

AUSTRALIAN
SECURITY
LEADERS
CLIMATE
GROUP

CLIMATE & SECURITY

COP26: Background Briefing



WORLD LEADERS' ACTION ON CLIMATE & SECURITY

As world leaders prepare to gather in Glasgow for the make-or-break UN policy-making conference in November, Australia is falling behind its key allies on climate security risks. This failure is detailed in "Missing in Action: Responding to Australia's climate & security failure" recently published by the [Australian Security Leaders Climate Group](#).

Australia is "missing in action" on climate security risks, whilst AUKUS partners – the USA and the UK – are preparing for human and global security threats and challenges in a hotter world.



USA

President Biden's Executive Order of January 2021 calls for an urgent whole-of-government climate-security risk analysis.

In April, as part of **US President Biden's Leaders Summit on Climate**, US Secretary of Defence Lloyd J. Austin III said: "Today, no nation can find lasting security without addressing the climate crisis. We face all kinds of threats in our line of work, but few of them truly deserve to be called existential. The climate crisis does."

In October the **US Department of Defense**, along with other major departments across the US Government, released their *Climate Adaptation Plans* and President Biden addressed the UN on deepening UN action on climate security.¹



UK

The Ministry of Defence releases report on *Climate Change and Sustainability Strategic Approach* and an Initial Action Plan on climate and security risks.

A RAND report to the UK Ministry of Defence is released on "A Changing Climate: Exploring the Implications of Climate Change for UK Defence and Security".

In September, **Chatham House**, the UK's premier international affairs think tank, issued the *Climate Change Risk Assessment 2021*, and in October, the *What near-term climate impacts should worry us most?* report. They conclude:

- The world is dangerously off track to meet the Paris Agreement goals.
- The risks are compounding.
- Without immediate action the impacts will be devastating in the coming decades.



Pacific Nations & New Zealand

Strong recognition of climate and security risks and threats across the Pacific:

- At the 2018 **Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)**, leaders affirmed that "climate change presents the single greatest threat to the livelihood, security and wellbeing of Pacific people". The current effects of climate change in the region, let alone the future intensity increase, demonstrate an existential threat to PIF nations.
- **New Zealand Defence Force** publishes climate security plans, *The Climate Crisis - Defence Readiness and Responsibilities* (2018) and *Responding to the Climate Crisis: An Implementation Plan* (2019).



Australia

By comparison, **Australia** has repeatedly ignored the risks and is ill-prepared for the security implications of devastating climate impacts at home and in the Asia-Pacific, the highest-risk region in the world.

- No climate security risk assessment.
- Inadequate and contradictory climate policy.

¹ climateandsecurity.org/2021/09/deepening-un-action-on-climate-security/

CLIMATE & SECURITY MAJOR EVENTS

Global momentum builds on climate security with Australia's key allies

JANUARY

US President Biden's Executive Order calls for an urgent whole-of-government climate-security risk analysis.

2021

MARCH

UK Ministry of Defence report on "Climate Change & Sustainability Strategic Approach" and an Initial Action Plan on climate & security risks.

AUGUST

Release of **IPCC AR 6** - "Code Red" Warning.

OCTOBER

Australian Security Leaders Climate Group *Missing In Action: Responding to Australia's Climate & Security Failure* report released.

Release of **The Pentagon** updated Climate Adaptation Plan.

Chatham House releases 2nd risk report *What near-term climate impacts should worry us most?*.

FEBRUARY

The **UNSC Climate and Security Debate** in the timeline. "Maintenance of international peace and security: Climate and security" Date 23 Feb 21.

JUNE

World Climate & Security Report 2021 released.

SEPTEMBER

First ever leader-level summit of the **Quad pledge** to strengthen cooperation on the defining challenges of our time, including the threat of climate change and security challenges facing the region.

UNSC declares climate security an indispensable issue for Security Council. UNSC increasing focus, debated more than a dozen times since 2007.

UN Security Council Debate on Climate and Security.

Chatham House Climate Change Risk Assessment released.

OCTOBER - NOVEMBER

COP26 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference.

Climate, Peace and Stability: Weathering Risk Through COP and Beyond. High-level side event at COP26 will set out an evidence-based, coherent narrative on climate, peace and stability.

MAJOR CLIMATE SECURITY HOTSPOTS

Climate change & global insecurity

Climate change is transforming the way we think about security as it is now widely acknowledged as the greatest global security threat.

1 Arctic

Fastest warming on Earth is opening the region to new Great Power strategic and resource competition, with increasing militarisation of the polar zone.

2 United States

Climate and security risks central to defence and foreign policy. US military exposed to climate risks globally, and domestic facilities vulnerable. Nation impacted by more extreme weather, drought, wildfires, storms and water insecurity.

3 North Africa

Fires in Russia and drought in China affect global wheat supply; tripling of wheat price becomes a trigger for food riots and the "Arab Spring" across the Middle East and North Africa in 2010-11.

4 Sahel

Climate change is exacerbating food, water and land insecurity, and competition for scarce resources; fueling internal and cross-border instability, conflict and migration. Political vacuums exploited by terrorist groups such as Boko Haram.

5 Sub-Saharan Africa

Poverty, poor governance and instability interact with drying of sub-tropical zone and crop failures to become a "threat multiplier". Water crisis, such as South Africa's "Day Zero" (2018), cause widespread social and economic havoc".

6 Syria

Unprecedented one-in-a-thousand year drought from 2006-11, internal people displacement and inflow of refugees from Iraq war helped trigger societal collapse and civil war, with displacement of more than 12 million people, half across borders.

7 Europe

Climate-influenced Syria war refugee wave creates European political instability, fuels far right governments and social movements. Continent hit by unprecedented wildfires and heatwaves reaching 45°C in 2021, and record flooding.

8 South America

Warming and shifting rainfall patterns impacting water and food security. Instability, poverty and dislocation, a fertile ground for human trafficking and rising power of narcotics cartels.

9 South Asia

Accelerating sea-level rise threatens Asia megacities, river deltas and low-lying states. Bangladesh particularly vulnerable. By 2050, 250-340 million people may be affected. Acute water scarcity in Pakistan; threat of unliveable heat extremes across the region, with two nuclear armed states.



10 Himalayas

One-quarter of Himalayan, Tibetan and Tien Shen ice sheet mass already lost, threatening water flows in Asia's major rivers. Growing strategic sensitivity in a region where physical terrain is shifting fast.

11 Australia

Most vulnerable continent. Record-breaking drought precedes Black Summer bushfires in 2019/20 and cost up to \$100 billion, and deployment of 7000 troops for emergency relief.

12 China

Climate pressures on nation with 20% of the global population but only 6% of potable water. Threat of inundation of large coastal cities and low-lying industrial heartland; more extreme weather and floods; growing environmental risks. Increasing risk to state stability if economy falters as climate risks multiply.

13 Pacific Islands

Region experiencing severe droughts and stronger cyclones. Under threat due to rising sea levels, posing an existential risk to low-lying island nations. Likely increasing calls on regional military forces for disaster relief.

14 Antarctica

Changes in the structure of the Southern Ocean through climate change will have impacts globally, on weather, climate and fisheries (ie. food security). As fish stocks retreat to the poles, the Antarctic Treaty System may be challenged by countries wishing to exploit marine resources.

15 Indonesia

Indonesia has 10% of the global coastal areas that will be affected by sea level rise. This creates potential food security risks in our most populous neighbour.

CLIMATE & SECURITY

KEY ACTIONS FOR AUSTRALIA

The Australian Security Leaders Climate Group (ASLCG)

initial climate and security policy recommendations:

1 An urgent Climate & Security Risk Assessment

- Appoint a well-resourced, independently-chaired, expert panel to urgently conduct a comprehensive Climate and Security Risk Assessment, using the best available information, to report publicly within six months.
- Includes all relevant departments; risk, science, security professionals and experts; and international advisors.
- Draw on the experience and analysis of our allies and the Asia-Pacific region.

2 Establish a dedicated Office of Climate Threat Intelligence

- A “full spectrum” strategic approach by building an Australian climate risk “early warning system” capacity to identify and respond to current or emerging direct climate risks to national interests.
- Ongoing support to key stakeholders across the policy and innovation spheres as Australia’s national interest is threatened by severe, but increasingly plausible, climate change scenarios.
- Maximise the collective intelligence capacity and break down thematic, resource and organisational silos, to give longer-term perspectives, and provide regular assessments by consistent monitoring and evaluation of climate-security risks.

3 Triennial National Climate Risk Assessments

- Based on the model used in the USA, with triennial reports to Parliament, prepared by a high-level expert group working with relevant agencies including BoM, CSIRO and university researchers, to provide a regular, publicly-available assessment of climate trends, risks and impacts.
- A valuable tool for policy-making, in providing both national and regional projections, impacts and scenarios, and hence mitigation and adaptation frameworks.
- Provides a rigorous risk-management framework for government policy-making and planning across a wide range of portfolios, including transport, health, infrastructure, energy, environment, emergency services, and defence.

4 Build an Australian National Prevention & Resilience Framework

- Prepare a prevention and mitigation roadmap based on the best scientific advice and a precautionary risk-management framework.
- Australia must prepare for a world of rapidly changing global alliances and institutions; it cannot rely primarily on reactive responses, given the growing scale and complexity of the threats facing the nation.
- Military concepts of protection, prevention, preparedness and leadership will be critically important in addressing the climate emergency.

FOR EXPERT COMMENTARY ON CLIMATE & SECURITY

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Admiral Chris Barrie AC (Retd) is former Chief of the Defence Force. Chris Barrie retired in 2002 after 42 years in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). Since then, he has worked on strategic leadership issues as consultant, teacher and mentor at Oxford University, the National Defense University in Washington DC and at the Australian National University.

Based in **Canberra**.



Cheryl Durrant is former Director of Preparedness & Mobilisation, Australian Department of Defence, and was the Defence partner with the Australian National Resilience Taskforce's Disaster Vulnerability Profiling Project. Cheryl served 15 years with the Australian Army, specialising in strategic intelligence, information operations and domestic security.

Based in **Burnie**.



Air Vice-Marshal John Blackburn AO (Retd) is former Deputy Chief of the Royal Australian Air Force and currently the Chair of the Institute for Integrated Economic Research-Australia and also a consultant in the field of defence and national security. He has extensive experience across the fields of strategy, policy, planning, operational command, capability development and materials acquisition.

Based in **Canberra**.



Major Michael Thomas (Retd) is a former Australian Army officer and is a non-resident Senior Fellow with the Washington-based Center for Climate & Security where he co-leads the Indo-Pacific Program. He is also a council member with the International Military Council on Climate and Security and author of *The Securitisation of Climate Change* (2017).

Based in **Melbourne**.



Colonel Neil Greet (Retd) is a former Australian Army officer with operational service in Iraq and Timor Leste, who led projects in several remote indigenous communities and played a key role in Defence's response to Victoria's 2009 Black Saturday disaster. He is a Director of the Institute of Integrated Economics Research, and the consultancy Collaborative Outcomes.

Based in **Canberra**.



Ian Dunlop is a Member of the Club of Rome. He was formerly an international oil, gas and coal industry executive, chair of the Australian Coal Association, CEO of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, and chair of the federal government's first emissions trading taskforce, with wide experience in risk management.

Based in **Sydney**.

**OUR NATION IS ILL-PREPARED
FOR THE SECURITY IMPLICATIONS
OF DEVASTATING CLIMATE IMPACTS
AT HOME AND IN THE ASIA PACIFIC,
THE HIGHEST-RISK REGION
IN THE WORLD.**

Admiral Chris Barrie AC
Former Chief of the Australian Defence Force (Retd)