

POLICY ARENA

RETHINKING CLIMATE REFUGEES AND CLIMATE CONFLICT: RHETORIC, REALITY AND THE POLITICS OF POLICY DISCOURSE

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Abstract: This paper critically examines the perceived threat of ‘climate refugees’ and ‘climate conflict’. It locates the ideological roots of these concepts in development theories and policy narratives about demographically induced migration, environmental refugees and environmental security. While alarmist rhetoric around climate refugees and conflict has been deployed by a variety of actors, including U.N. agencies, development NGOs, national governments, security pundits and popular media, the paper concentrates on its strategic use by U.S. defence interests. It raises the question of how the portrayal of climate change as a security threat could further militarise the provision of development assistance and distort climate policy. Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The year 2007 witnessed growing concern about the threats posed by ‘climate refugees’ and ‘climate conflict’ to international security. First the *Atlantic Monthly* (Faris, 2007), then the UN Environment Programme (UNEP, 2007), and then even UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon (2007) attributed violence in Darfur to a combination of demographic pressures, resource scarcities and climate change. Along with the Darfur stories came other dire predictions about the threat of so-called ‘climate refugees’ spilling across the globe

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and wreaking havoc, and according to a Christian Aid report, *Human Tide*, creating 'a world of many more Darfurs' (Christian Aid, 2007a, b).

In April that year the UK government brought the issue of climate change before the UN Security Council for the first time, citing the Darfur case (Harvey, 2007). In the United States, the defence think tank, CNA, produced a report *National Security and the Threat of Climate Change* which argued that global warming could help trigger widespread political instability in poor regions and large refugee movements to the United States and Europe (CNA, 2007). Toward the end of the year, the Norwegian Nobel committee (2007) warned that climate-induced migration and resource scarcity could cause violent conflict and war within and between states when it awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to Al Gore, Jr. and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

In this paper I analyse why these narratives suddenly gained so much traction and still circulate vigorously today in international policy circles. Section 2 explores the problematic ideas, values and assumptions at their root and examines the reasons why they have proved useful to a diversity of political actors. Section 3 looks more closely at their strategic value to U.S. defence interests, especially in regard to Africa. I argue that these threat narratives themselves pose a threat to the kind of peaceful international cooperation and development initiatives needed to respond equitably and effectively to climate change.

2 ROOTS AND RHIZOMES: POPULATION, ENVIRONMENT AND SECURITY

For those familiar with the environmental security field, particularly neo-Malthusian models of environmental conflict developed in the 1980s and 1990s, climate refugee and conflict narratives seem very much like old wine in a new bottle. The vintage goes back even further, however, to a powerful policy narrative that I call the 'degradation narrative' (Hartmann and Hendrixson, 2005; Hartmann, 2006). Drawing on old colonial stereotypes of destructive Third World peasants and herders, degradation narratives go something like this: population-pressure induced poverty makes Third World peasants degrade their environments by over-farming or over-grazing marginal lands. The ensuing soil depletion and desertification then lead them to migrate elsewhere as 'environmental refugees', either to other ecologically vulnerable rural areas where the vicious cycle is once again set in motion or to cities where they strain scarce resources and become a primary source of political instability.

Despite salient critiques by international development scholars and practitioners (for example, Boserup, 1965; Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987; Williams, 1995; Leach and Mearns, 1996; Thompson, 2000), the degradation narrative has proved particularly popular in Western policy circles because it kills a number of birds with one stone: it blames poverty on population pressure, and not, for example, on lack of land reform or off-farm employment opportunities; it blames peasants for land degradation, obscuring the role of commercial agriculture and extractive industries and it targets migration both as an environmental and security threat.

With the waning of the Cold War, growing interest in sustainable development and alternative visions of security increased the authority of the degradation narrative. In particular, concern began to mount about the dangers posed by so-called 'environmental refugees'. Central to the concept is the assumption that population pressure is one of the

main precipitating causes of environmental degradation and resulting migration (Saunders, 2000).

Myers (1995) further popularised and legitimised the concept of environmental refugees offering a working definition:

Environmental refugees are persons who can no longer gain a secure livelihood in their traditional homelands because of environmental factors of unusual scope, notably drought, desertification, deforestation, soil erosion, water shortages and *climate change* [my emphasis], also natural disaster such as cyclones, storm surges and floods. In face of these environmental threats, people feel they have no alternative but to seek sustenance elsewhere, whether within their own countries or beyond and whether on a semi-permanent or permanent basis. (Myers, 1995, pp. 18–19)

In many cases, Myers wrote, environmental refugees are actually ‘population pressure’ refugees (p. 63).

The report made the statistical claim that there were at least 25 million environmental refugees in the world, compared with 22 million refugees of ‘traditional kind’ (p. 1). Despite the fact that the 25 million figure was arrived at more by conjecture than scientific method,¹ it began to circulate widely in the international policy arena (Saunders, 2000; Nordas and Gleditsch, 2007). Now Myers claims there will be 200 million climate migrants by 2050, a figure which is similarly making the rounds in policy documents even though Myers himself acknowledges that the estimate is based on ‘heroic extrapolations’ (Brown, 2008, p. 8).

In addition to unreliable statistics, the ‘environmental refugee’ concept has a number of shortcomings. It naturalises the economic and political causes of environmental degradation and masks the role of institutional responses to it. Should people forced to leave their homelands because of the development of a large dam, mine tailings, petroleum pollution or flooding caused by illegal logging all be categorised together as ‘environmental refugees’? In the case of extreme natural events such as droughts, storms and floods, whether or not people are forced to migrate permanently from their homes usually depends on pre-existing social relations (who is most vulnerable) and post-disaster responses (what kind of aid/relief is provided and who receives it). (Wisner *et al.*, 2004).

Rooted as it is in neo-Malthusian thinking, the concept of ‘environmental refugee’ overemphasises the role of demographic pressures in migration. The causes of migration are extremely complex and context-specific, and moreover, there is little evidence to support the view that demographic pressure is at the root of many population movements (Suhrke, 1997). In addition, negative neo-Malthusian narratives of migration obscure the positive roles migration can play in improving people’s livelihoods and diminishing vulnerability to environmental change. Often, migration from rural areas is not a linear phenomenon or a rejection of rural livelihoods, but is instead a vital part of sustaining them (Black, 1998).

Despite such shortcomings, the environmental refugee concept was deployed by a variety of political actors. Sustainable development advocates found it useful to focus policy attention on environmental degradation issues (Black, 1998) and it also appealed to

¹While doing Ph.D. research on environment and security in 1997, I was told by someone who was present during the process that the figure was essentially conjured up by clustering groups of refugees and immigrants on the basis of already dubious statistics.

Western interests in favour of more rigid immigration controls, including limiting the grounds for political asylum. Kibreab argues that the term was invented in part to 'depoliticise the causes of displacement' so that states would not have the obligation to provide asylum (Kibreab, 1997, p. 21, cited in Saunders, 2000, p. 240). As the concept gained favour, environmental refugees were increasingly portrayed as a security threat, even though there was little serious research to substantiate the claim (Black, 1998).

In the 1990s, political scientist Thomas Homer-Dixon propelled the degradation narrative and its negative depiction of migration into the 'high politics' of national security. Homer-Dixon's (1999) environmental conflict model maintains that scarcities of renewable resources such as cropland, fresh water, and forests, induced in large part by population growth, contribute to migration and violent intrastate conflict in many parts of the developing world. In his own words:

Population growth and unequal access to good land force huge numbers of people onto marginal lands. There, they cause environmental damage and become chronically poor. Eventually, they may be the source of persistent upheaval, or they may migrate yet again, helping to stimulate ethnic conflicts or urban unrest elsewhere (Homer-Dixon, 1999, p. 155).

This conflict, in turn, can potentially disrupt international security as states fragment or become more authoritarian (for a critique of his model, see Hartmann, 2001).

Homer-Dixon's work had a major influence in Washington, DC policy circles particularly in the early years of the Clinton administration when Al Gore championed the environment as a cause. Its legacy persists today in the climate change arena where degradation narratives again link environmental change to violent conflict. UNEP's report on Sudan, for example, draws on Homer-Dixon's model and related research to make claims that overpopulation of both people and livestock, coupled with environmental stresses such as water shortages related to climate change, are at the root of conflict in the region (UNEP, 2007). *Atlantic Monthly* journalist Stephan Faris similarly argues that the real fault lines in Darfur are between 'settled farmers and nomadic herders fighting over failing lands.' And he attributes the failure of those lands primarily to climate change-induced reductions in rainfall. 'With countries across the region and around the world suffering similar pressures, some see Darfur as a canary in the coal mine, a foretaste of climate-driven political chaos' (Faris, 2007).

The narrative ignores basic elements of Sudanese political economy that helped create and sustain the conflict. These include gross inequalities in wealth and power between the elite in the capital and the rural population; government agricultural policies that favour large mechanised farms and irrigation schemes over rain-fed, small farmer agriculture, causing both political grievances and land degradation; forced migration, such as the 1990s removal of Nuba farmers from their lands into so-called 'peace villages' where they became a source of captive labour for mechanised farms; and what Alex de Waal calls 'militarised tribalism' (de Waal, 2007). In particular, the nationalisation of land in 1970, by which customary laws were set aside and people could obtain access only through lease agreements with the government, set the stage for widespread land-grabbing by elites and the marginalisation of pastoralists. As one scholar of the region notes, '...not all resource conflicts are based on a situation of resource scarcity; rather, they are political in nature and have to do with the workings of the Sudanese state' (Manger, 2005, p. 135). The discovery of a vast underground aquifer underneath Northern Darfur is not likely to diffuse the crisis,

but rather to heighten it, if the government controls the water for its own interests (Polgreen, 2007).

The construction of Darfur as a climate conflict should serve as canary in the coal mine that something is amiss when environmental determinism overrides serious analysis of power relations. This is not to deny that environmental changes due to global warming could in some instances exacerbate already existing economic and political divisions. However, whether or not violent conflict and mass migrations result depends on so many other factors that it is far too simplistic to see climate change as a major cause or trigger.

Moreover, such threat scenarios ignore the way many poorly resourced communities manage their affairs without recourse to violence. Brown *et al.* (2007) cite the case of the semi-arid regions of Northern Nigeria where conflicts between pastoralists and agricultural communities occur over water and fodder, but seldom spread because of the existence of traditional conflict resolution institutions. They argue that helping these communities adapt to climate change should involve strengthening such institutions.

Research in the drylands of Marsabit District in Northern Kenya found that, in times of drought and water scarcity, there was actually less violence, not more (Witsenburg and Roba, 2007). Poor herdsmen were not inclined to start fights during droughts, and despite poverty and population growth in the region, strong but flexible common property regimes governing water helped people adjust to its scarcity. 'If at any time a conflict over a scarce natural resource like water exists,' the authors write, 'it can be a sign that local resource users themselves have been made powerless and that their negotiating system has been paralysed, either by external agencies or local elites' (Witsenburg and Roba, 2007, p. 235). A study done in northern Senegal from 1998–2002 concluded that drought-related migration led pastoralists to develop better strategies to manage herds and also had positive repercussions on the communities where they settled due to expansion of agriculture and trade (Juil, 2005).

In fact, there is a rich body of empirical case studies of African agriculture, pastoralism and forestry that challenges conventional neo-Malthusian narratives about population, scarcity and conflict (e.g. Leach and Mearns, 1996; Gausset *et al.*, 2005; Derman *et al.*, 2007). Yet it is hardly ever cited in the environmental conflict or climate conflict literature. A certain exceptionalism is at work—while it is commonly assumed that scarcity can lead to institutional and technological innovation in more affluent countries, just the opposite is assumed for poor people in less affluent countries. Scarcity renders them into victims/villains, incapable of innovation or livelihood diversification and naturally prone to violence. Also neglected in the climate conflict literature is scholarship that connects violent conflict in Africa more closely to resource *abundance* (e.g. rich oil and mineral reserves, valuable timber and diamonds) than resource *scarcity* (e.g. Fairhead, 2001).

Today, critiques of 'climate conflict' are emerging. For example, regarding the implications of climate change for armed conflict, Buhaug *et al.* (2008) note the difficulty of coming up with any generalisable model since increased likelihood of organised violence 'depends crucially on country-specific and contextual factors' (p. 2). The report concludes that alarm about climate conflict is not based on substantive evidence.

The term 'climate refugees' is also coming under increased scrutiny on a number of grounds. First, while climate change is likely to cause displacement, the extent of that displacement will not only depend on how much the temperature rises and affects sea-levels, rainfall patterns and extreme weather, but also on the existence and effectiveness of adaptation measures that help individuals and communities cope with environmental stresses. Whether or not such measures are in place in turn depends on political economies

at the local, regional, national and international levels that are often conveniently left out of the discussion of so-called 'climate refugees.' As one report points out, larger climate-related humanitarian emergencies may be in places 'where people *cannot* afford to move, rather than the places to which they do move' (GECHS, 2008, p. 24).

Secondly, migration is too complex a process to label simply as environmental or climate-induced (Dun and Gemenne, 2008; Morrissey, 2008, p. 28). For example, studying the impact of desertification on migration patterns in the northeastern Ethiopian highlands, Morrissey (2008) found that people's decisions on whether to migrate or not were mediated by both structural and individual factors. These included the potential for livelihood diversification within rural areas as well as whether or not one had real opportunities and connections in urban areas. In addition, the high degree to which ethnicity has been politicised in the country limits migration options. His research

shows the impossibility of providing a grand narrative, or simplistic model, of environmentally induced migration in which farmers experiencing adverse environmental change migrate out of those areas (and livelihoods) affected by environmental deterioration (p. 29).

Even on islands and atolls threatened by sea-level rise, decisions to migrate can entail many more factors than climate change alone. A study of the small Pacific island nations of Kiribati and Tuvalu found that socio-economic pressures resulting from lack of employment and development opportunities as well as other kinds of environmental changes are the main drivers of out-migration. The role of climate change needs to be viewed *together* with these processes (McAdam and Loughry, 2009).

A third area of concern is how the label 'climate refugee,' like 'environmental refugee' before it, could further undermine the rights and protections of traditional refugees as defined by the 1951 U.N. Refugee Convention (UNHCR, 1951/1967). According to the Convention, a refugee is someone who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion and nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside his country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. . . .' (UNHCR, 1951/1967).

At the same time that it has become popular to apply the label refugee to any group of forced migrants, immigration enforcement agencies, especially in Europe, have fractioned the traditional refugee category by creating a bureaucratic hierarchy of asylum seeker eligibility in order to restrict admission (Zetter, 2007). It is against this politicised background that one must view the evolution of the term 'climate refugee.'

Both the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) caution against using either the term environmental refugee or climate refugee since they have no basis in international refugee law and could undermine the international legal regime for the protection of refugees (UNHCR, 2008; IOM, 2009). UNHCR further emphasises that much displacement due to climate-related factors is likely to be internal in nature, without the crossing of international borders. A more appropriate legal regime for climate-related migration may be human rights law (McAdam and Saul, 2008).

Given their analytical flaws and lack of supporting evidence, why have these narratives gained so much momentum? Part of the reason lies in the ways they draw on deep-seated fears and stereotypes of the dark-skinned, over-breeding, dangerous poor (Hartmann, 2009). For example, a June 2009 ABC prime time television documentary on climate change, *Earth 2100*, scared the viewers with scenes of future apocalypse in which starving

Africans take to arms against the West, desperate Mexicans storm the American border, and half the world population dies of a new plague so that humans can get back into balance with nature again.

In policy circles, the persistence of these narratives is tied to their *usefulness* to a variety of interests. Critical literature on policy narratives illustrates the importance of population ‘crisis narratives’ in justifying certain kinds of Western development interventions—particularly the spread of commercial agriculture and forestry at the expense of peasant livelihoods—in Africa and elsewhere (Roe, 1995). A similar phenomenon is witnessed for climate narratives. For example, a 2008 report titled *A Climate of Conflict* argued that climate change would likely compound the propensity for violent conflict in 46 poor countries and political instability in another 56 (Smith and Vivekananda, 2008). Much of the authors’ analysis is based on old assumptions about the relationship between environmental scarcity and violence. They propose a solution in which international agencies invest in sustainable development, climate change adaptation measures and peace-building activities. There is also a role for multinational corporations. In this win-win world, the rich help the poor, and are largely absolved of responsibility for resource degradation and extraction, as well as political violence. It is as if the scramble for oil, minerals and land in Africa is of little consequence.

However, it is also important to note that climate refugee and conflict narratives are sometimes deployed strategically by actors demanding that Western states take seriously their obligations to curb carbon emissions and provide adaptation assistance to affected communities. For example, in May 2009, twelve Pacific Island states brought a resolution to the UN General Assembly linking climate change to political instability in an attempt to get the Security Council to address their plight (MacFarquar, 2009).

But even the best of intentions cannot obscure that we do not live in a win-win world, and that spinning climate change as a security threat is likely to undermine, rather than strengthen, serious efforts to link climate change mitigation and adaptation to development efforts that reduce poverty and promote equity. Playing with fear is like playing with fire. You cannot be sure exactly where it will spread.

In the current moment, crisis narratives about climate refugees and conflict serve the interests of national security actors. The next section looks at the United States as a case study of how these narratives threaten to blur the line between development and military assistance, especially in Africa.

3 WHOSE FUTURE? THE PENTAGON, CLIMATE CHANGE AND AFRICA

In 2003, the Pentagon entered the climate and security fray by sponsoring a scenario of the impacts of abrupt climate change. Widely reported in the press, the scenario painted a familiar neo-Malthusian nightmare of poor, starving populations overshooting the reduced carrying capacity of their lands, engaging in violent conflict over scarce resources, and storming en masse towards United States and European borders (Schwartz and Randall, 2003).

A next round of scenarios on the foreign policy and national security implications of climate change was undertaken in 2006–2007 by the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, DC. Those involved were supposedly ‘a diverse group of experts’ from ‘a daunting range of disciplines,’ yet from a reading of the list there appear to be very few, if any, international

development or environment scholars representing perspectives from less affluent countries. Instead, on the foreign policy side, the list reads like a who's who of former Clinton era officials and advisors waiting in the wings for a Democratic presidential victory (Campbell, 2008, pp. 1–3). Indeed, the *Wall Street Journal* described CNAS in November 2008 as a 'top farm team' for the incoming Obama administration's national security apparatus (Ackerman, 2008). Michele Flournoy, co-founder of CNAS, was named Undersecretary of Defence for Policy in January 2009. She is now publicly speaking about how climate change is going to accelerate state failure, mass migration, the spread of disease and possibly insurgency (CSIS, 2009).

The project generated three scenarios in which the climate conflict narrative goes uncontested and the last catastrophic scenario reads like the script for the ABC documentary cited above. The overall message of the project is that climate change may be the biggest security challenge the United States faces, and that it presents 'surprisingly similar' challenges as terrorism, a powerful reason why 'groups whose interests centre on either the environment or on national security have cause to come together and act in tandem' before the world turns into a harrowing, Hobbesian dystopia (Campbell and Parthemore, 2008, pp. 19–20).

This beating of the climate conflict drums has to be viewed in the context of larger orchestrations in U.S. national security policy. While development assistance and humanitarian aid have long been strategically deployed as an element of defence policy, in recent years the military has encroached much further into civilian territory. Observers are beginning to speak of an 'aid-military complex' (Easterly, 2008)—in 2005, the share of official U.S. development assistance dispersed by the Pentagon was 21.7 per cent, up from 5.6 per cent 3 years before (CSIS, 2008). The State Department's role in both diplomacy and development has been severely weakened as a consequence, and disaster response is increasingly becoming the purview of the military (Berrigan, 2008).

These trends reflect a strategic shift in defence thinking toward a focus on stability operations and the taming of 'ungoverned spaces.' In 2005, the Department of Defense (DOD) issued a directive stating that 'stability operations' shall be given equal priority to combat operations.

The immediate goal often is to provide the local populace with security, restore essential services, and meet humanitarian needs. The long-term goal is to help develop indigenous capacity for securing essential services, a viable market economy, rule of law, democratic institutions, and a robust civil society (DOD, 2005, p. 2).

To this end, the U.S. military should mainly work through 'indigenous, foreign, or U.S. civilian officials' or 'military-civilian teams' which shall be open to representatives of International Organisations, NGOs, and the private sector (p. 3). The Army's 2008 manual on stability operations cites climate change as a driver of conflict (Department of the Army, 2008).

The concept of 'ungoverned spaces' derives from a 2007 study of 'ungoverned territories' done by the Rand Corporation for the U.S. Air Force, which identified these areas as failed or failing states, poorly controlled borders or locations within 'otherwise viable states where the central government's authority does not extend' (Rabasa and Peters, 2007, p. 1). As critics point out, many of these spaces are actually governed, but not by groups favourable to U.S. interests (Clunan and Trinkunas, 2008). Ungoverned spaces are perceived as a threat because they can serve as recruiting and organising grounds for

terrorists, criminal networks and other illicit activities. Discursively and strategically, the concept of ungoverned spaces provides a point of convergence for anti-terrorism efforts, stability operations and development assistance. For example, Keenan (2009) argues that in 2003 the U.S. military and Algerian government colluded in creating a bogus Islamic terrorist threat in the Sahara.

From 2007 onwards, Africa has been the primary focus of climate conflict discourse. Coincidence or not, this development has coincided with the establishment of the new U.S. military command for Africa, AFRICOM. The reasons for the creation of AFRICOM are multi-faceted and include the protection of U.S. access to African oil and other strategic resources, the War on Terror and countering increasing Chinese influence in the region (Volman, 2008). Popular resistance within Africa has meant that the United States has not been able to locate AFRICOM's headquarters on the continent; it is currently stationed in Stuttgart, Germany. By its very institutional structure, AFRICOM represents the blurring of military/civilian boundaries. Among its staff, AFRICOM includes senior USAID officials to 'help us plan our own military tasks supportive of USAID efforts' (USAID, 2009). In general, AFRICOM seeks to integrate U.S. military objectives more firmly with economic and political ones.

Constructing climate conflict as a particularly African security threat meshes well with these objectives. CNA's previously cited report on the threat of climate change, specifically linking potential insecurity caused by climate change to the proposed mission of AFRICOM. While it is highly unlikely that the United States would send in troops or base strategic development assistance solely on a perceived risk of climate conflict, the promotion of that risk helps to make such interventions more palatable, especially in liberal foreign policy circles. Indeed, a report by the Center for American Progress, another think tank close to the Obama administration, calls for protecting America through 'sustainable security' (Brigety and Dewan, 2009). It seeks to tie U.S. development assistance to strategic defence and intelligence objectives. 'Climate-induced resource conflicts' are cited as a potential 'significant source of political instability and violence' (p. 14). CNAS, meanwhile, is promoting a similar concept of 'natural security' (Burke, 2009).

At the very least the military mobilisation of climate refugee and conflict narratives should give development and environment agencies cause to reflect on the consequences, intentional and unintentional, of painting climate change, and the poor people most vulnerable to its effects, as a security threat. There are some hopeful signs that this reflection is starting to occur. For example, the Commission on Climate Change and Development (2009) criticises the 'pessimistic literature' on climate change and migration: 'There is evidence that framing migration as a threat leads to policies that do little to control migration but that limit the benefits of migration to migrants and their original and destination communities' (p. 69). Within the U.S. defence and intelligence communities there are also divergent views about the risks of climate conflict; one observer noted that at least some of the alarmist hyperbole is driven by the interests of private defence contractors and think tanks rather than the official military (Personal Communication, 2009).

Yet many challenges remain. IPCC's (2007) coverage of climate and security issues has neglected the significant body of critical literature on the resource scarcity/conflict connection, and there is concern that if it takes up security more seriously in future reports, it could do so in a problematic manner (Nordas and Gleditsch, 2009). In the United States, members of Congress eager to pass climate legislation have resorted to the security threat argument as a way to win support on Capitol Hill, where according to the *New York Times* (2009), 'many politicians will do anything for the Pentagon.'

Raising the spectre of climate refugees and climate conflict obscures the real battle lines in the climate policy arena. How will the benefits of carbon capping systems be distributed—as windfall profits to large energy companies or as transitional assistance to poor communities struggling with rising energy costs and investments in green technologies? Will the integration of aid for climate adaptation and aid for poverty reduction become just another way for more affluent countries to fund problematic carbon offset projects in less affluent countries? To the extent that people are displaced by climate change, how can they best be accommodated in new settings inside and outside national borders? Are the concepts of adaptation, vulnerability and resilience too accepting of the status quo of inequality (see also Gaillard, 2010; Mercer, 2010)? Might the challenge of climate change provide an opportunity to rethink the meaning of development and economic growth in ways that promote redistribution of power and wealth while simultaneously protecting the environment?

We do not need the military to fight these battles. Instead they should take place in public, democratic, civilian spaces at all levels of politics and governance. Those who continue playing the climate refugee and conflict card are raising the stakes unnecessarily and threatening to militarise not only climate policy, but also development aid.

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