

## Event Summary: Bridging the Climate Divide: Can Risk Management Reveal a Prudent Path Forward?

By: Kerri Rance and Matthew Ward

Despite increasing recognition that global climate change poses significant risks to national security, uncertainty remains about how best to develop and implement a strategic planning framework to limit the most severe impacts. Preparing to manage this risk will require thoughtful and frank discussions that are currently out of step in the current politically polarized atmosphere surrounding climate change issues in the United States. CSIS brought together the authors of a new E3G report, *Degrees of Risk: Defining a Risk Management Framework for Climate Security*, along with representatives from the Office of the Oceanographer of the Navy and Office of the Secretary of Defense to discuss these issues and steps currently being taken to mitigate the threats of climate change.

The discussion began with presentations two of the report's authors, Dr. Jay Gulledge, Senior Scientist and Director for Science and Impacts at the Pew Center on Global Climate Change and Nick Mabey, Founding Director of E3G. The report presents a new risk management framework for discussing the issues surrounding climate change. The authors hope the framework will reframe the debate and re-align the political, diplomatic, and financial investments made by countries with the actual risks that stem from climate change. This framework would provide policy makers a tool for developing comprehensive strategies to address the security threats that can result from climate change. In their view, not only will a risk management system address the expected climate issues, it will provide a way to manage and mitigate the substantial unknowns.

Gulledge described risk as the *probability* an event will occur multiplied by the *severity* of the event. This calculation shows that risks can be significant even in the face of great uncertainty – as is the case with global climate change - but that uncertainty alone should not paralyze our willingness to act on the issue. In the climate debate, the greatest unknown is how quickly and severely the climatic system will react to slight changes in natural patterns. The authors agree that our best estimate for average global temperature rise is 3°C. However, there remains a 10% chance that the climate will warm more than 5°C, the consequences of which are much more severe. The authors posit that although the probability of seeing a 5°C increase in temperatures is lower, from a risk management perspective, the severity of resulting impacts would be much greater. Therefore, reducing emissions today holds greater value as it will, in turn, reduce the probability of reaching the 5°C mark.

Mabey suggested that a risk management strategy should be built on a Three-Tier “ABC” Framework:

- Aim to mitigate to stay below 2°C target
- Build and balance a budget for resilience that assumes at least a 3-4°C change

- Develop a contingency plan with the capacity to respond to 5-7°C change

E3G's report put forth 10 recommendations that are foundational for implementing a risk management framework. These recommendations include:

- Sufficient mitigation goals – aggressive mitigation to lower greenhouse gas concentrations rapidly reduces the probability of extreme outcomes
- Resilient and flexible global climate regime – must include strong rules for reporting & transparency, and provide contingency options that allow the system to make up for missed reductions
- Creation of a crash response for the worst case scenario in order to mitigate the effect of panic should the existing plans fail. There is currently a reluctance to plan for the worst case scenario even though there is agreement about the dire consequences the worst case would bring

Mabey points out that many governments have not committed to an independent national climate security risk assessment, or commissioned an institution (independent of the policy making chain) to monitor and evaluate effectiveness of national policies in achieving strategic outcomes. This lack of broad-based national data prohibits policy makers from developing objective policies that address the greatest threats to their nations. There is an opportunity for countries to improve their risk management systems by developing these national assessments, increasing their investments in transformational technology R&D and filling critical information and data gaps that currently exist.

After Gullede and Mabey's presentations, Courtney St. John from the Office of the Oceanographer of the Navy, and Dr. Daniel Chiu from Office of the Secretary of Defense presented their agencies' views on planning, echoing the need for a more coordinated effort to climate change risk planning. The Strategy Office of the Secretary of Defense, recognizing the complexity, uncertainty and change inherent in the future security environment, has adopted a risk management framework. This framework is used because strategic planning cannot rely on the robustness of predictive powers, therefore DOD must manage risk across a range of challenges and time frames to navigate the complexity of short and long term security challenges posed by climate change. Although these issues have come to the forefront of planning, Dr. Chiu reminded the group that they are constrained by the budget and cost-benefit analysis.

The conclusion reached by the panelists was, aside from re-litigating the science of climate change, it's not a topic most people want to talk about. Yet, the authors argue that now is the time for refreshed thinking and new approaches which will reengage people in the dialogue about climate change, and what is to be done given current global and national priorities. A risk management approach highlights the need to constantly reevaluate existing policy choices and assumptions rather than remaining content with the status quo.