

Statement of Chairman Edward J. Markey

Subcommittee on International Development and Foreign Assistance, Economic Affairs, International Environmental Protection, and Peace Corps

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Right now, dozens of wars and conflicts dot our world map, from the Sudanese desert to America's longest war in Afghanistan. The root causes of war are diverse, and rarely simple, from religious divisions to democratic yearnings.

But two major factors have emerged in the modern era that act to strain the strands of stability until they snap: climate change and energy security.

In two regions of our world, climate and energy have recently played major roles in exacerbating what were already tense times.

In December 2010, a Tunisian street food vendor lit himself on fire in protest of government corruption and extreme poverty. That spark spread in Tunisia and ignited the Arab Spring.

Yet feeding this anger over years of corrupt and autocratic rule was a more immediate hunger. In 2010, terrible droughts in Russia and China and floods in Pakistan decimated wheat harvests and created a global shortage.

The price of wheat increased dramatically. The Middle East, home to the world's top nine wheat importers, felt it acutely, especially since the region's farmers struggled with their own parched fields. Much of Syria was gripped with the worst drought it had ever experienced.

The price of bread skyrocketed across the region and demands for regime change were not far behind.

About 600 miles north of the Syrian border, the ashes of Malaysia Airlines flight 17 blanket a wheat field in pro-Russian separatist controlled eastern Ukraine.

A surface-to-air missile apparently split the plane and snatched nearly 300 lives, but another weapon has already been deployed in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and in wars across the globe: energy.

Russia has already shut off the natural gas spigots to Ukraine. That's more than half of Ukraine's gas supply. Gone.

When winter arrives and natural gas demand spikes, this could become another political and humanitarian crisis, bringing suffering to Ukrainian families and challenges to the new government.

Because of Europe's reliance on Russian gas, Putin's energy weapon gives him unparalleled leverage to continue his bullying tactics.

Energy profits can also inflict damage. ISIS, the rebel group destabilizing Iraq, was funded initially by Sunni oil sheiks.

ISIS is no longer an upstart insurgency; they're a legitimate threat consolidating their power around energy holdings as much as sectarian allegiances. They've captured Iraqi oil fields. They control much of Syrian oil production. And now they are selling this oil on the black market. Revenues from these operations buy them credibility, weapons, and loyalty—valuable commodities for building a so-called caliphate in this volatile region.

Since the Industrial Revolution, our world has burned fossil fuels, increasing temperatures and destabilizing our climate. And since that time, we have become more dependent on these same fuels that have destabilized countries and drawn America into international conflicts.

Tunisia isn't the first time famine has played a role in a regional conflict. In a 2007 Congressional hearing of mine, one general told the story of Somalia. How drought had caused famine. Famine had encouraged conflict. How U.S. military forces were sent to ensure food aid reached those people and was not used by warlords to gain further power. And how 18 U.S. soldiers lost their lives in what we now call Black Hawk Down. The General believed all went back to the drought that went back to the famine.

Russia isn't the first country to use energy as a weapon in geopolitics. Much has changed in the U.S. energy sector since OPEC's devastating embargo four decades ago. The shale revolution has boosted U.S. oil production to record levels. Yet much remains the same. Oil still commands a monopoly over our transportation sector. We remain dependent on foreign suppliers to meet nearly one third of our needs, roughly the same share as 1975, when we banned the export of American oil.

Today, we have two panels of experts to help us examine how the twin challenges of climate change and energy security are driving conflicts now, and what new conflagrations could be on the horizon.

We must do everything in our power today to mitigate the threats that will require military intervention tomorrow. If we fail in our responsibility, it is our men and women in uniform that will get called upon to try to clean up the mess.