


# And Then Things Got Complicated: Addressing the Security-Climate-Migration Nexus

## Executive Summary

**T**imes are changing. The intersecting challenges of climate change, human migration, and instability present a unique problem for many local and regional actors in crisis regions. Already, these issues are beginning to overlap in ways that undermine traditional notions of security and development policy, not just within their borders but also for European and U.S. foreign policy and multilateral institutions.

We have already seen how climate-driven disruptions, food insecurity, migratory tensions, and domestic conflicts have reshaped politics across continents. Examples are the Arab Spring and events in Libya, Syria, and the Sahel. In decades to come, this dilemma will broaden and intensify. In the 21st century, security needs to be defined more broadly, and we must revisit deeply ingrained policy siloes of diplomacy, development, and defense. Mobilizing this to address the nexus will be the political litmus test of our time.

## Myanmar: The new Nexus test case

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South Asia, particularly India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, is of great economic and political relevance for the Western Alliance. It is also an area where the security-climate-migration nexus manifests in complex and multidimensional ways that threaten stability beyond regional borders. Especially in Myanmar, political instability and rising insecurity due to the February 2021 coup add to challenges posed by climate change, including rising temperatures and recurring droughts in the center, and increased frequency and intensity of storms on its long coast.

Average daily temperatures in Myanmar have already increased by about 0.25°C per decade for the past three decades, and daily maximum temperatures have risen even further, by 0.4°C. Since 1990, Myanmar has seen more tropical cyclones reaching its shores just before the monsoon but fewer after. The Global Climate Risk Index 2021 found Myanmar had the highest weather-related losses in the past two decades, alongside Haiti and Puerto Rico.


Sea-level rise will affect a large portion of the country's rice bowl close to former capital Yangon. A recent assessment said that droughts, flash floods, and landslides are "highly likely" in the central dry zone. Almost all farmers who responded to a 2020 UN survey said erratic weather has led to lower or non-existent crop yields. Climate change is likely to worsen the plight of communities in the poverty-ridden Chin and Rakhine states which border India and Bangladesh.

The coup will exacerbate many other indicators that influence the intersecting challenges of climate change, migration, and instability, particularly amid the

global COVID-19 pandemic. Armed conflicts and disasters displaced more than 400,000 people in the past year alone. Hunger and poverty are rising. It is estimated that in 2022, one in four people will need humanitarian assistance, and half of the population will live in poverty. There are also valid concerns that the military junta may expand natural resources exploitation, further degrading ecosystems and worsening climate change.

Regional efforts to resolve the crisis have yet to bear fruit. Much of the attention has focused on hard security concerns, rather than incorporating the critical nexus thinking to tackle this evolving situation.

## **The Sahel: Nexus thinking to tackle current challenges and future risks**




**A**s one of the regions in the world facing a combination of security, governance, developmental, and environmental challenges, the Sahel has been a magnet of international attention in recent years. Despite this growing interest, policy responses and multilateral collaboration struggle to match the complexity of the challenges unfolding in the Sahel and spilling over beyond the region.

The temperature in the Sahel is expected to rise between 2.5 and 4 degrees by 2100, while rainfall variability is set to increase. This will cause particularly severe and long-lasting damage for a region where livelihoods are highly dependent on climatic conditions and natural resources, and where alternative income sources are scarce. Such a development could deepen human insecurity and increase migration.

In northern Burkina Faso and Mali, frequent droughts have depleted resources and decreased fertile land, forcing pastoralists further south and causing migration to rapidly growing urban centers or across the borders. Intra-regional movements have re-opened old religious, ethnic, and tribal fractures that have, at times, caused violence and even open conflict.

While over 90 percent of migrants still move within the Sahel, the region has become a major hub for migration from Sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa and across the Mediterranean over the past decade. Transit migration compounds risks in countries like Niger, where demographic pressure, scarce food and energy resources, social marginalization, and fragile state-society relations constitute major stress points. Complicating things even further, non-state armed groups use the situation to their advantage to gain territorial control and political allegiance, as national governments struggle with structural fragilities.

## The way forward



**T**here is no time to lose: In the coming decades, climate change will increasingly threaten humanity's shared interests and collective security in many parts of the world, disproportionately affecting the globe's least developed countries. It will pose challenging social, political, and strategic questions for governments, non-profit organizations, and international financial institutions. Yet multilateral discussions on security have so far been limited to the narrow confines of military threats. It is time to introduce a greater degree of complexity into these conversations.

Nexus<sup>25</sup> project partners are the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) in Rome and the United Nations Foundation. The project, led by Nathalie Tocci at IAI and Michael Werz at the Center for American Progress, is funded by Stiftung Mercator in Germany. For more information please consult: <http://www.nexus25.org>.

This is an executive summary of two papers written specifically for the Nexus<sup>25</sup> side event at the 2022 Munich Security Conference.

In addition to the side event at the 2022 Munich Security Conference, the project partners will host additional events on the sidelines of the IMF and World Bank 2022 spring meetings in Washington DC and the UN High Level Political Forum in New York. An in-depth discussion will follow at a Nexus Conference in Rome on 24 and 25 May 2022. For additional information or requests to participate in our meetings please contact Nathalie Tocci ([n.tocci@iai.it](mailto:n.tocci@iai.it)) or Michael Werz ([mwerz@americanprogress.org](mailto:mwerz@americanprogress.org)).

