Climate Change, Social Stress and Violent Conflict
State of the Art and Research Needs
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Abstract

Climate change in the Persian Gulf – regional security, sustainability strategies and research needs

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In recent years, most countries have integrated climate change and energy security in their national security agendas. Also on an international level, these topics are of key interest, as can be seen in the envisaged new NATO general strategy, the 2007 climate change debate in the UN Security Council and the recent General Assembly resolution asking "the relevant organs of the United Nations (…), to intensify their efforts in considering and addressing climate change, including its possible security implications". Although climate change per se has so far not made it into regional security strategies in the countries of the Persian Gulf, this region is likely to witness strong direct and indirect impacts of climate change, adding additional stress to the already fragile political systems. In my paper, I begin by sketching potential implications of climate change on the Gulf countries and link this to the potentially volatile security dynamics of the region. I will particularly try to answer the question whether the case of Yemen can be regarded as a scenario that other states in the region might face as well. Further, I will look at the external stress the region might face through a major influx of East African environmental refugees and war victims.

Secondly, it should be underlined that the projected impacts of climate change will begin to take effect in several decades. By this time, oil and gas rents for the Gulf States are likely to be on the decline either due to resource depletion or due to a post-fossil fuel world energy. In either case, the Gulf States will require new forms of income generation or the systems will fall short of the necessary means to wield off the considerable inner- and extra-systemic challenges facing the region. I will gauge in how far the current attempts to generate a sustainable future for Gulf regimes might yield success: Is there a realistic chance for a sustainable future economy in the Gulf that will cope with the pressures of climate change without exacerbating existing or future fault-lines? Numerous smaller initiatives for a more sustainable future of the Gulf states have emerged, while individual states have released national "future strategies" (Qatar Vision 2030 or Oman Vision 2020).

However, it remains to be seen how much innovation, behavioural and technological change Gulf governments can actually induce. Finally, I will sketch the research needs from a governance and an environmental/climate science perspective. From the latter point of view, the most challenging science task at hand is the downscaling of the large-scale IPCC predictions to a level that can be of more immediate use to Gulf decision makers. The tension between probability calculations presented as "facts" for policy makers and an augmented level of scientific uncertainty about tangible small-scale regional effects is, however, likely to remain. Research focussing on governance, on the other hand, will need to retain a dual perspective. While analyzing the inner-systemic risks and fault lines in the Gulf states it needs to simultaneously take into account the events related and unrelated to climate change in the neighbouring regions of Asia and North/East Africa. The aim of a comprehensive climate research, however, will always be the attempt to integrate both perspectives. For the Gulf region, research from both angles as well as from a meta-perspective is vital and, so far, surprisingly rare. I will outline and discuss several possible research projects and thus conclude my paper.