**“The Water and the Fish”:   
Dealing with Climate-Induced Crime, Insurrection and Domestic Terrorism**

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**Abstract**

Climate change is hindering the ability of countries to provide basic services in regions experiencing reduced rainfall during winter, soil degradation, and diminishing habitable areas. These factors increase the motivation of various groups to commit crimes against the local population, take control of natural resources in the area, and develop and intensify acts of rebellion and insurrection against the authorities as well as cross-border terrorism. This article seeks to illustrate the relationship between the climate crisis and countries’ ability to preemptively employ military strategies to minimize and eradicate violent activities of criminal organizations and other intrastate actors in areas particularly vulnerable to climate change. The analysis examines existing warfare theories applied against guerrilla and terrorist organizations operating within civilian populations, referred to as counterinsurgency (COIN) operations, and adapting them to climate-induced challenges using a novel model identified as counterinsurgency-climate change (COIN-CC).

**Keywords:** Climate change, violence, crime, terrorism, guerilla warfare, COIN

**Background**

Climate change is expected to escalate markedly in the coming decades and significantly affect life processes as we currently know them (IPCC, 2021; United Nations, 2019). These effects will result primarily from the rise in the Earth’s average surface temperature and will be characterized by an increase in extreme climate events. During the winter, there will be a higher likelihood of floods and intensified winds, leading to damage to infrastructure and settlement areas. In the summer, these changes will bring about extreme heatwaves that harm both animal and plant life, as well as the spread of massive wildfires (European, 2021; Heller, 2021; Paz & Kidar, 2007; UNFCCC, 2015). Based on forecasts by multiple international bodies led by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), these events and their impacts will continue to intensify over time and pose new challenges to personal and national security in the foreseeable future (IPCC, 2021; Karl & Trenberth, 2003).

In this context, various countries are already concerned about the developing security challenges arising from climate change, which correlate with escalating violence both domestically and across borders (Agnew, 2012; Seiyefa, 2019). These challenges provide fertile ground for the development of complex geostrategic conflicts in the international arena and the emergence of domestic threats among various groups in societies (Agnew, 2012; Bachar, 2021; Heller, 2021; Schwartz & Randall, 2003). Driving these threats are a decrease in global food supply capabilities, changes in water sources (due to decreased rainfall feeding reservoirs and human-induced changes to artificial water channels), land degradation, accelerated desertification, intensifying natural disasters, and the depletion of essential resources. In addition to all of these, the emergence and spread of diseases due to climate change will pose a major health threat throughout the 21st century (Costello et al., 2009).

The challenges posed by climate change not only introduce a series of new internal threats to nations and their security systems, but also limit their ability to counter these threats using traditional military means. These threats manifest in the proliferation of criminal elements, uprisings against the state, and exploitation of the situation by both domestic and cross-border terrorist actors. This phenomenon is not strictly limited to climate-vulnerable areas; neighboring regions are also impacted by waves of refugees seeking more livable conditions and violent organizations attempting to seize control of water and food resources to secure supplies for themselves or the communities they support in their areas of origin (Agnew, 2012; Bachar, 2021; Sue Surkis, 2021). Therefore, in order to maintain regional stability, it is imperative that various countries identify climate-vulnerable hotspots and take preemptive action against malicious actors who may exploit the climate crisis in these areas.

The current article seeks to illustrate the link between the climate crisis and its various manifestations and the ability of countries to employ military measures for missions ranging from preemptively eradicating localized crime and violence to taking broad-scale action against groups endeavoring to challenge the government and even engage in international terrorism. The analysis involves examining existing counterinsurgency operations (COIN) theories and adapting them to the emerging challenges posed by climate change and extreme weather events. To this end, we will introduce the concept of COIN-CC (COIN-climate change), which draws upon Mao Zedong’s “fish and water” theory, according to which a guerrilla force’s survival in a region depends on its ability to assist the local population in exchange for shelter and support. We argue that climate change creates new opportunities for malicious actors to engage in such activity, and that consequently, it is vital for the state to monitor and respond to the growing needs of populations in climate-vulnerable areas to eradicate criminal activities at an early stage.

**The Escalating Violence in Climate-Vulnerable Areas**

In recent years, many researchers have been investigating the link between climate change and the surge in violence across various domains, ranging from minor offenses such as vandalism, theft, or drug use (Vergunst et al., 2022), to more serious crimes such as homicide (Hsiang et al., 2013; Mares & Moffett, 2019). For example, the General Affective Aggression Model (GAAM) indicates a correlation between rising temperatures and increased aggression in various behavioral situations, such as reckless driving or a willingness to use physical violence against another person (Mares & Moffett, 2019).

However, models like GAAM emphasize the significance of potential catalysts that may be amplified due to climate change. The link between climate change and violent tendencies is particularly pronounced when coupled with low socioeconomic conditions, compromised health, or existing psychological difficulties (frustration, stress, mental illnesses) (Agnew, 2012; Hsiang et al., 2013). Similarly, climate change will affect the rise of both individual and organized crime in regions already grappling with escalating economic or other crises.

In its 2014 principal report, the IPCC highlighted the escalating threat to human security as climate change intensifies, due to a sharp decline in the state’s ability to provide essential public services, which would force individuals to turn to non-state actors to meet their basic needs (Field et al., 2014; Seiyefa, 2019; Toffler, 1980). A 2015 document published by the G7 (the Group of Seven industrialized nations) defines climate change as a factor exacerbating political pressures in specific climatically fragile geographic areas (Rüttinger et al., 2015). In these areas, the local population is already becoming more dependent on non-state actors (such as civilian organizations and local militias) and finds itself in constant competition for access to local and external resources with other populations also characterized by a lack of physical and psychological security (Agnew, 2012; Mares & Moffett, 2019; Seiyefa, 2019).

In a recent discussion held by the United Nations Security Council it was noted that there are currently 15 countries around the world embroiled in conflicts due to their exposure to harsh climate conditions, including Iraq, Syria, and Mali (UN, 2021). As climate change intensifies in their region, more countries are expected to join this group. These countries, along with others, are grappling with a dual crisis, where their internal systems are crumbling, rendering them unable to prevent the emergence of malicious actors due to lack of governance, economic instability, poverty, acts of terrorism, and more (Fund for Peace, 2022; UN, 2021). Of the 15 countries mentioned in the UN discussion, most of which are in Africa, eight are already receiving assistance from foreign forces (peacekeeping forces and/or external actors) to help maintain order and stability (Seiyefa, 2019). Discussions and numerous documents produced by major international bodies indicate a deepening connection between the climate crisis and the development of conditions conducive to the growth of criminal infrastructure, insurrection, and even terrorism. In some cases, the development of criminal infrastructure occurs with the encouragement of the government or local government officials due to the state’s inability to provide essential services to the population in the face of climate change (Agnew, 2012). Based on the Fragile State Index (FSI)[[1]](#footnote-1) produced by the Fund for Peace (FFP) and the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) Country Index[[2]](#footnote-2), Table 1 demonstrates a high correlation between countries tangibly impacted by the climate crisis and countries that are fragile, i.e., failing in most of the parameters examined due a variety of other factors (Fund for Peace, 2022; University of Notre Dame, 2020). Therefore, it can be argued that in countries with harsh climate conditions that are expected to worsen there is a much higher prevalence of violence, posing challenges for both local governments and other international actors.

**Table 1. The Correlation between Fragile Countries and Countries Impacted by the Climate Crisis**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Country** | **FSI Ranking** | **ND-GAIN Country Index Ranking** |
| Chad | 182 (1) | 9 |
| Central African Republic | 181 (2) | 5 |
| Guinea-Bissau | 180 (3) | 12 |
| Eritrea | 179 (4) | 18 |
| Democratic Republic of Congo | 178 (5) | 6 |
| Sudan | 177 (6) | 7 |
| Nigeria | 176 (7) | 16 |
| Afghanistan | 175 (8) | 8 |
| Yemen | 171 (12) | 1 |
| Mali | 170 (13) | 14 |
| Syria | 153 (30) | 3 |
| Iraq | 120 (63) | 23 |
| Out of | 182 countries | 179 countries |

Note: The FSI ranking is inverted, so that the lower a country’s position in the ranking, the more fragile it is. A relative adjustment appears in parentheses to facilitate easy comparison between the two indices.

As Table 1 indicates, there is a relatively strong correlation between the country’s climate crisis ranking and its fragility ranking.

Furthermore, it should be emphasized that the internal problems associated with both crises (climate and national fragility) create events that have ramifications beyond the domestic arena. Malicious actors often do not distinguish between countries and tend to move between them, so that a complex development within one country can impact the entire region. As the rise of extremist elements within countries can also contribute to international terrorism, these situations will require foreign governments to intervene directly or indirectly through peacekeeping operations, COIN operations, and even full-scale military intervention to maintain stability and prevent the spread of violence beyond borders.

On the other hand, other studies emphasize that extreme living conditions and a lack of basic resources are not sufficient to predict the phenomenon of terrorist activity. Many terrorist entities around the world are driven by extreme ideologies that lead them to target political entities and often emerge independently of geographical conditions (Jenkins, 2020; US DOD, 2021). However, harsh climatic conditions and a significant lack of essential resources due to droughts or wildfires create a fertile ground for both individual and organized violent actors to grow stronger by exploiting the population’s perception that the state cannot provide solutions. Prominent examples include terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State (ISIS) operating in Iraq and Syria and the Boko Haram terrorist organization operating in northern Nigeria, which exploit the severe food shortages in these regions to gain support.

The phenomenon of armed groups operating against state interests is not a new one. However, the increasing diversity of hybrid organizational structures and their varying degrees of engagement with both internal and external populations distinguish these groups from traditional non-state actors and lead to new patterns of violence (Nett & Rüttinger, 2016). These emerging actors include a blend of criminal elements, anti-government factions seeking to overthrow the regime, and even various forms of terrorist groups, operating collectively under a loosely affiliated umbrella organization or shared ideology.

**The Escalating Violence in Other Climate-Vulnerable Areas**

In addition to the emergence of domestic violent actors in regions already grappling with extreme heat and droughts, larger populations in extensive areas outside these climate-vulnerable zones are indirectly affected by a range of developing phenomena. These include: (1) conflicts over the control of areas where water sources are still available; (2) clashes over access to food, cattle-grazing areas, and other resources; (3) the spread of diseases from climate-affected areas to the surrounding regions; (4) increased migration from climate-risk areas to regions with more favorable conditions; and (5) increased abduction and forced recruitment of civilians by local organizations, both in secure regions and in areas where access to resources is more challenging.

A water crisis resulting from climate change is escalating in regions where water is already a scarce commodity. However, the competition this will lead to will also impact areas where water is still available. States and even sub-state entities will act to hoard, divert, and restrict the amount of drinkable water available to other parties not affiliated with or supportive of the government or entity in question. This dynamic has already led to increased conflicts between countries in recent decades. Examples include the conflict between Egypt and Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance dam, which threatens to reduce the water flow in the Nile, and the diversion of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers by dam constructions in Turkey and Syria that has dried up inhabited areas in Iraq (Thomson, 2017).

In addition to water access, the climate crisis will significantly impact food production, particularly crops and livestock for consumption, in regions where the crisis is already affecting conditions and is expected to worsen, which will intensify competition for the remaining fertile lands. It is estimated that 20 percent of the global population will face severe food conditions by 2050 (WFP, 2021) due to soil degradation, decreased rainfall in some areas, increased floods in others, food destruction due to heat, the drying up of fish-farming ponds, and damage to fields caused by storms (Gregory et al., 2005; Jägermeyr et al., 2021; WMO, 2019). These in turn will contribute to increased food price volatility and the emergence of criminal actors seeking to control existing food supplies and imports. All these factors will continue to exacerbate local violence as well as violence spilling over into other regions.

Furthermore, farmers affected by the activities of violent organizations seeking to seize control of their crops will cease food production, further widening the gap in self-sufficiency. An example of this effect can be seen in the actions of the Boko Haram organization in Nigeria, which sought to seize local food resources in northeast Nigeria by stealing from and slaughtering the local population. As this activity intensified, the organization found itself chasing non-existent food sources as farmers abandoned their lands, leading to a significant decrease in regional production (Searcey, 2016). Beyond water and food, other resources defined as scarce in these countries will also diminish (Agnew, 2012). For example, the demand for fuel will increase under extreme climate conditions, as it is crucial for extracting groundwater, desalination, transporting food, cultivating lands, and operating energy systems.

Another challenge expected to spread from climatic risk zones outward is a surge in diseases and pests following extreme events, which will affect the personal security of inhabitants long after the event is over (IPCC, 2021; Knutson, 2021). For example, in 2022, Pakistan experienced devastating floods, which quickly precipitated the outbreak of diseases such as cholera due to the presence of stagnant, contaminated waters that went undrained. These diseases quickly spread to regions that were not directly affected by the flooding. A rapid increase in illness in places without adequate medical services will lead to the emergence of violent actors seeking to exploit the situation, primarily by gaining control over the limited medical supplies, taking advantage of available food and drinkable water resources, extorting money, and stealing aid equipment coming from outside (Paz & Kidar, 2007; WMO, 2019).

Difficulties in obtaining food and water and the spread of diseases lead to increased migration into areas where the effects of the changing climate are not as pronounced. Migration is a common phenomenon among populations in unstable conditions. As violence intensifies within a given territory due to competition for food and the loss of sources of livelihood, individuals and entire communities will seek new places to live (Agnew, 2012; Reuveny, 2007). According to estimates by the World Bank, in the coming years the climate crisis is expected to lead to the migration of over 200 million people worldwide (Clement et al., 2021). This trend will put pressure on various countries to address the issue of migration. Beyond the interstate tensions that will arise as a result of migration waves, this phenomenon will lead various elements within countries to seek informal and illegal sources of livelihood. More radical elements may even exploit migration routes for engaging in organized crime and/or various forms of terrorist activities.

The lack of sovereignty and competition over natural resources enable extremist elements to more easily recruit low-cost personnel to bolster their physical strength. This includes forced recruitment and the abduction of individuals in neighboring areas. While media attention in recent years has been directed toward migrant workers and climate refugees who settled in Europe and chose to join the ranks of ISIS organizations for ideological reasons, most of these organizations’ new local recruits are not motivated by strong ideologies or any ideology at all. They are often young people and children living in extreme conditions, impoverished farmers, and individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds whose prospects are limited. Such people will primarily be driven by the need to survive or escape their current situation, further exacerbating forced recruitments into violent organizations as well as various manifestations of modern slavery.

The five phenomena mentioned above (access to water, access to food and essential resources, diseases, migration, and forced recruitment) occur primarily in areas with inherent instability and pre-existing low socioeconomic conditions, where conflicts are routine, illegal trade (e.g., weapons, drugs) is easily facilitated, and more. All of this, combined with internal political instability and external geopolitical pressure, will lead to the strengthening and rise of criminal organizations, civil unrest, and even terrorism (Seiyefa, 2019).

This entire analysis pertains to failed states, a phenomenon that must be addressed.

**Responding to the Challenge of Internal Violence: “The Water and the Fish” Theory**

“The Water and the Fish” theory is the brainchild of Chinese military strategist and philosopher Mao Zedong, who went on to lead the People’s Republic of China until his death in September 1976. The theory underscores the crucial link between the local population and guerrilla and terrorist groups operating within it or relying on it for sustenance and shelter. Mao’s central idea, as outlined in his book *On Guerrilla Warfare* (1937), emphasizes the vital relationship guerrilla fighters (the fish) must maintain with the population (the water) to ensure their survival and execute their plans. Through the “water and fish” analogy, Mao argues that in order to survive, a force operating in an area must acknowledge, respect, and assist the local population and cause them no harm. Only then will the population agree to provide the insurgent forces with essential support, such as shelter, food, water, and weapons for self-defense against rival populations. Mao writes that “it is only undisciplined troops who make the people their enemies” (Tovy, 2009, 2017). In other words, a neutral local population will provide fertile ground for an adversarial force to conduct its operations, as long as that force refrains from harming them and seeks ways to win their favor. By doing so, the population in return will enable the adversarial force to continue surviving in the territory until it achieves its desired objectives.

Mao’s writings have inspired numerous military books describing how countries and military forces can take the “water and fish” model and apply it in in reverse, i.e., as part of COIN operations (Tovy, 2017). These models now also include strategies to counter various criminal and terrorist activities, some of which have adopted warfare tactics used by guerilla organizations inspired by Mao’s ideas, operating worldwide, especially in South America. The U.S. Department of Defense defines counterinsurgency operations as “comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes” (U.S. DOD, 2021). In essence, they involve separating the “water” from the “fish” to help “dry up” the environment that enables the insurgents to thrive. In the U.S. Department of Defense dictionary, counterinsurgency appears alongside the acronym COIN (U.S. DOD, 2021), and the military field manual (FM 90-8) defines the tasks associated with it as “involving a wide range of measures intended to liberate and protect society from subversion, illegal elements, and insurgency” (U.S. Army, 1986). The British Army also refers to COIN operations as “activity designed to expand and strengthen the legitimacy of military forces in the arena and improve military effectiveness” (British Army, 2003). “Counter-rebellion” is another interpretation of the term COIN (Tovy, 2009). Here, the concept can be linked to elements that are not necessarily nationalistic, but rather entities that challenge governmental authority by inciting civil disobedience. These entities adversely affect society both directly and indirectly in various ways, including but not limited to theft, exploitation, and illegal trade.

According to the “water and fish” model, the overarching goal of COIN operations is to deny the enemy access to information and logistics (with an emphasis on water, food, and warfare resources), weaken its ability to raise funds and recruit new operatives, prevent it from enjoying safe havens, and undermine its legitimacy. COIN models also suggest ways of enlisting the support of the local population on behalf of the forces operating against the enemy in the region. By enlisting the local population, intelligence agents can obtain information about the enemy, target its key operatives, thwart its activities against the forces (prevent ambushes, raids on facilities, etc.), seize its weapons, and more (British Army, 2003; Thompson, 1965; Tovy, 2009; US Army, 1986). Thus, the most critical idea embodied in COIN strategies is separating the support base provided by the local population from the extremist entity.

In recent decades, various COIN operations have been conducted worldwide, with varying degrees of success. These include the French campaign in Algeria, the British presence in Northern Ireland, the prolonged U.S. conflict in Vietnam, followed by its interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Israel’s presence in the West Bank. These operations were deemed vital to maintain stability in the region and prevent hostile entities from entering into neighboring territories and other countries. In some cases, success resulted primarily from effective planning and implementation of COIN efforts, while in others, there were significant failures due to poor application of the guiding principles (Tovy, 2009).

Several components enable COIN operations to be implemented to gain the support of the local population. These include establishing relationships between the community and the military through joint initiatives, social and employment projects fully sponsored by the military, counselling, assistance in providing essential services, assistance in supplying food, water, and medicine, maintaining public order, and protecting the population from criminal organizations. The British army guidebook further emphasizes that the local population must not be harmed; there is a ban on depriving locals of employment, and close collaboration between those providing and those receiving the assistance is essential to identify and address real needs in a timely manner. Merely providing temporary assistance in the form of foreign aid will not lead to the desired outcome (British Army, 2003; Thompson, 1965; Tovy, 2009).

**COIN-CC Operations as a Response to Climate Change Challenges**

The climate crisis poses an even greater challenge to curbing the growth and influence of extremist elements within and outside regions particularly vulnerable to environmental crises. Consequently, CION operations by governmental and external actors are becoming crucial for separating “the water from the fish.” This article refers to these operations as CION-CC (Counter Insurgency – Climate Change) operations, drawing from insights presented in the previous section. In line with Mao’s ideas, the central rationale presented here is the need to separate the population affected by the climate crisis from the malicious actors, by implementing a systematic five-stage process. The process includes gathering intelligence and conducting a preliminary analysis of the problem and potential solutions. This is followed by two intermediate stages focused on providing targeted assistance to gain a foothold within the population and promoting its independent capacity for coping with the crisis in the future. In the later stages, the forces are required to carry out focused processes aimed at changing the population’s attitude toward all the players in the region and weakening the malicious actors. These stages must be executed in line with guiding principles to maximize their effectiveness and prevent a reverse trend wherein the population opts to continue engaging with the malicious actors.

**Figure 1: The COIN-CC Model**

**(Insert here - see PP)**

The five main stages of the COIN-CC model are as follows:

**Intelligence gathering and preliminary analysis of challenges:** Preliminary intelligence must be gathered in areas particularly vulnerable to climate conditions, followed by a comprehensive analysis of the problems arising from these conditions, both in winter and summer. In addition, a climate forecast for the next two decades must be constructed. To achieve this, intelligence agencies should collaborate with climatologists, agronomists, and other scientists who can assess the challenges and needs in relation to the land and resources available in the area. Merging early intelligence gathering with an in-depth analysis of the problem is essential for tailoring a proportionate solution that can be provided over the necessary duration of time. The intelligence gathered should include a practical understanding of what is currently lacking, what will be lacking in a decade, and what external aid is required. It should address the various groups operating in the area and their relations with the local and national government as well as other groups in the region. Finally, it should include an understanding of how the situation is affecting the stability of the local government, why the local government is not providing the necessary assistance, where the key bottlenecks are, and which entities in the area can help resolve them.

**Life-saving assistance:** The executing body must build a stable and sustainable logistical supply chain to the vulnerable area. This supply chain should include essential resources that are in short supply, such as water, food, baby products, medicines, and resources and machines for producing energy (e.g., generators, solar panels, and electricity storage solutions). The supply chain should only be provided after an in-depth gap analysis has been conducted in relation to the size of the distressed population, so as not leave excess reserves that might spoil or be stolen for trading purposes. As the operation progresses, ongoing assistance must be provided to secure the population’s support of the assisting forces and entities and ensure it does not turn to malicious actors for additional assistance. This ongoing assistance must be reviewed and evaluated periodically to determine whether it needs to be increased, reduced, or stopped.

**Training the population:** The local population needs to be trained on how to optimize their use of the scarce resources that remain. This should include, for example, introducing crops that are adapted to local climate conditions or teaching water- and fertilizer-saving cultivation methods. All of these will allow the locals to become more self-sufficient in the long term and provide an incentive for them to stay in the area rather than migrate elsewhere. However, it is imperative to support the local population in building a facilitating local infrastructure that equips them with essential tools for coping with the problems identified in the first stage. It is crucial to involve the local population in this process so they perceive the new infrastructure as emerging from within the community, rather than as something imposed by external entities attempting to infiltrate the region, a perception that might lead to infrastructure sabotage.

**Undermining the legitimacy of malicious forces:** The forces providing aid must constantly promote the idea among the population that aligning with extremist, violent, or separatist elements will not benefit them and will actually worsen their quality of life in the long term. This is based primarily on inculcating the understanding that at best these malicious entities offer short-term fixes to problems that will only become worse as they are rooted in changing climate conditions. Accordingly, assisting forces must clearly convey the specific implications of climate change and its impact on the region. This will help the population grasp the long-term nature of the challenges and that the actions taken by state forces are designed to improve their situation and prepare them for the future.

**Armed military operations:** Military forces and assisting entities in the area must constantly take action against emerging malicious actors. These actions should primarily focus on preventing harm to civilians who do not comply with insurgent demands, preventing resources from reaching these malicious actors, preventing the recruitment of additional members to their rank, and primarily, diminishing their power. This warfare should rely on physical force as well as awareness campaigns that convey key messages and guide the positive efforts of the forces. The underlying assumption is that the more sustained and effective the preceding four stages are, the smaller the need for armed military operations and required resources will become.

To ensure the effectiveness of the five stages constituting the COIN-CC model, emphasis must be placed on the following five principles:

**Preserving sovereignty:** In cases where the operation does not take place within the state’s territory but in another sovereign state particularly vulnerable to climate change, it is essential to obtain approval for various COIN operations from the hosting country. These operations must adhere to the laws of the hosting state to ensure that cultural values and governmental mechanisms are not undermined. This principle is critical for reinforcing the hosting state’s sovereignty and preparing it for the period following the external forces’ departure. Furthermore, it prevents the leadership from appearing weak in the face of internal and external political opposition and most importantly, it serves to maintain positive future relations between the assisting and hosting states.

**Equality in assistance:** Giving clear preference to one entity or group over another within the population requiring assistance, whether in resource allocation, granting work contracts, or providing training, can lead parts of the population to turn to the malicious actors to obtain the help they need. This will alienate favored individuals and groups from the rest of the population and push them toward increased dependency on the assisting entities. Such a scenario might also draw in other individuals and groups who are wavering regarding whether to support the assisting or malicious entities.

**Securing supply chains and aid stockpiles:** Malicious actors may choose to attack assisting forces, supply chains bringing resources from outside, aid stockpiles, and possibly even the population that is unwilling to engage with them. These events can further exacerbate the fragile situation. Security measures, including armed forces operating on significant platforms, will help protect these facilities and prevent them from being harmed. Even if armed forces do not actively participate in COIN-CC operations, they should support civilian aid entities, particularly by providing protection. In other words, aid that is not accompanied by armed protection may become a target, especially in the initial stages of aid provision.

**Gradual allocation:** Aid should be allocated over an extended period of time rather than in a single action or a series of actions over a short time span. Distributing all the resources within a short period will lead to several negative effects. For example, surplus aid could fall into malicious hands, allowing the population to “play both sides” (i.e., receive assistance from the state while supporting malicious elements that supply their needs from stolen surplus). In addition, providing all the aid at once will require an investment of greater resources by the aid forces and will reduce the motivation to provide assistance over time to ensure that the population receives what it needs and disengages from the malicious actors once the state and foreign military forces gradually withdraw from the area.

**Operational expansion:** It is not sufficient to operate in a single location, especially in cases related to climate change. Expanding the operational area will serve to reach a much larger population and strengthen its alliance with assisting forces. Various COIN models refer to this as “expanding the oil spot.” It entails selecting one or more focal areas for initially implementing the plan and then expanding it as needed. Initial locations are chosen to gauge the effectivity of various aspects of the plan and positive results are then extended to new areas. The areas selected should strike a balance between particularly vulnerable areas, where success is not feasible and requires significant investments without yielding substantial results, which will become completely ineffective once state forces leave, and areas where providing assistance is relatively easy, with a high likelihood that the population can independently manage the impacts of the climate crisis even without external support. In other words, the chosen areas should be those where reasonable investments will produce tangible results that increase over time.

Failure to follow a structured methodology that begins with gathering intelligence, analyzing the problem, and creating a comprehensive strategy, will hinder the mission’s success. Furthermore, it is imperative to adhere to the principles presented above to prevent opposition among the population, secure the commitment of government officials, and remove barriers within the national and local government in order to create a continuous, complete, and effective process.

Moreover, as mentioned above, most dual crises occur in failed states. Therefore, government or external COIN-CC operations alone are not enough to defeat malicious actors. COIN-CC operations must be combined with additional government actions to change the situation. These include:

Military actions: targeting the hierarchical structure of the malicious organization, obstructing funds, damaging weapon supply chains, preventing the recruitment of additional “soldiers,” damaging infrastructure, thwarting activities, and more.

Civil actions: providing extensive public services by state institutions such as education, healthcare, transportation, and so on.

Integrated activities across all these domains will help establish political legitimacy, enhance governance, and reduce the ability of various malicious actors to operate and thrive in these areas.

**Conclusion**

Climate change is likely to intensify intrastate violence in various ways, including physical violence against populations and the restriction of access to resources. This violence will empower and enable non-state malicious actors such as criminal organizations, insurgent groups, and even terrorist entities to exploit these changes and work to strengthen and expand their activities. These effects will be particularly pronounced in regions where resources are scarce and the state cannot guarantee a continuous supply of water, food, and other essential services. In some cases, these effects will be geographically limited to the areas most vulnerable to climate change. In other cases, they will spread to neighboring areas through waves of refugees and violent organizations attempting to seize control of water and food resources, at times with the state’s encouragement or tacit approval. In light of this, even countries not directly affected by climate change must identify hotspots prone to harm and act preemptively against malicious actors who may exploit the crisis in these areas.

The international community and countries that have an interest in maintaining regional stability must lead initiatives that link climate change mitigation with the prevention of violent conflicts. Relevant parties should identify regions where the climate crisis is likely to foster malicious actors and implement the COIN-CC stages described in this article. Merging the “fish and water” model with additional methods of crime control, counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism, coupled with ongoing efforts to combat global warming, will enable different regions to achieve relative stability and realize their interests both within the state and in the international arena. Failure to implement this model and ignoring the need to address the root of the problem could facilitate the growth of extremist elements that will become much more difficult to control over time as the effects of climate change continue to intensify.

1. The FSI ranks states according to their fragility by assessing various parameters such as security, economic factors, human rights, state legitimacy, provision of public services, refugees and internally displaced persons, external intervention, and more. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The ND-GAIN Country Index ranks countries according their vulnerability to climate change. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)