, and thus put human security at risk.

As lands and economies shrink, ethnic, religious and class fighting will increasingly erupt over the limited access to resources and opportunities in our near abroad. Residents of affected countries may move

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further inland to avoid encroaching tides, but they will inevitably end up on somebody else’s land on narrow islands. They will effectively finish where they started, facing the same global warming symptoms they were originally fleeing.

What happens to the territorial waters of sinking Islands? Territorial waters are determined from a country’s coastline. If a coastline shifts then the Exclusive Economic Zone of a nation (generally an area of 200 nautical miles) shifts too. If a country sinks in its entirety, then not only will that people lose their nation, and their seat in the United Nations General Assembly, but they also lose their territorial waters. Other nations might fight for ownership over territorial waters vacated by a newly submerged nation. Border and territorial disputes are common, yet that risk will be exacerbated by climate change.

Ambassador Sir Emyr Jones Parry, the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations, has recognized, “An unstable climate will create the very kind of tensions and conflicts that the Security Council deals with, day in and day out, yet more frequent and even more severe”. When regional conflict erupts, the victims of climate change will call on Australia to intervene.

Whilst it is sometimes said that history is an overrated instrument for predicting emerging security threats, land, resources, and the

environment's hand in war and conflict has been noticeable for decades, and the hand is often bloody.

The 1974 Nigerian coup grew largely from an inadequate response to famine (Franke et al, 1980). The 1994 genocide in Rwanda, which resulted in an estimated 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutus being killed, tens of thousands of Hutus dying in refugee camps, and the displacement of two million victims, was significantly influenced by competition over scarce land and declining soil fertility (McKinsey).

Others have pointed to the emergence of Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the First Capital Command in Brazil, the largest gang in the Western hemisphere, as examples of non-government entities acquiring a quasi-government status when legitimate governments are seen not to deliver services and security to the people (The CNA Corporation, 2007).

Prior to the 2007 election, Labor's current Environment Minister, the Hon. Peter Garrett, and the then Homeland Security Shadow Minister, the Hon. Arch Bevis MP, rightly saw climate change as a threat multiplier eroding economic and environmental conditions in

already unstable regions. It can devastate already poor nations, resulting in political instability.

Projected climate change will increase the problems in the region and add to the problems of effective governance. That will drain Australia's defence and policing and border surveillance efforts. It will stress weapons systems and sensor suites in ways Australia might not have previously considered.

The impact of extreme weather conditions is increasingly an ingredient in military and policing deployments, weapons and equipment procurement and maintenance rosters. This is an alarm bell to both the Government and the private sector which contracts to and supplies Australia's military and civilian forces.

Throughout the Cold War, the US and the Soviet Union each collected data in the Arctic.

The impact of ice thickness and sub-ice ocean conditions on acoustics were serious security considerations. So too the US Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) notes that climate change, whether hotter, drier, or wetter, could present unexpected environments that

**The impact of extreme weather conditions is increasingly an ingredient in military and policing deployments, weapons and equipment procurement and maintenance rosters.**

will stress weapons systems. Storms and rough seas will increase transit times, amplify equipment fatigue and reduce the endurance and abilities of personnel.

Stabilization operations overseas often tend to be low-intensity conflicts but are manpower intensive. Hotter temperatures, a lack of clean water and diseases such as malaria and dengue fever that will cause fatigue and illness will create real logistical challenges for Australia's defence forces and the International

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Deployment Group of the Australian Federal Police (AFP).

Fortunately, AFP Commissioner Mick Keely recognizes climate change as turning border security into the biggest policing challenge this century (ABC News, 25 September 2007), and the Chief of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), Air Chief Marshall Angus Houston, has named climate change as a, "Security challenge the ADF must face, but has not previously considered" (Bergin & Townsend, 2007). Now, Australia must further their research into that challenge.

### 3. Climate Changes – Redrawing Global Trade Routes

Climate change's impact on polar ice cover has resulted in redrawing global trade routes and opening up new areas to oil and gas exploration. The US has expressed concern about the Arctic with less sea ice. With that, they expect more competition for resources (The CNA Corporation, 2007).

Closer to home, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) warned that climate change will result in fish stock migration and other changes in marine bio-systems will likely increase illegal fishing in Australian

waters (Bergin & Townsend, 2007). ASPI's prediction needs to be considered when Australia's Customs and Royal Australian Navy border policing strategies are drafted. How many patrol boats are required? How and when are they deployed? And by whom?

To conduct that assessment it is necessary to evaluate when and where new sea lanes might emerge, seasonal data on fish stock movements is needed, and predictive intelligence on how such issues might affect illegal fishing and drug smuggling.

### Conclusion

Australia, until recently, had little reason to believe that other countries, especially poor nations, would punish them for refusing to ratify Kyoto. As a nation, Australia refused to recognize the significant threat to others and would not move to ratify Kyoto as an important symbolic gesture to the rest of the world. Climate change was erroneously seen as a uni-dimensional challenge of low importance.

Feasibly, a short-term political cost-benefit balance in the mind of the former Government is a large part of that explanation.

**There was broad political support for security fixes to aviation and maritime security, and anti-terrorism laws, but nothing on the impact of global warming on security. That mindset has now shifted.**

They believed that they had little to lose from climate change and that expensive regulations would only help people in the distant future. For that reason, they were unwilling to commit to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

There was broad political support for security fixes to aviation and maritime security, and anti-terrorism laws, but nothing on the impact of global warming on security. That mindset has now shifted. Australia now conceptualizes climate change as a multi

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dimensional challenge, including as a security concern.

The creation of a new Climate Change portfolio and the Government's immediate ratification of the Kyoto Protocol signal a new cooperative approach to the challenge of global warming. The Labor Government's election campaign included an announcement to draft a counter terrorism white paper. That blueprint of national security threats facing Australia, to be completed by the end of 2008, will include an assessment of climate change challenges.

Such remodelling of Australia's political landscape heralds a new era in the national security space. Lands disappearing and the complete loss of livelihoods through decreased fisheries, damaged coral reefs, tourism affected by dengue epidemics, and agriculture destroyed because of climate change is, of course, worthy of Australia's attention.

Accepting that organized crime will benefit from regional instability and terrorists could hijack climate change to recruit jihadists, and recognizing that our defence forces and police will increasingly be called upon to intervene in intrastate and interstate

conflicts, are real threats that require serious research. Australia needs to invest more time and money in scoping the impact of global warming and earn some credibility along the way by being seen to proactively drive improvements to the problem of global warming. To do otherwise is not only unworthy of Australia's regional status, but exposes serious and unplanned consequences that are inimical to national interests. ■

The views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of the ALP or the Hon. Arch Bevis MP.

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