



Reaching Climate Security

How Climate Change Moved up the Security Council Agenda

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Introduction

From an initial tentative debate to resolution paragraphs, the topic of climate security has raced up the United Nations Security Council agenda in the recent years. This advancement has been controversial, however, and there is still no consensus on whether the Security Council is the right arena for climate discussions. While some states argue that action on climate change is central to international security and conflict prevention, others fear it could legitimise interference in states' sovereign decision making on development choices.

As global emission curves continue stubbornly to point upwards despite multilateral agreements to limit temperature rise, a Security Council directive on immediate, holistic action is viewed by some as crucial to preventing the worst global climate change forecasts from coming true. Sweden (in 2017–18) and Germany (in 2019–20) are two of the most recent examples of non-permanent members urging the Security Council to adopt a more ambitious agenda on climate security matters. Indeed, it seems that Sweden's approach to incorporating climate change awareness into the Security Council mandate was particularly fruitful. Despite the reluctance of some permanent

members, climate change made it into several resolutions, and a climate security mechanism and an expert network group were formed during its two-year membership of the Council.

What led the Security Council to agree to make climate change part of its resolution vocabulary? As Germany picks up from where Sweden left off, backed by several risk assessments that highlight climate change as one of the biggest threats to global security,¹ will concerns and objections soon just be muffled things of the past?

This dynamic evolution of climate change as a Security Council issue has caught the interest of scholars and several articles and policy briefs have been written on potential ways forward for states inclined to lead the change.² This paper offers an overview of the progress of the climate security debate in the Security Council and examines the defining moments leading up to where we are today. It then looks at the future of climate change as a Security Council issue, focused on the ambitious commitments of Germany, a current non-permanent member, and the positions of the permanent members. The paper concludes with remarks on the opportunities and pitfalls ahead.

¹ See e.g. World Economic Forum 2020. "The Global Risks Report 2020". 15th Edition, at: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risk_Report_2020.pdf; Munich Security Conference 2020. "Munich Security Report 2020: Westlessness"; International Military Council on Climate and Security 2020. "The World Climate and Security Report 2020", at: https://imccs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/World-Climate-Security-Report-2020_2_13.pdf

² See e.g. Murphy, Ash 2019. "The United Nations Security Council and Climate Change: Mapping a Pragmatic Pathway to Intervention"; Scott, Shirley V. & Roberta C.D Andrade 2012. "The Global Response to Climate Change: Can the Security Council Assume a Lead Role?". *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. 18,

no. 2, pp. 215–226.; Conca, Ken et al. 2017a. "Climate Change and Global Security: What Role for the UN Security Council?". *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*.; Cousins, Stephanie 2013. "UN Security Council: playing a role in the international climate change regime?". *Global Change, Peace & Security*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 191–210; Born, Camilla 2017. "A resolution for a peaceful climate: opportunities for the UN Security Council". *SIPRI Policy Brief*. January 2017; Scott, Shirley V. 2015. "Implications of climate change for the UN Security Council: mapping the range of potential policy responses". *International Affairs*, vol. 91, no. 5, pp. 1317–1333; Conca, Ken, 2019. "Is there a role for the UN Security Council on Climate Change?". *Environment*, vol. 61, no. 1, pp. 4–15.



Method

This paper builds primarily on a review of the academic literature related to climate security and international organisations. In addition, official documents and reports by various institutions, as well as newspaper articles are used to highlight current events. Finally, conversations were held with government officials from Sweden and Germany to confirm information found in the literature and in online sources; and, in the case of Germany, to confirm future plans to promote climate security in its remaining time on the Security Council.

The road to climate security: an expanding mandate

Traditionally, the Security Council mission to maintain international peace and security has been interpreted as preventing armed conflict between states. However, it is up to the Council to determine what its mandate, to "(...) maintain or restore international peace and security",³ actually entails. Thus, interpretation of the mandate has varied and evolved significantly since the UN Charter was signed in 1945, allowing it to adapt to the ever-changing environment of international security.⁴

The new interpretations began with the addition of intrastate wars and proceeded to include cases without two pronounced sides, such as coups d'état and certain humanitarian crises. The terrorist attacks on the USA of September 11, 2001 marked the beginning of Security Council action on security threats without clear geographical limitations.⁵ From this point, the Council began to adopt resolutions that addressed

for example international terrorism more generally, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the illicit spread of small arms and light weapons.

Until 2014, the reading of the Council mandate was still mainly focused on armed conflicts in some form. However, the outbreak of Ebola in Africa in 2014 was explicitly treated as a threat to international peace and security. United Nations Security Council resolution 2177 stated that the outbreak "(...) is undermining the stability of the most affected countries concerned, and, unless contained, may lead to further instances of civil unrest, social tensions and a deterioration of the political and security climate".⁶

This evolution of the Council's mandate, from interstate wars to virus epidemics, illustrates the expansion of its authority. First, the general understanding of security

The United Nations Security Council

The United Nations Security Council is one of six main organs in the United Nations. It has major responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, and is considered the world's most powerful organisation as its decisions are binding on all UN member states. The Council has 15 members: five permanent and ten elected on a two-year basis by the General Assembly. The five permanent members of the Security Council are China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States, as the five recently victorious powers in the Second World War when the UN was founded in 1945.

³ UN Charter Article 39

⁴ Penny, Christopher K. 2018. "Climate Change as a 'threat to international peace and security'" in Scott, Shirley V. and Ku, Charlotte (eds) *Climate change and the UN Security Council*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

⁵ The Council had addressed HIV/Aids in Africa in an earlier resolution (SC Res 1308, 2000) but without referring to it as a threat to international peace and security.

⁶ United Nations Security Council resolution 2177, 18 September 2014.



evidently now includes areas with destabilising effects on societies that might potentially give rise to conflicts. Second, its actions have moved in the direction of conflict prevention, addressing the root causes of armed conflict and tensions rather than operating strictly in reaction to existing conflicts.⁷ Based on these developments, not only are security issues related to climate change considered potential topics for the Security Council; a growing number of states are actively pursuing them.

Enter climate change: the defining moments

Climate change was raised in the Security Council for the first time in an open debate organised by the United Kingdom in 2007. The debate addressed the relationship between energy, security and climate, and emphasised the need for the Council to consider effects of climate change on international security.⁸ Over 50 delegates, ranging from industrialised states to small island states participated, to express either praise for or scepticism about the initiative.⁹

To justify the debate, the British foreign secretary, Margaret Beckett, who was chairing the debate, focused on climate change as a driver for conflict. While a small majority of the speakers agreed with this linkage, most states opposed or did not comment on the propriety of the Security Council discussing the issue.¹⁰ European and Pacific Island UN member states were

particularly positive about the initiative, welcoming the Council's role in highlighting the urgency and magnitude of the issue.¹¹

Opposing voices – primarily Russia, China and developing states – argued in accordance with three main themes. First, the Security Council was not perceived to be the correct arena for discussions such as this. In fact, it was argued that engaging with climate change in the Council would encroach on the role of other UN bodies. Second, it was not thought that the Security Council had access to the proper expertise to handle the topic proficiently. Finally, concerns were raised about engaging with a global issue in a democratically unequal venue.¹² The debate thus exposed significant division within the Council.

Two years later, the General Assembly adopted a resolution in which climate change was labelled a security issue. This led to a report by the security-general urging the Security Council to review its role.¹³ However, neither the resolution nor the report resulted in any action by the Security Council until 2011, when Germany initiated a second debate on the impact of climate change on international security. This debate focused primarily on the risks posed by rising sea levels, but also included a broad range of other security implications of climate change. In his opening statement, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recalled the previous debate and stressed that “[Climate change] not only exacerbates threats to international peace and security;

⁷ Sindico, Francesco, 2007. “Climate Change: A Security (Council) Issue?”. *Carbon & Climate Law Review*, no. 1 2007.

⁸ UNSC 2007, SC9000. “Security Council holds first-ever debate on impact of climate change on peace, security, hearing over 50 speakers”, at:

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2007/sc9000.doc.htm>

⁹ Sindico, Francesco, 2007. “Climate Change: A Security (Council) Issue?”. *Carbon & Climate Law Review*, no. 1 2007.

¹⁰ Engelbrekt, Kjell 2016. “Climate Change Mitigation”, pp. 157-196 in *High-Table Diplomacy: the*

Reshaping of International Security Institutions. Georgetown University Press.

¹¹ Scott, Shirley V. 2018. “The UN Security Council and global action on climate change”, pp. 1-24 in Scott, Shirley V., and Charlotte Ku (eds). *Climate Change and the UN Security Council*. Edward Edgar Publishing Limited.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Born, Camilla, 2017. “A resolution for a peaceful Climate: Opportunities for the UN Security Council”, *SIPRI Policy Brief*, January 2017.



it is a threat to international peace and security".¹⁴ This position was seconded by a majority of states, in a notable change from the first debate. Among the representatives arguing for increased Security Council preparedness on the matter was the US ambassador to the UN, Susan E. Rice. Russia and China, however, remained unconvinced of the Council's role in the matter.

The debate resulted in a presidential statement in which the Security Council recognised the possible security implications of climate change, while also making it clear that the primary responsibility for addressing climate change lies with the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC).¹⁵ The statement nonetheless requested the Security-General to include contextual information on climate change in his reporting to the Council in circumstances where climate change could "(...) represent a challenge to the implementation of Council mandates or endanger the process of consolidation of peace."¹⁶ To date, this is the only official document from the Council to focus solely on climate change as a risk to international peace and security.

Several so-called Arria-formula meetings, which are informal gatherings of state

representatives and non-state actors, on climate security or related topics were held during this time.¹⁷ This illustrates the growing interest in and support for the matter as a Security Council issue, despite the reluctance of certain permanent members. Although persistent and symbolically important, the debates and informal meetings did not result in any tangible Council action. This was, however, about to change when Sweden began its term.

Accelerating climate action

When Sweden joined the Security Council as a non-permanent member in 2017, 20 years after its previous term, climate security was one of its four priority areas.¹⁸ Working alongside other like-minded UN member states, work on climate security advanced quickly and in several areas during this time. Without wasting any time, the work on climate and security began with a Council meeting on the broader situation in the conflict-affected Lake Chad Region in January 2017. The meeting was followed by a trip in March to four states in the region, exposing the Council to the effects of climate change on the situation in the area.¹⁹

¹⁴ UNSC 2011, SC 10332. "Security Council, in Statement, Says 'Contextual Information' on Possible Security Implications of Climate Change Important When Climate Impacts Drive Conflict", at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2011/sc10332.doc.htm>

¹⁵ UNSC S/PRST/2011/15. "Statement by the President of the Security Council", at:

<https://undocs.org/en/S/PRST/2011/15>. Presidential statements signal "(...) the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour within a particular issue area." (Scott, Shirley V. 2015. "Implications of Climate Change for the UN Security Council: mapping the range of potential policy responses". *International Affairs*, vol. 91, no. 5, pp. 1317-1333)

¹⁶ S/PRST/2011/15

¹⁷ For a full list of the Arria-formula meetings, as well as open debates touching upon the subject, although

not primarily targeting climate change action, see **Table 1**; Security Council Report 2019. "Arria-Formula Meetings", at:

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-security-council-working-methods/arria-formula-meetings.php>.

¹⁸ Regeringen 2016. "Programme for Sweden's membership of the United Nations Security Council 2017-2018", at:

<https://www.government.se/4923c2/contentassets/a73b87f90821410a89722929af98cf8d/programme-for-swedens-membership-of-the-united-nations-security-council-20172018.pdf>

¹⁹ For more information on how climate change can affect stability in the Lake Chad region, see e.g. Nagarajan, Chitra et al 2018. "Climate-Fragility Profile: Lake Chad Basin". Berlin: adelphi.



During the trip, Sweden produced the draft of a statement and, together with the United Kingdom, the statement was rewritten into the first draft resolution to include a paragraph on the implications of climate change on both security and the Council's work in the region. The United States was the only member requesting a revision to the paragraph before it was unanimously adopted, making Resolution 2349 the first ever UN Security Council resolution to recognise the security implications of climate change.²⁰

Following this landmark resolution, the continuing work of Sweden and other members allowed similar paragraphs on climate change to be written into further resolutions during Sweden's time on the Security Council, including on the missions in Somalia, Mali, Sudan and the Central African Republic. It therefore appeared that Sweden had identified a fruitful approach to the issue; instead of approaching climate change thematically, Sweden went about it geographically, focusing on how climate change was affecting areas already on the Council's agenda.

In July 2018, Sweden chaired the third ever debate to directly address climate-related security matters. It was notable that one permanent member in particular, China, seemed to change its position, presenting a slightly more open stance in the debate.²¹ Both France and the United Kingdom expressed their support and intention to contribute to the work on

climate change and security, and the representative of the United Kingdom even voiced an intention to take a lead role on the matter.²² The US representative asserted the need to broaden the understanding of what constitutes security, illustrating his contribution with initiatives taken to maintain Iraq's water infrastructure, but without, however, mentioning climate change during the debate. Finally, the Russian representative urged the Council not to securitise climate change:

We believe it is essential to allow all the United Nations mechanisms related to combating climate change to do their work in peace, without creating artificially intersecting approaches that merely obstruct the advancement of our shared interests.²³

Beyond the veto powers it is worth noting that the representative of Sudan enhanced the pledge taken by Arab governments in 2016 to shift towards a greener economy and to integrate the principles of sustainable development into their conflict resolution and peace initiatives. This could potentially be an indication of a shift in attitudes even among oil exporting countries.²⁴

Following the debate, the Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations addressed a letter to the Secretary-General, summarising the ideas voiced in the debate in the hope that it would "(...) serve as an inspiration and support for our

²⁰ Regeringens skrivelse 2018/19:104. "Sveriges medlemskap i FN:s säkerhetsråd 2017–2018", at: <https://www.regeringen.se/4ada5a/contentassets/528b85f72c304c55889889e9e36d4024/regeringens-skrivelse-om-sveriges-medlemskap-i-fns-sakerhetsrad-20172018.pdf>; Security Council Report 2017. "In Hindsight: The Security Council and Climate Change-An Ambivalent Relationship", at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2017-08/the_security_council_and_climate_change_an_ambivalent_relationship.php

²¹ Pohl, Benjamin 2018. "Gauging the Temperature: Climate Change in the UN Security Council". *Climate Diplomacy*, at: <https://www.climate-diplomacy.org/news/gauging-temperature-climate-change-un-security-council>

²² UNSC 2018 S/PV.8307. "Maintenance of international peace and security", at: http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF-CF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_pv_8307.pdf

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.



collective efforts to tackle climate change and address climate-related security risks".²⁵ Among other things, the letter made policy recommendations on an institutionalised home within the UN system for climate security, in order to ensure coordinated action, and a request to include climate risk analysis in the security-general's reporting to the Security Council.²⁶

Not just in the open debate, but also linked to the heightened attention on climate security among members of the Security Council more generally, a demand emerged for better risk analysis regarding climate-related security risks during Sweden's time on the Council. Sweden saw the institutionalisation of knowledge on climate-related security risks as an important task and was a driving force in the establishment of the Climate Security Mechanism. The task of the pilot mechanism was to coordinate research and policy on climate security to provide integrated climate risk assessments to the Security Council and other UN bodies.²⁷ The mechanism came under the remit of the Department of Political Affairs, supported by UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). Although still in its early stages and with limited resources, its establishment marked an important step for the institutionalisation of climate security capacity.²⁸ Sweden also initiated an international network of experts on climate

security, which would be further developed by Germany.

By the time Sweden ended its term in December 2018, the Council had adopted several resolutions including climate change awareness, and Sweden alongside other states had laid the groundwork for institutionalising expertise and practical tools for further work on the matter. When the time came to hand over the torch, Germany was one of the states that were eager to pick it up. The two states engaged in discussions before Germany's term, focused, among other things, on climate security strategies.²⁹

A controversial subject

Nonetheless, as demonstrated above, there is still a significant divide between states on whether the Security Council should be active on the issue at all. The main argument for why climate security should be a matter for the Security Council is that climate change poses a direct and indirect threat to international peace and security. Recent reports have even ranked it as the top risk to global security, in terms of both likelihood and impact.³⁰ Thus, the extraordinary authority of the Council to override sovereignty and require states to limit greenhouse gas emissions, ratify specific treaties or take other action to slow the escalation of climate change makes an appealing case in particular, for smaller, more vulnerable states.

²⁵ UNSC S/2018/749. "Letter dated 30 July 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General", at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2018_749.pdf

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Smith, Dan et al 2019. "Climate Security: Making it #Doable". *Clingendael Report*. February 2019.

²⁸ Born, Camilla et al 2019. "Advancing United Nations Responses to Climate-Related Security Risks". *SIPRI Policy Brief*, September 2019.

²⁹ Conversation with Auswärtiges Amt representative 2019-11-27.

³⁰ See e.g. World Economic Forum 2020. "The Global Risks Report 2020". 15th Edition, at: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risk_Report_2020.pdf; International Military Council on Climate and Security 2020. "The World Climate and Security Report 2020", at: https://imccs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/World-Climate-Security-Report-2020_2_13.pdf



Small island states have long been on the frontline of this side of the debate, portraying live examples of how climate change is already risking the very existence of their nations through rising sea levels and shore erosion.³¹ The president of Kiribati has even announced a plan to buy land from other states to ensure that the inevitable migration of its population is dignified.³² Representatives of these states have thus pleaded for Security Council action to limit global warming and establish early warning mechanisms, as the changing climate poses a direct threat to both the national and human security of their countries.

In addition to such straightforward security implications linked to climate change, researchers have argued that climate change acts as a threat multiplier to make existing and future conflicts more probable and more intense.³³ This is an argument made by most of the UN member states in favour of taking action on climate change, especially as it is in line with the Security Council's move to focus more on conflict prevention.

Looking instead at the other side of the argument, the main argument against including climate security is that the Security Council is not the right arena for discussion of such issues. This is argued in part by states that view climate change as more of a sustainable development issue rather than something that requires the

attention of the Security Council.³⁴ Another aspect of the argument is that the Council's capacity is limited and a further addition of responsibilities would restrict its ability to take action on urgent matters. Climate change related security aspects thus risk becoming low priority, if time allows-issues, in favour of events requiring immediate attention.

The sceptical arguments are, however, more complex than that.

A central critique of the Security Council taking on the issue of climate security is the structure of the Council itself. With its five permanent members, each with a power of veto, the Security Council is often criticised for being undemocratic. Some states argue that a global issue that requires global solutions, such as climate change, should be discussed in a truly democratic setting.³⁵ Following appeals for a more democratic arena, many voices generally in favour of greater action on climate change are reluctant to put the matter on to the Council agenda as they see reform of the Council as the number one priority before expanding its mandate any further. In other words, the legitimacy of the Security Council handling climate security issues is contested.³⁶

Another concern is the problematic results that might arise from securitising climate change by placing it on the agenda of the Security Council. For example, the

³¹ van Schaik, Louise et al, 2019. "Fighting an existential threat: small island states bringing climate change to the UN Security Council", *Clingendael Policy Brief*.

³² Holland, Andrew and Esther Babson, 2017. "Atlantis 2.0: How Climate Change Could Make States Disappear – and What That Means for Global Security", pp. 28-34 in Werrell, Caitlin E. and Francesco Femia (eds), *Epicenters of climate and security: The new geostrategic landscape of the anthropocene*.

³³ See e.g. Mobjörk, Malin et al 2010. "On Connecting Climate Change with Security and Armed Conflict". *FOI*, report no FOI-R—3021—SE.

³⁴ Although most states now recognise the security effects of climate change.

³⁵ Sindico, Francesco, 2007. "Climate Change: A Security (Council) Issue?". *Carbon & Climate Law Review*, no. 1 2007.

³⁶ Binder, Martin and Monika Heupel. "Contested legitimacy: The UN Security Council and climate change" in Scott, Shirley V. and Ku, Charlotte (eds), *Climate change and the UN Security Council*. Edward Elgar Publishing.



representative of India has said that “thinking in security terms usually engenders overly militarised solutions to problems, which inherently require non-military responses to resolve. It brings the wrong actors to the table”.³⁷

Finally, there are also concerns over any resolution on climate change that might have a neo-colonial impact. Critics make the case that states have the right to sovereignty over their own development choices. This is generally voiced by oil exporting states arguing for sovereignty over natural resources, which they fear might be restricted should the Security Council begin to pass resolutions on climate change.³⁸

Where are we now?

Despite these concerns, the inclusion of climate change on the Security Council agenda is also argued to have helped to legitimise it in what are turbulent times.³⁹ Germany, which organised the second climate security debate in 2011, is now on the Council and has listed the topic as one of three priorities for its current term. Further advances of the ambitious agenda therefore seem likely in the next mandate period.⁴⁰ The build-up of momentum, as illustrated below, has already begun.

Even before its mandate period on the Council, Germany worked alongside the small island state Nauru to set up the UN Group of Friends on Climate and Security in August 2018. At the outset, the group had 27 members representing five regions: Asia/Pacific, Africa, Western Europe, Eastern Europe and Latin America/the Caribbean. Sweden was one of the original members of this group, along with four current members of the Security Council: Germany, Belgium, the Dominican Republic and Poland.⁴¹ The group now has over 40 members.⁴² It has the potential to be an important arena for sharing ideas and strategies, as well as involving critical member states in establishing a holistic way forward.⁴³ While it is still young, it has already organised a two-day seminar before the Climate Summit, at the pre-summit event of 74th session of the UN General Assembly in New York in 2019, on “addressing climate-related security risks through concrete action: voices from the field”.

During its first month on the Council, Germany co-organised together with the Dominican Republic the fourth open debate in a formal Council setting on climate and security. The debate, “Addressing the impacts of climate-related disasters on international peace and security”, lasted for over eight hours and more delegations than

³⁷ Planetary Security Initiative 2019a. “UN Security Council Briefing on Protection of the Environment in Armed Conflict”, at: <https://www.planetarysecurityinitiative.org/news/un-security-council-briefing-protection-environment-armed-conflict>

³⁸ Sindico, Francesco, 2007. “Climate Change: A Security (Council) Issue?”. *Carbon & Climate Law Review*, no. 1 2007.

³⁹ Born, Camilla 2017. “A resolution for a peaceful climate: opportunities for the UN Security Council”. *SIPRI Policy Brief*. January 2017.

⁴⁰ Auswärtiges Amt 2019a. “Deutschland, Mitglied im Sicherheitsrat der Vereinten Nationen 2019/20”, at: <https://new-york-un.diplo.de/un-de/service/02-Themen-Schwerpunkte-Ziele>

⁴¹ Auswärtiges Amt 2019b. “Vereinte Nationen: Deutschland gründet Freundesgruppe „Klima und Sicherheit“, at: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/themen/klima/freundesgruppe-klima-und-sicherheit/2125194>.

⁴² Werrell, Caitlin and Femia, Francesco, 2019. “UN Security Council on Climate and Security from 2017-2019”. *The Center for Climate and Security*, at: <https://climateandsecurity.org/2019/02/05/un-security-council-on-climate-and-security-from-2017-2019/>

⁴³ Dröge, Susanne 2018. “Klimawandel als Sicherheitsproblem: prioritäten für Deutschlands Sicherheitsratssitz 2019-2020”. *SWP-Aktuell*, no. 49, September 2018.



ever before shared their views on climate change and security. A majority of the speakers not only welcomed the debate, but called for Security Council action.⁴⁴

During its first presidency in March and April 2019, Germany teamed up with France for a joint presidency for the first time in the Council's history. The joint presidency, which focusing on women, peace and security, led to the adoption of resolution 2492 (2019) and a recommitment on the matter. The productivity of the joint presidency suggests an eventful mandate period for other issues too.

Following its presidency, Germany organised the Berlin Climate and Security Conference in June 2019. The aim of the conference was to "(...) discuss the growing risks that climate change presents for peace and security".⁴⁵ It attracted 250 participants from different societal sectors, ranging from government representatives to civil society and the scientific community. This was an important step in the work on climate security in the Security Council, as it helped to strengthen momentum, alliances and strategies on the subject among state leaders from all over the world. The conference conclusions and ideas for ways forward were contained in a document known as the Berlin Call for Action. The document maintains that climate security must become a foreign policy priority, and emphasised the work of Sweden in the UN. Moving forward, the document calls for improved operational responses, among

other things, and calls specifically on the Security Council to: "(...) acknowledge the threat that climate-related risks pose to international peace and security".⁴⁶ A follow-up to the conference is confirmed for 2020, just before Germany assumes the Council presidency for the second time.

In addition to the Group of Friends, the co-organised debate and the conference, Germany has also built on the network of experts initiated by Sweden. The role of this network, which is coordinated by the German think tank adelphi, is to provide the Group of Friends with scientific data on climate and security. Germany has also advanced the Climate Security Mechanism, for example, by funding regional risk assessment projects and enabling it to organise its first conference on the subject.⁴⁷

Germany is likely to make climate security its focus area during its second time as Council president in July 2020. How it will approach this in terms of strategy is still undecided, and will depend heavily on the political situation among the permanent members.⁴⁸ One thing is clear: Germany is not putting all its eggs in one basket. Regardless of the political situation during its next presidency, Germany will have contributed to the climate security discourse in the Security Council in multiple areas.

⁴⁴ UNSC S/2019/113. "Letter dated 4 February 2019 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General", at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2019_113.pdf

⁴⁵ Berlin Climate and Security Conference 2019a. "Executive Summary".

⁴⁶ Berlin Climate and Security Conference 2019b. "Improving the Climate for Peace: Berlin call for action".

⁴⁷ Conversation with Auswärtiges Amt representative 2019-11-27.

⁴⁸ Conversation with Auswärtiges Amt representative 2019-11-27; Auswärtiges Amt 2020. "Halbzeit für Deutschland im UN-Sicherheitsrat: Zwischenbilanz und Ausblick", at: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/internationale-organisationen/uno/halbzeit-sicherheitsrat/2291152?isLocal=false&isPreview=false>



Future outlook

Will there be a thematic resolution from the UN Security Council on climate security in the near future? This will depend heavily on the actions of the five permanent members (P5) in the coming months. As exemplified in the cases above, UN member states are already laying the groundwork for institutionalised working on climate security within the Security Council. For action of any greater magnitude to take place, however, the support of the veto powers is imperative.

Looking at the current stances of these powers, France and the United Kingdom are already onboard with bringing climate security on to the Council agenda. The United Kingdom hosted the first open debate on the matter, and both states are founding members of the UN Group of Friends on Climate and Security. As noted above, both states have expressed interest in advancing the issue.

Russia has been the veto power most outspoken about keeping the issue off the table in the Security Council. By sticking to conservative interpretations of the Council's mandate, it has argued that the climate security has other forums specifically intended for it. Just recently, Ambassador Nebenzia argued that examining the climate problem in the Security Council is "(...) superfluous and even counterproductive" as its "(...) principal task

is to react rapidly to menaces to international peace and security".⁴⁹ However, Russia has recently ratified the Paris Agreement, signalling a shift in political stance nationally. It has also included climate change in its national security strategy, somewhat contradicting its previous arguments for the Security Council not engaging in debates on climate change because it did not conform with its view of security.⁵⁰

Having previously been reluctant to put climate security on the Security Council agenda, arguing that it had the potential to undermine state sovereignty, China slightly shifted its position during the open debates in 2018 and 2019, noting that China takes climate change and its security implications seriously.⁵¹ Ambassador Zhaoxu even acknowledged that "climate change-induced natural disasters (...) will lead to disruptive factors undermining peace and stability".⁵² China has also been lauded for its fast transition to solar and wind power. However, since the 25th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP 25), China's investments in renewable energy have continued to decline rapidly as a result of the removal of subsidies and slower growth in the economy. In line with the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, climate change is suspected to be a lower priority for Beijing.⁵³

The question then falls to the position of the United States. Known as 'P1' among the P5, this captures the importance and influence

⁴⁹ Planetary Security Initiative 2019b. "Momentum builds for UN Security Council action on "multitude" of climate-related threats", at: <https://www.planetarysecurityinitiative.org/news/momentum-builds-un-security-council-action-multitude-climate-related-threats>

⁵⁰ Born, Camilla, 2017. "A resolution for a peaceful Climate: Opportunities for the UN Security Council", *SIPRI Policy Brief*, January 2017.

⁵¹ UNSC 2018 S/PV.8307. "Maintenance of international peace and security", at: <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF>

CF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_pv_8307.pdf

⁵² Planetary Security Initiative 2019a. "UN Security Council Briefing on Protection of the Environment in Armed Conflict", at: <https://www.planetarysecurityinitiative.org/news/un-security-council-briefing-protection-environment-armed-conflict>

⁵³ Hook, Leslie, 2019. "Climate change: how China moved from leader to laggard". *Financial Times*, at: <https://www.ft.com/content/be1250c6-0c4d-11ea-b2d6-9bf4d1957a67?shareType=nongift>



of the US position on any matter. The United States has previously led the expansion of the Council's mandate, pushing for both a resolution on terrorism and the creation of the first ad hoc international criminal tribunal, for the former Yugoslavia.⁵⁴ The 2017 change in administration, however, has had a ripple effect also visible in the Security Council, as it went from generally being in favour of climate security being a matter for the Council, to be the only state to object to a paragraph on climate change being in United Nations Security Council resolution 2349 (2017) on the Lake Chad Basin.⁵⁵ The withdrawal from the Paris Agreement sent a strong signal of the status of climate change in US foreign policy objectives. In its domestic politics, the US Department of Defense published a report on assessing vulnerabilities from climate change and their effect on high-level operations. The report states that "[t]he effects of a changing climate are a national security issue with potential impacts to Department of Defense (DoD or the Department) missions, operational plans, and installations".⁵⁶ As in the case of Russia, this would suggest a changing view of climate security, bringing it into the traditional security sphere.

Looking beyond the veto powers, several states have begun to include an intention to prioritise action on climate security in their Security Council candidacies. Norway and Canada are two such examples, and both

are running for a seat in 2021–2022.⁵⁷ This suggests that the Council will see an increased number of debates and meetings in the future.

Conclusions

This study has shown while states that favour climate security being discussed in the Security Council have faced significant obstacles, their work has been persistent and has accelerated in recent years. The variety of hosts of open debates and Arria-formula meetings on the matter is worthy of note, highlighting broad support for increased action by the Council. The positions of the veto powers are, as in most Council matters, the biggest impediment to getting agreement on a resolution focused solely on climate change-related security risks.

The first resolution to include the phrase 'climate change' was adopted after the Council was brought face to face with the security impacts of climate change. It therefore seems to have been key to Sweden's work to approach the matter geographically, locating first one location particularly at risk of further destabilisation from climate change, and then another, instead of forcing a new topic area onto the Council agenda.

⁵⁴ Scott, Shirley V. 2018. "The attitude of the P5 towards a climate change role for the Council" pp. 209-228 in Scott, Shirley V., and Charlotte Ku (eds). *Climate Change and the UN Security Council*. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

⁵⁵ Security Council Report 2017. "In Hindsight: The Security Council and Climate Change-An Ambivalent Relationship", at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2017-08/the_security_council_and_climate_change_an_ambivalent_relationship.php

⁵⁶ Department of Defense 2019. "Report on Effects of a Changing Climate to the Department of Defense", at:

https://climateandsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/sec_335_ndaa-report_effects_of_a_changing_climate_to_dod.pdf

⁵⁷ Government of Canada 2019. "Our priorities", at:

<https://www.international.gc.ca/campaign-campagne/unsc-csnu/index.aspx?lang=eng>; Regeringen 2019. "Norway for the UN Security Council 2021-2022", at:

https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/dep/utnevning/ud/vedlegg/fn/flyer_un.pdf



Security Council Resolution 1373,⁵⁸ which required all states to take action to criminalise terrorism, followed in the emotional aftermath of 9/11. This suggests that a resolution on limiting climate change might follow an extreme weather event or humanitarian disaster. What such an event might be to trigger Council action is unclear, as immense disasters have already taken place without generating such a response. However, given that climate change now appears in resolutions and is being debated by more actors, a greater Security Council response to environmental disasters appears more likely in the future. The current state of global climate politics, however, most notably the failure to reach a satisfying agreement at COP25 makes a resolution on climate security within the near less probable. More likely is a Council statement arising from the joint initiatives of states, urging national governments to treat climate change as a security risk.

In sum, this has two primary implications. First, although the position of some of the veto powers says otherwise, there is momentum for climate action at this level. The growth in membership of the Group of Friends on Climate Security is one expression of this, as well as the continuing work to establish mechanisms to facilitate communication between science and policymaking. This encourages continuing work to keep the topic on the agenda.

This progress does, however, risk obscuring concerns about giving the Security Council a mandate to act on climate change and although the issue is pressing, states need to be mindful of these concerns when moving forward. Action on climate security could, as shown in this text, add legitimacy to a contested Security Council, but if not handled mindfully, it risks giving rise to even

more criticism of the undemocratic processes of the Council.

Second, in connection with the urgent nature of climate change, the obstacles are still significant and states cannot rely solely on the Security Council to provide an immediate response at this time. Instead, the alliances of like-minded states built within and outside the Council should take the lead on climate action in other forums, without necessarily losing momentum in the Council.

This study highlights that despite the severe obstacles, there are good reasons for policymakers and academics not to neglect the Security Council as a forum for raising climate-related security matters. The debates and opinions signal an international desire for a more holistic approach to climate change that includes areas not traditionally considered appropriate for discussion in that body. Advances have already been made and, as Germany and other states have signalled, climate security will be raised again in the Security Council in the near future, making it an important area for future research and analysis.

⁵⁸ UNSC Res 1373 (28 September 2001). UN Doc S/Res/1373.



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TABLE 1: Open Debates and Arria-Formula Meetings on Climate Security, 2007–2019⁵⁹

YEAR	TYPE	THEME	HOST(S)
April 2007	Open Debate	Energy, security and climate	The United Kingdom
June 2007	Open Debate*	Natural resources and conflict	Belgium
July 2011	Open Debate	Maintenance of international peace and security: Impact of climate change	Germany
Feb 2013	Arria-formula meeting	Security dimensions of climate change	Pakistan & The United Kingdom
June 2013	Open Debate*	Conflict prevention and natural resources	The United Kingdom
June 2015	Arria-formula meeting	Climate change as a threat multiplier for global security	Spain & Malaysia
July 2015	Open Debate*	Peace and Security threats to SIDS	New Zealand
April 2016	Arria-formula meeting	Water, Peace and Security	Senegal
May 2016	Briefing	Challenges to the Sahel Region with a special focus on climate	Egypt & Spain
Nov 2016	Open Debate*	Water, Peace and Security	Senegal

* = Not targeting climate change and security directly but the matter was brought up by the speakers.

⁵⁹ UN Web TV 2018. "Protection of the Environment During Armed Conflict - Security Council Arria-formula meeting", at: <http://webtv.un.org/search/protection-of-the-environment-during-armed-conflict-security-council-arria-formula-meeting/5859032430001/?term=gsdgsd>; Security Council Report 2019. "Arria-Formula Meetings, 1992-2019", at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/working_methods_arria_formula-17.pdf; Born, Camilla, 2017. "A resolution for a peaceful Climate: Opportunities for the UN Security Council", *SIPRI Policy Brief*, January 2017.; Climate Security Expert Network 2019. "Short history of UNSC engagement on climate-related security risks", at: <https://climate-security-expert-network.org/topic-5>; Planetary Security Initiative 2019a. "UN Security Council Briefing on Protection of the Environment in Armed Conflict", at: <https://www.planetarysecurityinitiative.org/news/un-security-council-briefing-protection-environment-armed-conflict>; What's in the Blue 2019. "Arria-formula Meeting on the 'Protection of the Environment during Armed Conflict'", at: <https://www.whatsinblue.org/2019/12/arria-formula-meeting-on-the-protection-of-the-environment-during-armed-conflict.php>



April 2017	Arria-formula meeting	Security Implications of Climate Change: Sea Level Rise	Ukraine
June 2017	Briefing*	Preventive Diplomacy and Transboundary Waters	Bolivia
Dec 2017	Arria-formula meeting	Climate Change: Preparing for security implications of rising temperatures	France, Italy, Japan, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Peru, Germany, the Maldives & Morocco
Dec 2017	Open Debate*	Addressing Complex Contemporary Challenges to International Peace and Security	Japan
July 2018	Open Debate	Understanding and addressing climate-related security risks	Sweden
Oct 2018	Briefing*	The Role of Natural Resources as a Root Cause of Conflict	Bolivia
Oct 2018	Arria-formula meeting*	Water, Peace and Security	Bolivia, Ivory Coast, the Netherlands, Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia and Italy
Nov 2018	Arria-formula meeting*	Protection of the Environment During Armed Conflict	Kuwait
Jan 2019	Open Debate	Addressing the impacts of climate-related disasters on international peace and security	Dominican Republic
Dec 2019	Arria-formula meeting*	Protection of the Environment During Armed Conflict	Estonia, Germany, Kuwait & Peru

* = Not targeting climate change and security directly but the matter was brought up by the speakers.





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