

Session 3

Climate and Global Health Crises as Strategic Threats

With the social, political, economic and public health impact of the Covid-19 pandemic still reverberating around the globe, strategists are already thinking about how to guard against the next pandemic. As the scale of the economic and human costs of Covid-19 become further apparent, the threat posed by infectious disease to the strategic interests of states is no longer in question. From supply chain disruptions to massive economic shocks, the consequences of another pandemic similar or worse than Covid-19 have put infectious disease squarely on the threat radar of decision-makers around the world. Global health crises have also demonstrated their disruptive effect on the global strategic balance, particularly as certain actors have sought to use the pandemic as an opportunity to advance their strategic interests. Moreover, climate change continues to threaten both human and economic security on a global scale. Arguably representing an existential threat to humanity, climate-related issues, including extreme weather, climate action failure and human-led environmental damage, present some of the direst risks to strategic interests over the following decades.

The scope, scale and speed that characterise global crises today are leading to new ways of thinking strategically about the world and the nature of strategic threats. No longer are nuclear weapons and energy access the only concerns of strategists; forces beyond human control, including natural disasters, climate events and global health crises, are increasingly making their strategic impact apparent.

Discussion Themes

- **How has the threat perception of crises such as pandemics and climate-related events changed since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic? How are the long-term threats of these types of events being incorporated into strategic outlooks?**
- **How can governments balance between managing public health crises and mitigating economic contraction while working to generate key opportunities to advance their respective societies?**
- **While carbon emissions dropped significantly during the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, as economies re-open, there are concerns that emissions will rise significantly. Given this, how can governments best incorporate strategic planning to deal with the long-term impacts of climate change while dealing with short-term but severe economic shocks?**
- **How are governments around the world responding to the threat posed by climate change inaction? What are the challenges of convincing populations of the merits of climate change mitigation strategies in the face of economic hardships?**
- **Given that climate change impacts are likely to play out disproportionately across countries, how will climate-related issues be incorporated into the strategic outlooks of different countries? Might some countries seek to use disparate climate change impact as strategic leverage against rivals?**