Presentation Title:
Sustainable Security, Fragile States Framework, and Enabling Climate Assessments

Presenters:
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Presentation Abstract:
The 2011 Defense Science Board report, “Trends and Implications of Climate Change for National and International Security,” highlights the urgency for our Nation’s defense mission to develop a climate information system. Of particular importance is that this system informs both short- and long-term implications of a changing climate on US national security interests. As the future security environment continues to evolve, identifying and understanding non-traditional factors that are emerging (such complex security, natural resource, and climate dynamics) becomes important across the full spectrum of operations. However, it is clear that the connections between climate, conflict, and US national security interests are not effectively made. As a result, these factors are not effectively operationalized in national security assessment, planning, and decisions.

Fragile states have emerged as one of the greatest threats to international security and, as such, are now a key consideration in U.S. national security strategy. The reasons why certain states fail—while others succeed—continue to perplex researchers and policymakers. Some of the contributing factors to fragility—social, economic, and institutional—can be exacerbated by national resource and environmental stressors; if left unabated, these can contribute to increased social unrest, possibly result in violent conflict. Early and accurate identification of unsustainable practices, then, can help structure successful intervention strategies for addressing fragility in a more comprehensive manner. This certainly includes scenarios that require the employment of appropriate elements of US national power (i.e., “smart power” approaches). Various approaches have been proposed to provide early warning of state failure, but, to date, the importance of the environment and natural resources has not received adequate consideration. These represent the missing linkages between national security interests and climate assessments.

This presentation will explore these issues by building on the Army Environmental Policy Institute’s study, “Environmental Factors and State Fragility: Enabling Smart Power Capabilities,” and the Army War College’s recent book chapters on “Sustainable Security.” It will discuss the need to reinforce sustainability principles in the US security discourse and engage fragile states across the full spectrum of operations in support of US national interests. As natural resources and environment factors are important components of national, regional, and global stability and security, the presentation will identify the need for a common conceptual framework to better assess sustainable security and fragility for these factors. It will also touch on the opportunity this framework presents for using mission-relevant climate change scenarios (including low probability, high impact estimates), impact assessments approaches, and climate information products that are relevant to contingency planning. It will present the existing national security policies and strategies driving these needs, and explore current conflict and natural resource research efforts. Finally, it will elaborate how a fragility-based, integrative framework can link national security missions with environmental and climate change knowledge product needs.