



Climate Change, Migration, and Conflict in the Amazon and the Andes

Rising Tensions and Policy Options in South America

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Introduction and summary

This report examines the interactions of climate change, environmental degradation, migration, and conflict in the Amazon; the tropical savannahs of Brazil—the Cerrado—and Bolivia; the Andean highlands of Peru and Bolivia; and the arid coastal plain of Peru.¹ These regions represent the major geographic and climatic regions of the continent, encompass the range of socioeconomic trends reshaping the region, and capture the new heartland of the continent’s illicit economies, including the global cocaine trade.

The natural wealth of the Amazon and the Andes is a crucial strategic resource. The Amazon is central to the regional and global climate and contains priceless biodiversity. The mineral wealth and energy resources of the Amazon and the Andes are also important contributors to the global supply chain and the macroeconomic growth of the region. Further, the Amazon and the Cerrado have adopted a crucial role in regional and global food security. Finally, the rivers and glaciers of the region are fundamental to the energy security, water security, and agricultural health of much of South America. For all these reasons, the areas defined in this report demand attention.

There are two caveats about this report. First, the study of climate change, migration, and conflict or insecurity in this region is more predictive in nature, compared to the earlier reports in this series. While many people in the region are experiencing profound dislocation or human insecurity because of the trends outlined in this report, the prospects for massive humanitarian disasters or country collapse are remote, unlike in Northwest Africa or the Bay of Bengal—topics of previous reports. Nonetheless, the trends are worrying and deserve the focused attention of policymakers in the Hemisphere.

Second, in line with the Climate, Migration, and Security Project, and driven by the evidence, this report is concerned with the periphery—the geographic and sociopolitical margins of the region. These peripheral regions or hinterlands are immense, far from the political and financial hubs of their countries and overwhelmingly rural with deeply entrenched poverty. Yet the pressures of population

and global demand for commodities have driven the rapid growth of towns and cities on this periphery, cities that face the challenge of navigating a path of sustainable, stable development in difficult environments.

This report looks at the most vulnerable residents of this periphery, particularly small-hold farmers and indigenous populations, and on the ungoverned or undergoverned marginal areas of the three countries studied. While the major urban centers and agricultural areas of Brazil's Northeastern, Southeastern, and Southern regions make cameo appearances because of their role in the regional migratory picture and international drug trade, they are not the focus of this report. Instead we examine how, in the peripheral regions of the Amazon and the Andes, an effective government presence is absent, rural livelihoods have been undermined, illicit economies have flourished, drug trafficking organizations and nonstate actors have put down deep roots, and the unregulated exploitation of natural resources and vulnerable populations continues apace.

New strategies are needed to comprehensively address these sources of instability. We must account for the dislocation caused by climate change and human mobility and facilitate smart and sustainable security strategies. Combating organized crime and the international narcotics trade, providing sustainable development, and preparing for the effects of climate change are the central challenges for the region in the decades to come.

These challenges intersect in the peripheral areas described in this paper, and military or police approaches to combat the presence of transnational criminal networks will not succeed without a more fundamental strategy for porous border regions.

The peripheral populations of the Amazon and the Andes must have their basic livelihoods protected in order to guarantee the future social and political stability of the region. They must be provided with effective governance that is capable of responding to the needs of its residents, regulating development, and protecting basic human security.

Governments must rise to the challenge and play the role of fair arbiter, balancing macroeconomic growth and the interests of extractive industry with equitable, sustainable development. The region's stability can only be protected by fairly resolving fundamental questions related to the division and proper management of natural resources. Government involvement is also needed to adapt to and prepare for climate change, along with providing relief for inevitable sudden-onset disasters linked to climate change.

To the extent possible, regional governments should seek to incentivize sustainable development, for example, by shaping infrastructure planning to encourage development of climate-resilient areas, and provide disincentives for those who seek to exploit particularly vulnerable regions. Finally, effective regional approaches to hydropower and renewable energy sources should be continued and expanded, and a more comprehensive, nonmilitary response to drug trafficking established.

While these efforts are the responsibility of all regional governments and numerous international organizations, it is particularly incumbent upon both Brazil and the United States to lead these processes.

For Brazil, there are fundamental reasons for protecting and sustaining the Amazon, so crucial to the economic health of the country. For both Brazil and the United States, successful action against the international trade in narcotics—and the illicit economies that grow in conjunction with it—will strengthen social stability in both countries, particularly in large urban centers.

By leading such regional efforts, Brazil also has an opportunity to define its 21st century global role in a progressive, peaceful way. And for the United States these efforts provide a chance to revive and sustain its hemispheric standing, have a partner in assuring stability in the region, establish long-term, sustainable economic relationships, and avoid future crises.

Given Latin America's economic rise, the United States and its European partners will have to manage a new modus vivendi to help steer regional transitions. For the United States, the challenge is to adapt defense and development policy to a new environment while coping with imminent budget cuts—crucial if the United States is to remain at the center of hemispheric affairs. South America, with Brazil at its heart, should form the centerpiece of a renewed engagement in democratic partnerships for the United States and Europe.

We begin with an overview of the issues covered in this paper, which include:

- The major economic changes taking place in Latin America, particularly Brazil
- The regional geographies and how they affect climate, migration, and conflict
- How climate change is affecting the region
- Increasing social instability due to economic and environmental shifts

We then examine these issues at play in Brazil, Peru, and Bolivia before moving to our recommendations for U.S. and Latin American policies to address them.

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