

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2024 Diyafah International School MUN (DISMUN). We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the Security Council (SC).

The Impact of Climate Change on Peace and Security

The subjects for this committee are clarified in this study material. It is not, however, meant to take the place of own study. To strengthen your capacity for dialogue and consensus-building, we advise you to carry out more study, dive deeply into the policies of your Member State, and take them into deliberation. Prior to the date of the session, each delegation will utilize their research to create and send a position paper. Instructions may be found in the [DISMUN Handbook](#).

We want to make it clear that any acts of intimidation or bias towards anyone on the basis of their race, gender, nationality, religion, age, or impairment won't be accepted. If you have any queries about the planning for the committee or the event itself, please contact: Communications.DISMUN@diyafahinternationalschool.com

We're looking forward to meeting you during the conference and wish you luck with your planning!

Sincerely,

Neiladityaa Suresh
Chair of the Security Council

Shabbir Aziz
Co-chair of the Security Council

The Impact of Climate Change on Peace and Security

“Climate change is real, and it is accelerating in a dangerous manner. It not only exacerbates threats to international peace and security; it is a threat to international peace and security.”

Introduction

It is widely recognized that events caused by climate change can have global security implications, as they may have consequences that affected states and societies are unable to mitigate. The United Nations (UN) Department of Economic and Social Affairs recently included a warning in its 2017 *Sustainable Development Goals Report* about the profound global impact of climate change:

“Global temperatures continued to increase in 2016, setting a new record of about 1.1 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial period. The extent of global sea ice fell to 4.14 million square [kilometers] in 2016, the second lowest on record. Atmospheric CO₂ levels reached 400 parts per million. Drought conditions predominated across much of the globe.... In addition to rising sea levels and global temperatures, extreme weather events are becoming more common and natural habitats such as coral reefs are declining. These changes affect people everywhere, but disproportionately harm the poorest and the most vulnerable.”

Since 2007, the UN Security Council has discussed the implications of climate change for peace and security on several occasions. Nevertheless, it has so far not come to definitive conclusions or decisions to respond directly to climate change as an independent threat to international security. Instead, the Council has primarily assumed a position of a “non-response strategy,” meaning that it avoids a direct response to climate change, yet continues to decide upon related phenomena, such as civil war, desertification, or natural disasters.

This Background Guide will provide an overview of the origins and current state of the debate regarding the possibility of the UN Security Council assuming an active stance towards climate change. It will first shed light on the international framework for global climate policy by referring to key international documents and treaties. The next section will then show how key actors on the level of the international system are currently working to tackle the climate change-security nexus. This will include recent historical context on how the Security Council and its Member States have approached the problem. The actual scope of the problem of climate change and its potential implications for peace and security are at the focus of the next section. Finally, to guide delegates in their policy deliberations, there will be a discussion of the Security Council’s opportunities for action.

International and Regional Framework

The following paragraphs will provide background on key international documents and agreements that manifest the linkage of global climate policy with peace and security. The *Charter of the United Nations* (1945) does not make an explicit reference to the protection of the environment or global climate policy; it does, however, state as a fundamental purpose of the organization “to take collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace.” The supreme organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, according to the Charter, is the Security Council. The Council “may investigate any dispute, or any situation” that might pose a danger to international peace and security, and can add any traditional and non-traditional topics (including topics related to climate change, for example) to its agenda. Chapters VI, VII, and VIII of the Charter determine several paths of action the Council may take, including investigation, diplomacy, sanctions, and even military action.

The Charter also served as foundation for the discussions at the groundbreaking 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, which sought to enhance international cooperation on global environmental and climate policy. Principle two of the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (1992) confirms that, while states have the “sovereign right to exploit their own resources,” thanks to the Charter and the principles of international law, they must “ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.” This no-harm principle, widely considered as the “foundation of international environmental law,” also guided the establishment of the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) as the primary international forum for global climate policy in 1992. The UNFCCC’s main objective is the “stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.” Through mechanisms enshrined in the *Paris Agreement* (2015), which effectively succeeded the *Kyoto Protocol* (1997) and entered into force in November 2016, the parties to the UNFCCC have committed to nationally determined contributions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as well as to international financial and technological cooperation, to keep the global temperature rise from exceeding 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

It was also the General Assembly that prominently recognized climate change as a critical security issue in resolution 63/281 (2009), which invited the “relevant organs...to intensify their efforts in considering and addressing climate change, including its possible security implications.” Subsequently and as requested in resolution 63/281, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon issued in 2009 a report on climate change and its possible security implications, which found that climate change acts as a “threat multiplier” for economic, social, and environmental problems, potentially aggravating already fragile situations.

Parallel to the previously listed elements of the international framework that focus on state-level security implications of climate change, there is also “a growing recognition...of the mutual interdependence between the security of individuals and communities and the security of nation States.” This concept of human security is most influentially defined in the 1994 *Human Development Report* as “freedom from fear and freedom from want,” as well as “safety from such chronic acts as hunger, disease and repression and ... protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, jobs or communities.” A number of international bodies have over recent years worked towards making global security policy considerations more human-centered, and in those approaches the negative effects of climate change on human security play a prominent role. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which serves as a scientific advisory body to the UNFCCC, also bases its risk assessment on the paradigm of human security. In its latest *Fifth Assessment Report* (2014), the IPCC cites evidence that “human security will be progressively threatened as the climate changes.”

Role of the International System

Despite periodic consideration of the issue, the UN Security Council has yet to make any formal decisions on its role in addressing climate change or to adopt any resolutions that respond directly to climate change as a discrete threat to international peace and security. The topic of climate change was first discussed during a debate convened in 2007 by the United Kingdom. At the end of another debate in 2011, initiated by Germany, the Security Council unanimously adopted presidential statement 2011/15, which reaffirmed that the UNFCCC is the key instrument to address climate change, while also expressing the Council’s concern “that possible adverse effects of climate change may, in the long run, aggravate certain existing threats to international peace and security.” Subsequent briefings, debates, and informal meetings on the topic took place in 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016, and 2017; however, they did not result in any formal Council decisions, and “the future of the Council’s engagement with climate change [remains] uncertain.”

The Security Council’s lack of action can be attributed to differing policies and standpoints regarding the securitization of climate policy. SIDS argue that a stronger role for the Security Council is both within its mandate and necessary to address the problem. Many SIDS face existential and security threats due to rising sea levels,

which makes them, for example in the form of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), one of the loudest voices to call for global action against climate change, including in the Security Council. Many SIDS are also members of the Group of 77 (G77) coalition of developing countries, which is customarily supported by China. In 2007, when the topic was first on Security Council's agenda, the G77 opposed a formal consideration of climate change by the body to avoid encroachment on the work and mandate of other UN bodies. Since then, the position of the G77 has seemed to lose unanimity, as more and more countries and blocs acknowledged the direct linkage of climate change with peace and security, and declared their willingness to consider a stronger role for the Security Council.

The European Union and its Member States are typically in favor of an increased role for the Security Council. It is no coincidence that the topic was first added to the agenda by the United Kingdom and that the only formal position of the Security Council, presidential statement 2011/15, was reached under the German presidency. While the United States assumed a neutral position in 2007, it became one of the loudest proponents of securitization in the 2011 debate, when its delegate stated that it "is past time for the Security Council to come into the 21st century and assume our core responsibilities." The recent decision by the United States government to withdraw from the UNFCCC's *Paris Agreement*, however, makes a continuation of this position doubtful.

China and Russia, both veto powers, remain strong opponents to Security Council action confronting climate change. Although they ratified the *Paris Agreement* and, especially in the case of China, seem to embrace a low-carbon transformation of their economies, they see no added value in involving the Security Council. Russia fears "a further politicization of the issue and increased disagreements among countries," while China, regarding climate change as "fundamentally a sustainable development issue," points out that the Security Council lacks "universal representation" as well as the necessary expertise and capabilities, and therefore should not replace the UNFCCC.

Outside the Security Council, many institutions and organizations have subscribed to the idea that climate change has implications for peace and security. The Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC, Patricia Espinosa, has recently emphasized that it is "key [to frame] climate change as a security story" and that "[climate] action reduces risk and increases stability." The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) recently published a joint strategic report with the International Police Organization (INTERPOL) entitled *Environment, Peace and Security: A Convergence of Threats* (2016), which focuses on environmental crime (which it finds worth up to \$258 billion) and its negative consequences for peace, security, and stability. In cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN University, and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), UNEP also investigated the implications of climate change for livelihoods, conflict, and migration in the Sahel region.

The G7 group of industrialized countries has recognized that "climate change poses a serious threat to global security" and continues to formulate common climate policies, based on research such as its influential report *A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks* (2015). The Secretary General of the military alliance North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Jens Stoltenberg, affirmed that "[climate] change is also a security threat" – a statement that is flanked by NATO's growing concern about the topic. Similarly, many states include the security implications of climate change in their national security strategies (or equivalent documents), including, for example, Russia and the United States.

This includes, for example, the publication of the international climate change think tank E3G named *United we stand: Reforming the UN to reduce climate risk*, which argues for an active UN Security Council role in global climate policy. The Think20 dialogue process, an effort of international think tanks to inform the participants of the G20 Summit in July 2017, produced as a key policy brief *Building Global Governance for 'Climate Refugees'*, which focused on migration and displacement as direct consequences of climate change. More generally, academic and research institutions, such as the Center for Climate and Security (CCS) and the Stockholm International

Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), work as well-informed focal points for researchers, policymakers, and citizens who are interested in the debate.

Adverse Consequences of Climate Change for International Peace and Security

Climate change is advancing rapidly. It is expected that by the year 2100, there will be an increase in global temperature of 2 to 7 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, which will “cause more frequent and more severe extreme weather events such as heavy rains, drought, heatwaves and storms.” Simultaneously, as the extent of global sea ice is receding due to global warming, sea levels will continue to rise, with estimates ranging from 0.36 to 0.58 meters by the year 2100. Environmental stress caused by climate change will lead to declining agricultural yields in many regions of the world, with adverse effects including food insecurity, poverty, and competition over natural resources. Droughts will become more common and reduce access to clean drinking water. These negative effects of climate change will be most problematic in regions that are already weak and fragile, further jeopardizing the livelihoods of their inhabitants and increasing “migration that people would rather have avoided.”

Sea level rise and coastal degradation: Rising sea levels will threaten the viability of low-lying areas even before they are submerged, leading to social disruption, displacement, and migration, while disagreements over maritime boundaries and ocean resources may increase. Unintended effects of climate policies: As climate adaptation and mitigation policies are more broadly implemented, the risks of unintended negative effects – particularly in fragile contexts – will also increase.”

Potential Security Council Actions

With resolution 1625, adopted unanimously at the 2005 World Summit, the Security Council acknowledged “the need to adopt a broad strategy of conflict prevention, which addresses the root causes of armed conflict and political and social crises.” This exemplified the Council’s intention to assume a more active and preventive stance towards global threats, as resolution 1625 opened the door to focus on non-traditional international peace and security aspects. For this reason, resolution 1625 also represents an important precedent for proponents of an increased role for the Security Council in global climate policy. The Council has moreover proved its capacity and willingness to assume *de facto* global lawmaking competence when it criminalized terrorism with resolution 1373 (2001) and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction with resolution 1540 (2004). Following these precedents, and pursuant to its mandate in the Charter, the Security Council could add climate change to its work agenda and become actively involved. In this case, the Council would have to determine its role in relation to the UNFCCC accords (for example, acting as an enforcement agency) or to establish its own set of norms, objectives, and procedures.

Based on the Charter, the Council may assume a role of soft compliance through investigating the issue (Article 34), calling for peaceful settlement of a conflict through arbitration (Article 33 (2)), and making recommendations to the involved conflict parties (Article 38). It may also call upon states to comply with provisional measures to “prevent an aggravation of the situation” (Article 40), such as urging them to ratify certain treaties or conventions, simply resorting to adopting a public resolution condemning certain actions or lack of actions, or calling upon the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to issue (non-binding) advisory opinions on states’ climate action.

A hard compliance policy, in the sense of Chapter VII of the Charter, could become manifest in the form of economic and diplomatic sanctions (Article 41), which could even be directed at certain polluting industries or climate-endangering markets. Based on its quasi-lawmaking competence (resolutions 1373 and 1540), the Security Council could also empower itself to investigate, regulate, and impose compliance, or create subsidiary bodies to do so. However, the use of military force (Article 42) is, even in this theoretical debate, by most commentators rejected on “practical and moral grounds.” These concerns also point towards the limitations

associated with the Security Council's potential actions. Even if the Council were willing to act, it may be limited by its lack of universal and equal representation, and accordingly, a perceived deficit in legitimacy.

Conclusion

This Background Guide section has introduced the reader to the debate about climate change and its implications for international peace and security. It has shown that the topic receives great attention from a wide variety of international bodies, and that there are several manifest indicators of the adverse consequences of climate change in the realm of international peace and security. The Security Council has been debating the topic for ten years now; yet – besides a presidential statement – it has not assumed an active role or even been able to formulate a common position. If the Council decides to become more involved in global climate policy, there is a wide range of potential steps it can take that range from soft compliance to hard compliance measures.

Further Research

To guide delegates in their research and policy formulations, there are several noteworthy questions to consider: Is there a window of opportunity for a common position among all Member States of the Security Council and, if so, what would it look like? If the Council decides to seize the matter, how would it work alongside relevant international institutions – including, most importantly, the UNFCCC? What potential tools and measures are most likely to succeed?

Annotated Bibliography

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The author is an eminent researcher in the field of climate change securitization. In this blog article, the author provides an update on the Security Council's latest informal debate on climate change and security, which was convened by Ukraine in April 2017. Since there was no formal resolution, the article introduces the debate and summarizes the statements of its participants and their diverging views. The source is valuable, as it highlights the most recent developments of the Council's ongoing consideration of climate change.

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