

EPICENTERS OF CLIMATE AND SECURITY: THE NEW GEOSTRATEGIC LANDSCAPE OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

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NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

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“Epicenters of Climate and Security: The New Geostrategic Landscape of the Anthropocene” is a multi-author, edited volume exploring a range of “epicenters” of climate and security and how they shape the geostrategic map of the 21st century. These epicenters are defined as “categories of systemic risk” driven by a changing climate interacting with other socio-political-economic dynamics.

A systemic risk is a risk to a component or components of a system that, due to the critical nature of the components, can significantly disrupt (and sometimes collapse) the whole system that depends on it. In this report, an “epicenter” is defined as a category of systemic risk, or simply a collection of systemic risks with similar characteristics – a kind of “super-systemic risk.” For example, the Strait of Malacca is a major maritime trade route connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans that is critical for global trade and security. Risks to freedom of navigation through the Strait of Malacca, or broader risks to the stability of the Strait, can therefore be described as a systemic risk to global trade and global security. However, there is more than one critical maritime trade route in the world. The Strait of Hormuz, the Panama Canal, the Arctic Northwest Passage are just a few of these critical nodes in the global trade system. Many of these straits will face disruptions as a result of a changing climate. Together, these straits present a category of systemic risks to global trade and security, and are therefore considered an “epicenter” of climate and security.¹ This volume explores many such epicenters.

These epicenters are, in many ways, without precedent and unique to the “Anthropocene” era - the period of Earth’s history we are currently in, according to Simon Lewis and

Mark Maslin.² The Anthropocene is characterized by humans having considerably (and possibly irreversibly) altered the global ecosystem, including the atmosphere. The risks described in each of the epicenter chapters are risks that could exist, in one form or another, during a time of climate stability. However, rapid climate change exacerbates these risks significantly.

These epicenters encompass a range of critical geographies that together make up central pillars of global security. Their vulnerability to climate change presents a significant risk to that security. The epicenters of climate and security explored in this report have characteristics that meet the following three criteria:

1. Critical for global security (e.g. a localized disruption to the epicenter could scale-up to higher order security scenarios and to the regional and international scale);
2. Vulnerable to a rapidly-changing climate (e.g. increased intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, sea level rise);
3. Categories of risk present in multiple locations around the world, rather than being specific to one geographic location (e.g. megacities, small island nations, water-weaponization).

Each of these epicenters, individually – indeed, each of the systemic risks contained within each epicenter - should be cause for concern among policy-makers and planners worldwide. Collectively, however, the vulnerability of these epicenters presents a potentially dramatic threat to global security with considerable disruption to the geostrategic landscape. In that context, each chapter in this volume presents a particular “epicenter,” while the whole volume presents a picture of a potentially unprecedented threat to global security. Hence, the nature of these risks mean that the tools required to anticipate and manage them will have to evolve to find the signals in the noise.

NOTES

1 See “Dire Straits: Strategically-significant International Waterways in a Warming World,” by Adam H. Goldstein and Constantine Samaras in this volume for more on straits as epicenters of climate and security.

2 Lewis, S, and Maslin, M, “Defining the Anthropocene,” *Nature*, Vol 519, pp. 171-180, March 12, 2015