

Working paper - March 2017

National Security and Climate Change in Israel and in the Middle East

Researcher: **Joel Gordon**¹

Supervised by Carmit Lubanov, AEJI

Project Plan

The research will focus on the link between “Climate Change and National Security,” as investigated from a national and regional perspective vis-à-vis Israel and the Middle East. The investigation will be directed towards outlining strategies and policies that could be suggested to the Israeli government, following a discussion of the (multiple) threats posed by climate change. To this end, a preliminary title has been framed: *Leveraging for “New Geopolitical order” and Economic Opportunity*, in order to underline the positive economic potential for Israel in assuming a leadership role in climate policy.

Topic Description

For almost a decade, climate change has been described as a “threat multiplier²,” affecting economic stability, security and the environment; specifically characterized as a “threat multiplier for instability in some of the most volatile regions in the world” (CNA Corporation 2007). Given these reports, changes in climate could threaten to incite conditions of (further) civil unrest and political destabilization in the region of the Middle East. Such a situation is likely to pose an immediate and long-term threat to the national security interests of Israel.

We approach this issue from national and regional parameters in order to reassess the Israeli perspective. At present, climate change in Israel is not a strategic priority in terms of government policy and ranks low on the Israeli security agenda. The geopolitical currents of climate change need to be factored into the equation, in addition to the scientific data, for policy recommendations to be justifiable. Addressing the issue in terms of the geopolitical landscape and national security will help to question future decision making processes and widen the discourse. Renewing the discussion

¹ Research Intern at the Association of Environmental Justice in Israel (AEJI), Climate Governance research and policy initiative, 2017. The internship is in frame of the International program for Master degree, Porter school for environmental studies, Tel Aviv University.

² “Climate change is best viewed as a threat multiplier which exacerbates existing trends, tensions and instability” (European Commission 2008).

could prove imperative to defining Israel's political role and economic growth in the years to come, and in securing Israel's future as a technological leader and democratic state.

The research question will address the climate-security nexus in view of the aforementioned threat multiplier, but also in terms of "threat minimizers"³ (UN General Assembly 2009), to assess Israel's potential leveraging of political and economic benefits; most likely achieved through investment in smart technologies/renewables and the supply of these goods.

Methodology

Research methods include conducting interviews and establishing correspondence with available experts in the fields of security, politics and environment (including Owen Alterman and Dr. Anat Kurz (INSS), Professors Danny Rabinowitz and Alon Tal, and additional members of academia/government e.g. Arnon Soffer). There is a wide range of literature available on the related topics; however, it will be essential to quickly narrow down the most relevant sources over the next weeks. This process has already been initiated and the findings reaffirm the significance of the research area, as the discussion is very much alive and ongoing; recently brought to further attention by the comments of US Defense Secretary James Mattis.

Over the course of the initial research phase (March – April), the priority will be to identify and utilize materials effectively, in combination to the knowledge/suggestions gained from interviewees. Following the Pesach period, the task will be to structure the written report according to the appropriate guidelines, developing the themes more concretely and turning attention towards strategic policy. For strategic assessment and discussion of current policy, we will endeavor to contact Chief Scientist of the Ministry of Environment, Dr. Sinaya Netanyahu. UK climate policy will also be reviewed in part, as a comparative tool, while the cases of Sudan and Syria may be cited in relation to "climate refugees" and migration.

Official sources of information include, UNFCC,⁴ IPCC⁵, ICCIC⁶.

The research paper facilitates the opportunity to develop the foundations of a key strategic policy area, which is likely to become increasingly important in the future.

³ General, UN Secretary. "Climate Change and Its Possible Security Implications." *New York: United Nations* (2009).

⁴ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate change.

⁵ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

⁶ Israel Climate Change Information Center.



Preliminary Bibliography (Papers read to-date; key sources highlighted)

Alterman, Owen. "Climate Change and Security: An Israeli Perspective." (2015).

Barnett, Jon, and W. Neil Adger. "Climate change, human security and violent conflict." *Political geography* 26.6 (2007): 639-655.

Das, Onita. "'Climate change and armed conflict: Challenges and opportunities for maintaining international peace and security through climate justice'." (2016).

Farbotko, Carol, and Heather Lazrus. "The first climate refugees? Contesting global narratives of climate change in Tuvalu." *Global Environmental Change* 22.2 (2012): 382-390.

Gartzke, Erik. "Could climate change precipitate peace?." *Journal of Peace Research* 49.1 (2012): 177-192.

Gemenne, François, et al. "Climate and security: evidence, emerging risks, and a new agenda." *Climatic Change* 123.1 (2014): 1-9.

Harris, Katie. "Climate change in UK security policy: implications for development assistance?." *London, Overseas Development Institute* 3 (2012).

Hartmann, Betsy. "Rethinking climate refugees and climate conflict: rhetoric, reality and the politics of policy discourse." *Journal of International Development* 22.2 (2010): 233-246.

Mason, Michael. "Climate change, securitisation and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict." *The Geographical Journal* 179.4 (2013): 298-308.

Michaels, Lucy, and Alon Tal. "Convergence and conflict with the 'National Interest': Why Israel abandoned its climate policy." *Energy Policy* 87 (2015): 480-485.

Myers, Norman. "Environmental security: what's new and different." *Background paper for The Hague conference on environment, security and sustainable environment*. 2004.

Salehyan, Idean. "Refugees, climate change, and instability." *paper, "Human Security and Climate Change" conference, Asker, Norway*. 2005.

Selby, Jan, and Clemens Hoffmann. "Rethinking climate change, conflict and security." (2014): 747-756.

Scheffran, Jürgen, and Antonella Battaglini. "Climate and conflicts: the security risks of global warming." *Regional Environmental Change* 11.1 (2011): 27-39.



The Association of Environmental Justice in Israel (AEJI)
المنظمة للعدل البيئي העמותה לצדק סביבתי (ע"ר)

**Tal, Alon. "Will We Always Have Paris? Israel's Tepid Climate Change Strategy."
Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs (2016): 1-17.**