



CONFLICT-CLIMATE INTEGRATION

Policy Brief

The Climate Change Crisis: Ensuring Integration of Conflict Prevention and Climate Change in U.S. Foreign Policy and Development Assistance

Contributions:

This policy brief emerged from robust discussions and engagement across both the peacebuilding and climate change communities of practice. The Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) sincerely thanks Lindsey Doyle, formerly of InterAction, and Jenny Maron of InterAction for their convening power in facilitating conversations that contributed to this brief. AfP would also like to thank Dr. Tegan Blaine of the United States Institute of Peace and Cynthia Brady of the Wilson Center for their inspiring thought leadership and expertise on this issue. The brief was originally released in August 2021 and has been updated to reflect recent research and global political and policy developments.

Abstract:

Climate change, violent conflict, and fragility are compounding crises and pose severe risk to global peace and security. Climate change in conflict affected and fragile states undermines a country's ability to adapt, mitigate, and address climate risk and climatic hazards. The U.S. government and other donor climate change strategies are increasingly calling for more conflict prevention and peacebuilding integration. While great progress, donors will have to ensure robust implementation.

Introduction:

The changing climate is responsible for [more extreme and deadly weather patterns](#), evidenced by [unprecedented heatwaves and overwhelming rainfall in the United States](#), [deadly flooding in Asia and Europe](#), and [severe droughts in South America](#). A [report](#) released in advance of the annual United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference (COP26) in 2021 by the UN Environment Program confirmed the grave state of the Earth's climate, finding that [new national-level climate pledges](#), along with other mitigation measures, will not be sufficient to stop a global temperature rise of 2.7°C by the end of the century. A 2.7°C increase is well above the [Paris Agreement's](#) goal of limiting the global temperature increase to 1.5°C.

[Report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) (IPCC) found climate change already "has caused widespread adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people," and that near-term global warming of 1.5°C "would cause unavoidable increases in multiple climate hazards and present multiple risks to ecosystems and humans." The [third part of that report](#) released in early April 2022 stated that while there are "signs of climate action, the world remains wildly short" and "it's now or never, if we want to limit global warming to 1.5°C." The report implores the international community to urgently work on climate today or "we will...continue to sleepwalk into a climate catastrophe."

poses severe risks to global peace and security. The IPCC's April [report](#) found that climate change is already causing suffering and devastation globally. The World Bank estimates the effects of climate change could push an additional [130 million people](#) below the poverty line by 2030. The Flood Resilience Alliance predicts that, by 2050, [200 million people](#) will need humanitarian aid if fragile states do not receive enough climate financing, while [over 50% of the world's population](#) may live in water-stressed regions. The most recent [UN Global Humanitarian Overview report](#) estimated that up to 216 million people "may have to move within their own countries due to the effects of climate change." Over the past 40 years, over [one-third](#) of global cropland has been abandoned due to erosion.

Additionally, the [Sixth Assessment](#)

The increasing climate crisis also

The world was also facing a [30-year high](#) in global violent conflict, even before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Estimates projected that [274 million people](#) would require humanitarian assistance and protection in 2022, a [nearly 17% increase](#) from 2021, which was already the highest figure in decades. Russia's war in Ukraine continues to drive those figures up. Concurrently, COVID-19 is also operating as more than a health crisis; it is [stabilization in reverse](#), exacerbating conflict dynamics and overshadowing the climate crisis.

Climate change, violent conflict, and fragility are compounding crises. Of the 39 states with the highest or high fragility, 26 have [“more than one million people and/or more than 10% of the population liv\[ing\] in high](#)

[\[climate\] exposure areas.”](#) A seminal [G7 report](#) found climate change, through interaction with “other pressures and contextual factors,” can create seven “compound risks” of conflict: local resource competition; livelihood security and migration; extreme weather events and disasters; volatile food prices and provision; transboundary water management; sea-level rise and coastal degradation; and unintended effects of climate policies. Additionally, conflict was the [largest driver of food insecurity in the world in 2020](#), placing 100 million people at risk, which climate change will only continue to exacerbate.

Climate change in conflict affected and fragile states undermines countries' ability to adapt, mitigate, and address climate risk and climatic

hazards. For example, in [Mocoa, Colombia](#), displaced citizens and poor government resettlement and deforestation policies are increasing vulnerability to flood risks. In [Nigeria](#), heightened food insecurity and tensions between non-Fulani farmers and Fulani herders over land and water resources are driving violence in the Middle Belt. In the [Lake Chad Basin](#), climate-related water resource challenges are putting immense pressure on livelihoods, which is enabling armed groups and exacerbating the regional humanitarian crisis. In the [Northern Triangle](#), climate change is worsening droughts, decreasing crop yields, and intensifying storms, while worsening difficulties for governments struggling with [deadly violence and weak governance](#).

The Way Forward:

U.S. strategies and plans are increasingly developing a more robust and integrated response to address the compounding crises of climate change, conflict, and fragility. The Biden Administration made a major move in addressing the conflict-climate nexus by appointing former Secretary of State John Kerry as the first [U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate](#), who also serves on the National Security Council. This appointment affirmed Biden's commitment to climate change as a [foreign policy priority](#) and will promote high-level coordination across the interagency process. In the Administration's first year, it also announced executive orders, including [Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad](#) and [Planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration](#), which respectively called for centering the climate crisis in U.S. foreign policy and national security and requested an interagency report on climate change and its impact on migration. The Administration subsequently put forth [new climate finance commitments](#), including plans to double annual public

climate finance by 2024 and mobilize private finance internationally.

[USAID's new Climate Strategy \(2022-2030\)](#)¹ released in April 2022 is a significant improvement from the initial [draft strategy](#). AfP welcomes the new strategy that now clearly recognizes the compounding impact of climate change and conflict and the need to integrate peacebuilding and conflict prevention in climate policies and programming. For example, the new strategy identifies the climate crisis as “compounding”

violence and conflict and calls for a “holistic approach to climate programming...in conflict affected and fragile geographies.” It also significantly expands Intermediate Result 2.4 to “[s]trengthen the coordination of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding assistance to address climate impacts.” Specifically, the strategy urges “nimble programming” and systems change on both sides of the conflict-climate nexus, noting “conflict increases climate change vulnerability and climate change vulnerability increases conflict risk.”



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¹ The strategy outlines two strategic objectives: (1) targeted climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts; and (2) systems change for a larger transformation around climate action. It also sets climate action targets, such as mobilizing \$150 billion in public and private finance for climate, enabling improved climate resilience for 500 million people by 2030, and aligning country programming with [Nationally Determined Contributions](#) and [National Adaptation Plans \(NAPs\)](#) and priorities by 2024.



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Additionally, the Climate Strategy centers locally-led climate action on indigenous peoples, local communities, and women and youth through a broad and inclusive definition of “marginalized and underrepresented populations.” However, the revised strategy does not address how it will integrate the [Global Fragility Strategy](#), [Women, Peace, and Security Strategy](#), and [National Security Strategy](#), as well as the draft USAID [Local Capacity Development Policy](#), [Gender Policy](#), and [Youth Policy](#), among other cross-government and intra-agency policies and strategies.

As required by the [Global Fragility Act](#) (GFA), the White House recently [released](#) the long-awaited four priority “pilot” countries—Haiti, Libya, Mozambique, and Papua New Guinea—and one region—Coastal West Africa—and updated the [Global Fragility Strategy](#) in April 2022. The updates included a new “[prologue](#)” that specifically identifies that climate change shapes “[state fragility and risks of conflict](#).” Therefore, the 10-year plans as required by the GFA must integrate where applicable climate change.

The President’s Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience (PREPARE) is a positive development for U.S. efforts to advance international climate action, but has been undercut by Congressional funding decisions. PREPARE calls on Congress to provide \$3 billion of annual funding

by 2024 and technical support to developing countries for climate change adaptation. It coordinates a whole-of-government approach between U.S. federal agencies through three primary components: (1) deepening global understanding of climate risks; (2) mainstreaming and integrating adaptation into broader decision-making; and (3) accelerating adaptation financing. It also promotes coherence between climate action through diplomatic, development, and technical assistance. However, the [FY22 omnibus spending bill](#) allocated only [\\$1 billion toward international climate finance](#), which is much lower than the Biden Administration’s proposed \$2.5 billion and a sign that Congress does not plan to fully resource this initiative.

Biden’s [FY23 budget request](#) shows promising developments for international climate action, but its fate will be determined in the appropriations process. The budget invests a total of \$44.9 billion to tackle the climate crisis, a \$16.7 billion increase from 2021. International climate finance includes [\\$1.6 billion](#) in direct USAID and Department of State programming for climate mitigation and adaptation, as well as \$650 million in programming across development sectors, which doubles USAID climate programs.

The recent strong U.S. commitments to reduce emissions and end its reliance on oil is now more urgent than

ever following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. At COP26, the U.S. unveiled plans for the U.S. to reduce emissions and support climate action around the globe. The [Long-Term Strategy of the United States](#) proposes a path forward to reach net-zero emissions by 2050, with multiple routes all centered around “five key transformations:” decarbonize electricity; electrify end uses and switch to other clean fuels; cut energy waste; reduce methane and other non-CO2 emissions; and scale-up CO2 removal. During his [State of the Union Address](#) in March 2022, President Biden committed to reducing U.S. energy costs by \$500 a year by lowering the price of electric vehicles, promoting energy efficiency, and doubling clean energy production. Actualizing these measures is gaining heightened urgency due to the war in Ukraine.

The U.S.’ foreign policy has been significantly impacted by its dependence on oil. However, the U.S. [announced plans to ban Russian oil imports](#), which is an important opportunity to accelerate the U.S.’ planned transition to renewable and climate-neutral energy. The U.S. can achieve energy independence from Russia and other authoritarian countries, including Saudi Arabia, that will increase its overall [energy security](#), and its foreign policy will not be dictated by its dependence on oil.

The Alliance for Peacebuilding recommends the following:

1. Create shared language between the climate and conflict prevention sectors.

Climate experts must understand how climate impacts conflict dynamics and conflict experts must understand the impact of climate-driven environmental change on local contexts. The science and scientific terms around climate change and conflict terminology are not common language and can be difficult to understand. U.S. policymakers should adopt a common climate security language with an evidence-based, cross-disciplinary definition including traditional and human security dimensions of risk.

By communicating in a shared climate security language, both the conflict prevention and climate fields can agree on obstacles to address and solutions forward. The climate and conflict prevention communities can look to models like the [Weathering Risk Initiative](#), a global climate security risk and foresight assessment by Adelphi and the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research. Disciplines like [critical geography](#), which examines the interactions between spatial relations and international politics, can also provide a relevant framework for this shared language. Most importantly, through both regionalization and localization of climate fragility assessments, both sectors can bridge the gap between climate predictions and localized peacebuilding initiatives.

The U.S. can also address climate change without always using the term “climate” or centering programmatic approaches in the climate sector. For example, framing the benefits of renewable energy transitions and building more sustainable and efficient water infrastructure in terms of economic advantage can achieve climate mitigation and adaptation objectives without use of the politically polarizing term “climate.”

2. Ensure robust integration of climate and conflict prevention sectors and programming.

For both sectors, it is also essential to see both risk and resilience as integrated rather than siloed. Conflict and climate experts need to envision climate action not just in terms of reducing emissions and greenhouse gases, but working toward a robust sense of climate security in a way that not only [“delivers ecological, public health, and economic benefits, but also enhances global and national security.”](#) For instance, [climate migration](#) in the Sahel and transboundary water management issues in the Ferghana Valley due to increased droughts and floods show that climate action must consider conflict geographies, transnational dynamics around migration, and shared natural resources. Non-conflict sensitive [climate change responses can spark conflict](#) or undermine social resilience.

Conversely, poorly planned conflict prevention work can create or exacerbate environmental tensions. A nuanced, localized understanding of risks and opportunities that integrates both climate and peacebuilding considerations in programming will be essential to policymakers and implementers.

A shared, overarching long-term strategy will create a clear picture of the “end game,” with an ideal collective outcome supported by metrics looking 5, 10, and 50 years into the future. Peacebuilding and climate programs need to move beyond acute crises and work to understand long-term trends and analyses. Climate disruption

indicators, for example, could serve as early warning and response mechanisms for humanitarian emergencies. Through this strategy, both conflict prevention and climate principles can be integrated and mainstreamed throughout the design phase implementation and evaluation phases of cross-cutting programs led by multi-sector teams. This approach can extend beyond climate and conflict to address the layered, dynamic, and intertwined multi-sector needs and opportunities facing policymakers.

Existing institutions like USAID’s Climate Change Leadership Council and the State Department’s [Office of Global Change](#) are critical, but comprehensive prioritization of climate change in foreign and security policy within and across all sectors remains a challenge. The U.S. should integrate climate change into all foreign assistance programming by:

- Creating policy guidance and implementation plans that require cross-cutting programs, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting requirements;
- Increasing focus on climate mitigation and adaptation to address climate change’s compounding effects on conflict-affected and fragile states;
- Instituting food security strategies to build the resilience of communities threatened by severe droughts, floods, and waterborne diseases;
- Strengthening water infrastructure,



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water resource management, and drought-tolerant agriculture in alignment with the [U.S. Global Water Strategy](#); and

- Monitoring and assessing agricultural greenhouse gas emissions and mitigation, including the impact of associated policies on fragile contexts.

USAID's new strategy and the new GFS prologue specifically call for integrating conflict prevention and climate change, but these strategies must be robustly implemented by:

- Mainstreaming conflict risk assessments into the design, planning, implementation, and evaluation of climate programs;
- Ensuring conflict, governance, and humanitarian assessments integrate climate change risk, identify adaptation and mitigation opportunities, and utilize a gender analysis due to the [disproportionate impact](#) the climate crisis and conflict have on women and girls;
- Incorporating risk-reducing conflict prevention programs into USAID's climate strategy to ensure climactic hazards do not exacerbate violent conflict;
- Undertaking more rigorous and adaptive monitoring, evaluation,

and learning processes to acknowledge the interconnected and dynamic nature of conflict-climate risks and to increase the density and quality of information flow to improve decision-making at all levels, especially around cross-sector and cross-bureau co-creation and joint implementation;

- Ensuring both climate and conflict prevention policies and programs intentionally integrate women, racial, ethnic, and religious minorities and other marginalized groups and mainstream diversity, equity, and inclusion. Frameworks such as the [Global Fragility Act](#) and [Strategy](#) and the [Women, Peace, and Security \(WPS\) Agenda, Act](#), and [Strategy](#) can accelerate gender mainstreaming and integrate considerations of and from marginalized communities; and
- Understanding that while many regions of the world will be devastated by climate change, others may be affected in more subtle ways and even derive benefits such as extended growing seasons and these areas must be identified.

3. Integrate a human-rights based conflict prevention

approach

Resources are vital for the protection of defenders of the environment, as well as those providing protection in communities resisting corporate incursions and environmental degradation to ensure a human rights-based approach to integrated conflict-climate interventions. The [murder of monarch butterfly activist Raúl Hernandez](#), along with the [disproportionate killing of indigenous people](#) supporting environmental activism, show the close connection between climate response, human rights, and peacebuilding.

Additionally, structural gendered inequalities across norms, rights, and assets make women [both more vulnerable to climate change impacts and more easily impacted by violent conflict](#). The [association of gender-based violence and poor conservation results](#), for example, demonstrates social inclusion is necessary for cohesive, community-driven climate change adaptation and mitigation. Furthermore, as noted in a [recent report](#) by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), displacement caused by climate and conflict often impedes political and electoral rights, such as the right to vote in elections,



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by depriving people of constituency choice, proper documentation, voter information, and stable residency. Integration of a human rights-based approach in climate fragile contexts can protect and promote fundamental freedoms.

4. Ensure integration of conflict prevention and climate action is locally-led.

The connections between conflict and climate vary from place to place; thus policies, programs, and activities to address the conflict-climate nexus must be tailored to local needs and empower local actors. [Research](#) and [case studies](#) consistently demonstrate peacebuilding is [more effective](#) when locally-led. A locally-led approach recognizes that local solutions are fundamental to preventing and reducing violent conflict, and that sustainable peace relies on the [institutionalization](#) of peacebuilding efforts by local stakeholders.

Numerous local non-governmental organizations and research institutions work on climate and/or conflict and need resources and support. In South Sudan, the [Sudd Institute](#) is studying [links between climate disaster events and local conflicts](#). Additionally, the [Peace Centers for Climate and Social Resilience](#) in Ethiopia is researching connections between climate and conflict and incorporating lessons learned into their existing programs. Consultations with and support of such local entities can connect local stakeholders with U.S. Government officials and inform the design and implementation of U.S. policies and programming.

One of the biggest strengths of USAID's climate strategy is a commitment to work with local and indigenous communities, as well as women and youth. To ensure locally-led conflict-climate integration, the U.S. can support national and subnational governments, local civil society, faith-based organizations, and communities to develop context-appropriate institutions, programming, and adaptation plans to anticipate and resolve climate-driven and climate-enhanced conflicts. This support must also employ an intersectional approach, through deliberate consultation with local communities, including women,

youth, minority religious groups, and other marginalized groups that are most at-risk for displacement, lost economic opportunity, and violence, to design and implement programs. In addition, the U.S. should emphasize indigenous approaches and solutions, including those led by local faith-based groups and actors. If technology is utilized during programming, local people should own the technology.

5. Rethink budgeting and funding processes behind conflict prevention and climate action.

The U.S. will need to rethink budgeting and funding processes to successfully integrate conflict prevention and climate action. The budget must be fit-for-purpose and agile to ensure relevant, effective responses to country needs and priorities. To do so, the U.S. Government will need to streamline existing budget directives; create more flexibility in the budget and allocation processes to disburse funds; and leverage and incentivize existing frameworks to prioritize participatory decision-making and community ownership.

Re-conceptualizing policy and budgeting timeframes will also be essential. Congress should make long-term commitments through appropriations, so agencies do not rely solely on annual budgets. Crucially, Congress must also resource the historic funding commitments toward international climate action in PREPARE.

6. Work closely with multilateral institutions.

Multilateral institutions are a crucial lever for change to advance international conflict-climate action. The U.S. should leverage engagement with domestic climate change planning processes in developing countries, specifically the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#)'s NAP process.

Through the NAP process, the U.S. can integrate research and systemic consideration of climate change and conflict prevention risks and

opportunities for resilience-building. For instance, both the [South Sudan](#) and [Timor-Leste](#) NAPs include a focus on the potential connection between climate change and conflict outcomes, but recognize incomplete information and understanding. The U.S. can advance these NAPs by supporting the integration of conflict-climate change research and action into the national climate change planning processes and providing technical and material support for implementation and information-sharing between countries.

7. Require the Department of Defense to develop a comprehensive, measurable plan to reduce its carbon footprint and undertake environmental impact studies.

In October 2021, the Department of Defense [released a report](#) outlining how "increasing temperatures; changing precipitation patterns; and more frequent, intense, and unpredictable extreme weather conditions" are threat multipliers to the United States' national security. However, a [recent study](#) from Brown University's Costs of War project found the Department has a larger annual carbon footprint than most countries globally. The Department of Defense must address this by:

- Taking proactive and sustained measures to prevent or mitigate an intervention's impact on climate change;
- Creating plans for and communicating with local civilians that the military will reduce or at least not exacerbate carbon emissions or harm other natural resources;
- Developing waste disposal methods that do not contribute to climate disruption, groundwater contamination, negative health impacts (such as military burn pits), and other forms of pollution; and
- Establishing exit plans that include hazardous waste removal.



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About Alliance for Peacebuilding:

Named the “number one influencer and change agent” among peacebuilding institutions worldwide—AfP is a nonprofit and nonpartisan network of 160+ organizations working in 181 countries to prevent conflict, reduce violence, improve lives, and build sustainable peace. At our core, AfP cultivates a network to strengthen and advance the peacebuilding field, enabling peacebuilding organizations to achieve greater impact—tackling issues too large for any one organization to address alone.



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