

III CLIMATE CHANGE AND INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT

Dr. Gleick presented a wide ranging discussion on how climate change could affect international security. He clearly stated that the link between environmental problems and conflict is not necessarily direct or unicausal, but that global environmental problems, and in particular global climate change, could be expected to trigger or exacerbate international economic and political tensions. In particular, he discussed the effects of environmental problems in the areas of water resources, agriculture, population, and mineral resources, where climate change could alter access or the quality of resources, and could thus lead to conflict.

Water Resources

Dr. Gleick identified fresh water resources as the area where global climate change is most likely to lead to a worsening of international relationships. These resources are widely shared and the existing conflict over international river basins (for example, the Colorado River, shared by the United States and Mexico, and the Nile, shared by nine nations) was cited as evidence that global climate change has the potential to worsen frictions and tensions.

Agriculture

Agriculture was recognized as already vulnerable to climatic variability; climate change was expected to aggravate agricultural production problems. Using the example of President Carter's 1980 grain embargo on the Soviet Union, Dr. Gleick reminded participants that agricultural and food production has been used as a policy tool, even a weapon, in the past. It is likely to be used as such in the future. Population pressures were expected to put further stress on agricultural markets and agricultural trade; global climate change can only exacerbate this stress. It was suggested that factors such as comparative advantage in food production may become more important. The availability