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Addressing Climate Change as a Threat to National Security

Ayeesha Worgan

President of Security Council

Introduction

Climate change proves to be an urgent and constantly growing threat to national security, its effects being felt on a global scale. Human-caused anthropogenic changes in the atmosphere accelerate climate change, directly impacting both the quantity and quality of basic resources. Climate change is a leading factor in the increase of natural disasters, refugee flows, and conflicts on the basis of resources such as food and water, obtaining the potential to exacerbate and create tensions. Scarcity leads to poverty, unrest, conflict and displacement, issues that manifest themselves through different pathways depending on social, economic, political and culturally specific factors.

Definition of key terms

Climate Change: Long-term shifts in weather patterns and temperature, both natural and human-driven. Naturally, climate change can occur due to variations in the solar cycle, however since the 1800s human activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels, have been the main drivers of climate change

National Security: The ability of a state to cater for the protection and defense of its citizenry. This applies to the preservation of the norms, rules, institutions, and values of society as well as the people's protection from military and non-military threats.

Climate Security: A shorthand term referring to the (inter)national security risks induced by changes in climate patterns

UNFCCC: The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

UNSC: United Nations Security Council

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

General Overview

Climate change poses a threat to national security, with war frequency and population changes following cycles of temperature change. Global warming has shown to lead to a slowing of the ocean's thermohaline conveyor, creating more extreme weather conditions. These have been shown to lead to a series of social issues, including inflation, famine and population declines. Climate change has proven to be a global challenge as the impact thereof is spread unevenly across regions, and due to the heightened globalisation efforts of our current society, will impact all societies. These changes can result in a significant drop in the human carrying capacity of the Earth's environment, and have thus been identified as a severe/catastrophic threat to international security in the 21st century.

Climate stressors, that only continue to grow, increase competition for resources, and trigger displacement through food insecurity. The climate does not directly cause violent conflict, instead, its impacts further the drivers of social instability. Conflict, and thus threats to National security, can also impede actions combating climate change, as countries face reduced capacity to implement climate policy.

Climate change has a high likelihood to end civilization, with over 70% of the international government considering climate change to be a national security issue with need for high attention. Cooling has shown to impede agricultural production, a necessity within our current developing society, whilst warming has raised sea levels, threatening military and civilian infrastructure.

Climate actions to adapt and mitigate the ongoing changes also prove to have the ability to negatively contribute to the issue of human security if mishandled. There is a disproportionately harsher effect in fragile, socially vulnerable contexts, such as marginalised lesser developed areas. Many countries' energy source is dependent on fossil fuels, meaning that their revenues would be negatively affected by the mitigation or lessening thereof. Developing countries tend to rely on the economic value of fossil fuels, and if committed to mitigation policies, would no longer be able to sustain their military and social institutions.

Timeline of Events

April 2007 - The UNSC first discussed the connection between the climate and security under the Presidency of the UK and Northern Ireland.

June 2009 - The UN General Assembly passed a resolution proposed by the Pacific Small Island Developing States, in which the UN Secretary-General was asked to produce a comprehensive report on climate security.

September 2009 - The report was published, cementing the idea of climate change being a threat multiplier with the potential to immensely threaten international security.

July 2011 - The German Presidency of the UNSC consolidated the topic in an Open Debate on "Climate change's impact on the maintenance of international peace and security". The Open Debate resulted in the strengthening of climate change in the foreign policy agenda, and international alliances addressing the issue. The Council then thus produced a statement recognizing that "the possible adverse effects of climate change may, in the long run, aggravate certain existing threats to international peace and security".

2013, 2015 and 2017 - The UK, Pakistan, Spain, Malaysia and Italy discuss security implications of rising temperatures in Arria formula debates.

2018 - The Netherlands initiates a UNSC briefing on climate security in the Lake Chad region.

July 2018- The Swedish Security Council presidency reflects on the further needs of the Council to address the climate security issue in the UNSC.

January 2019 - The Dominican Republic initiated an Open Debate on climate-related disasters and the impacts thereof on international security.

July 2020 - Germany, as UNSC president, with 9 other UNSC members organised a high-level debate on climate security. A Special Representative was called and the creation of an Informal Expert Group was announced.

November 2020 - The Informal Expert Group on Climate Security in the Security Council meet and 19 countries participated. Operational responses, focusing on Somalia, are discussed and Niger and Ireland are appointed to share the presidency in 2021. The Republics of Ireland, Kenya, and the Kingdom of Norway promise to deepen the climate security related work.

February 2021 - A high-level open debate on the "Maintenance of International peace and security: Climate and security" is convened in the UNSC under UK's presidency. Many countries underlined the need to further operationalise the climate-security agenda and continue efforts to lessen climate change.

March 2021 - The United States informed the Permanent Representatives of the UNSC of its desire to join the Group of Friends on Climate and Security.

September 2021 - A thematic resolution on climate and security was requested by several council members during a high-level open debate, and the Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) announced an upcoming draft resolution.

December 2021 - A thematic resolution was brought forward by Council Presidents Niger and Ireland on "Systematically integrating climate-related security risks into the UN's conflict prevention, conflict management and peacebuilding work". However, with Russia's veto the draft did not pass. Preceding the vote, members voiced that the veto had blocked a critical resolution and believe that efforts addressing climate security should continue.

Current Situation

Currently, climate change and conflict dynamics create a negative feedback loop, as climate change fuels additional pressures towards conflict, that in turn undermines communities' abilities to work towards a solution. Conflict-ridden and lesser developed countries risk the misfortune of neglect from financiers of climate mitigation measures, who naturally tend to invest in areas with a secure political infrastructure.

COP 28 will take place from 30 November until 12 December 2023 in the UAE, where the UNFCCC will be discussing proactive measures to combat climate change and work towards climate security. Although we cannot predict the outcomes of the conference, the 27th conference of parties to the UNFCCC in Egypt reaffirmed countries commitment to limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees celsius above pre-industrial levels. The UNFCCC is an established international environmental treaty, signed by 198 nations, including all United Nations member states. The treaty is designed to lessen human interference with the climate system by stabilising greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere. The UNFCCC recognises a list of categories in which developing countries are placed according to their climate vulnerability and thus capacity to implement response measures. Countries affected by conflict and insecurity are thus categorised to remove them from certain mitigation efforts, however, little effort is then made to lessen or mitigate climate change in these areas. In the long-term this will only further the insecurity found within the specified country as the climate change will continue to manifest itself through additional conflict.

The 2020 Global Catastrophic Risks report, issued by the Global Challenges Foundation, concluded that climate security change has an extremely high likelihood of ending civilization if no extreme action is taken. However, climate security is yet to be

mainstreamed into international climate change law, with no discussion surrounding the issue emerging outside of climate change conferences.

Major Parties Involved

The Security Council: The Security Council has framed the problem of climate change as a 'threat to international peace and security'. The UNSC has previously failed a draft resolution, co-authored by Niger and Ireland, calling for the systemic integration of climate security risks. The draft was co-sponsored by 113 members of the UN, making it the second highest supported draft in the history of UNSC.

Russia: Russia used its veto in the UNSC to block the aforementioned thematic resolution on climate security. The draft centred on the idea of putting the security implications of climate change on the Security Council's agenda through specific actions, however following Russia's veto did not pass. The Russian Ambassador believed the resolution would politicise an economic and scientific issue, making Russia a politically motivated target.

Niger: Niger is currently still recovering from the food crisis brought by the severe droughts experienced in 2005, 2008, 2010 and 2012. Being highly dependent on its natural resources to support food security and livelihoods, Niger is adamant about the establishment of climate security. Recurrent drought, flooding, food insecurity, epidemics and violent conflict in Niger are all said to stem from their environmental degradation, through the elongated dry seasons and water scarcity. Niger has thus continued to enhance its adaptation and mitigation ambitions.

China: China emits a third of the world's greenhouse gases, whilst its civilian and military infrastructure is largely threatened by climate hazards. Under Xi Jinping China has continued to implement national security measures, combatting both internal and

external threats, with public documents having indicated that the PLA is considering climate implications.

Possible Solutions

1. **Supporting the Informal Expert Group on Climate Security**

   The Informal Expert Group on Climate Security in the Security Council, initiated by Germany in 2020, and currently chaired by Kenya and Norway. The group enhances the UNSCs work by gathering and communicating information researched and collected on climate-related security threats. They focus on providing concrete evidence to prove their claims and further actions able to be taken towards climate security. It is also a flexible group, free from the formal workings of the Council, being a voluntary initiative.

2. **Increasing Access to Renewable Energy**

   The UNDP, a United Nations agency that focuses on the elimination of poverty through sustainable economic growth and human development. Their climate security actions focus on growing international access to renewable energy. Access to sustainable energy allows for clean water, light, warmth and sustenance. Renewable energy combats climate change whilst highlighting local economic development, keeping developing areas from conflict through a decrease in competition for necessities.

3. **Climatizing Defence Budgets**

   An enlarged spending on combating climate change would prevent upstream conflict, thus furthering national security. Decarbonization technologies and military climate adaptation assessments would allow for sustainable development whilst being conflict-sensitive.

4. **Regenerative Security**

   Fully decarbonizing energy, construction, agriculture and transport systems within the security community would combat the climate crisis whilst furthering technological advancements within the military. Full regenerative security would only be achieved if ecocide would be legally defined as a crime under the International Criminal Court, allowing for military defense against the destruction of key habitats. New tools and command structures where climate change and national security are intertwined, are thus required to improve the effectiveness of all actions taken towards climate security.

5. **Advancing and Protecting Agricultural Sectors**

   The advancement and maintenance of the agricultural areas will allow for food sustainability to surge, combatting the competition caused by climate change. In turn, national security can be somewhat ensured, and the negative loop of climate change can be broken using an increase in supplies.

Useful Sources

Recorded UNSC debates on climate security, both high-level and open, where member nations make clear statements on the issue of climate security

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0ZV7vV6Mdc
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0ZV7vV6Mdc&themeRefresh=1
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