



Climatizing the UN Security Council

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Abstract

Since 2007, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has debated the security implications of climate change on several occasions. This article addresses these debates by exploring two interrelated questions: What drives the continuous efforts to place climate change on the UNSC's agenda and to what extent do the UNSC's debates illustrate an ongoing process of climatization? To answer these, the article draws on the concept of climatization, which captures the process through which domains of international politics are framed through a climate lens and transformed as a result of this translation. It suggests that climate change has become a dominant framing and an inescapable topic of international relations and that the UNSC debates follow a logic of expansion of climate politics by securing a steady climate agenda, attributing responsibility to the Council in the climate crisis, involving climate actors and advocating for climate-oriented policies to maintain international security.

Keywords Climate change · Climatization · International organizations · Securitization · Security Council · United Nations

Introduction: Debating Climate Threats at the UN Security Council

First, can climate security be achieved through the quick fix of securitization of climate change to address climate-related disasters? International peace and security considerations often trump other considerations. Defining a problem as a security challenge therefore often increases the attention and resources devoted to addressing it. Securitizing climate change may help to heighten public awareness, but securitization also has significant downsides. A secu-

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ritized approach risks pitting States into a competition, when cooperation is clearly the most productive avenue in tackling this threat. Thinking in security terms usually engenders overly militarized solutions to problems that inherently require non-military responses to resolve them. In short, it brings the wrong actors to the table. As the saying goes, if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. (Excerpt from the Indian delegate's intervention at the UNSC open debate held on 25 January 2019, UNSC S/PV.8451).

On 25 January 2019, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) held its 4th official open debate on the security implications of climate change. Despite the growing engagement of some member states, the Council could not reach an agreement on a presidential statement, let alone a resolution. Although an increasing number of states support the UNSC's involvement in climate politics, it is still a very contentious issue as the quotation by the Indian delegate attests. Since the first debate in April 2007, the UNSC has discussed climate-related issues on multiple occasions: Five official open debates (17 April 2007; 20 July 2011; 11 July 2018; 25 January 2019; and 24 July 2020) were supplemented by a series of informal meetings ('Arria-formula' sessions) that directly or indirectly explored the contested links between climate change and international security.

In international relations, these meetings have been extensively studied. Among this work, two main trends emerge: one revisiting the institutional debate on the role and functions of the UNSC and a second one on the process of securitization of climate change. First, scholars have traced these different debates shedding light on the agenda setting process, the content of the discussions and the opposing arguments presented by member states (Conca et al. 2017; Cousins 2013; Elliott 2003; Penny 2007; Scott and Ku 2018). They analyze how the Council integrates this emerging issue from an institutional perspective while questioning the potential role for the UNSC in the climate-security debate. Most of these studies consider why the UNSC should address climate change and how it could do it (Conca 2019; Conca et al. 2017; Elliott 2003; Scott and Ku 2018). They echo the monitoring and advocacy work conducted by different think tanks and policy-oriented research centers (Born 2017) whose coordinated efforts have been highly publicized through the Planetary Security Initiative launched in 2015 by the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They discuss the legitimacy of the UNSC in considering climate-related issues and its authority to act on such topics. They list a series of options for its action on climate change and question their feasibility. While generally advocating for a broader transformation of the UNSC, they often recognize that the current Council's politics undermine the likelihood of the adoption by the UNSC of a strong framework on climate change (Conca 2019). A second trend in critical security studies has explored the case of the UNSC as an example of securitization of climate change (Andonova 2010; Kurtz 2012; Maertens 2016; Methmann and Rothe 2013; Rothe 2016; Scott 2012, 2008; Webersik 2012). Drawing on the work of the Copenhagen school on the discursive construction of security threats, these studies analyze the speech acts that intend to construct climate change as a security issue. The UNSC is both considered as a securitizing actor producing securitizing moves, especially through its 2011 presidential statement (S/PRST/2011/15, 20 July 2011) and case-by-case



resolutions,¹ and a securitization arena where member states and other speakers intend to proclaim climate threats. This work discusses the political implications of a security discourse applied to climate change and highlights the risk of militarization and depoliticization that could result from the UNSC's engagement in climate politics (Ide 2020; Louis and Maertens 2021).

On the one hand, the first trend of research underlines the current challenges that the UNSC faces in addressing climate change. These studies show the political disagreements among its members who even struggle to have formal open debates as attested by the use of informal sessions. On the other hand, the work in critical security studies highlights the risks of tackling climate change as an isolated threat within the Council. Despite these conclusions and the repeated failures, there is still much interest in bringing climate change on the UNSC's agenda.

This article proposes to discuss the persistence of such a political endeavor by drawing on recent work on the process of climatization (Aykut et al. 2017; Maertens and Baillat 2017; Oels 2013, 2012). Instead of looking at the process of securitization of climate change, it considers the reversed process of climatization through which other domains of world politics are framed through a climate lens and transformed as a result of such a translation. It therefore supplements both trends of research by exploring two interrelated questions: What drives the continuous efforts to place climate change on the UNSC's agenda and to what extent do the UNSC's debates illustrate an ongoing process of climatization? It suggests that climate change has become a dominant framing and an inescapable topic of international relations and that the debates conducted within the UNSC follow a logic of expansion of climate politics. By looking at the UNSC's case, it intends to give cues for a better understanding of the significant influence of climate change in world politics and global governance today.

Climate Threats: from Securitization to Climatization

Political discourse and academic work linking climate change to security have been studied by critical scholars, to understand the political motives of the actors drawing that connection. These scholars have identified two dominant narratives: (1) the role of climate change in causing conflicts and (2) the threat that climate change poses to various dimensions of human security (food, health, etc.) (Hardt 2017; Lucke et al. 2014; McDonald 2018, 2013; Oels 2012; Rothe 2016; Trombetta 2008). Most of this work relies on securitization theories to capture the way climate change has been discursively framed as a security threat. Developed by the Copenhagen School, the concept of securitization considers the social construction behind the notion of 'security.' For Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 'the exact definition and criteria of

¹ For instance, in the resolution 2349 adopted in March 2017 on the security situation in the Lake Chad Basin region, the Council 'Recognises the adverse effects of climate change and ecological changes among other factors on the stability of the Region, including through water scarcity, drought, desertification, land degradation, and food insecurity' (S/RES/2349 (2017), §26).



securitization is constituted by the intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects' (1998, p. 25). In other words the process would consist of political elite designating a threat to survival—through a speech act—and making it recognized as such. According to these authors, a successful securitization process would allow the issue to be treated with the urgent and exceptional measures that characterize the field of security. The Copenhagen School's model, centered on a discursive analysis, has been widely criticized and expanded since its first formulation (Balzacq 2011; Collective 2006; McDonald 2008). Yet the securitization theories have inspired much work on the construction of the environment as a security issue and more recently on the case of climate change (Floyd 2010; Floyd and Matthew 2013; Lucke et al. 2014; McDonald 2013; Methmann and Rothe 2013; Oels 2012; Rothe 2016; Trombetta 2011).

In parallel to the literature on the securitization of the environment in international relations, the emergence of the concept of environmentalization in sociology can shed novel light on the relationship between environment and security. Like security matters, environmental issues can be socially constructed, through a process of 'environmentalization.' Acselrad (2010, p. 103) summarizes the work dedicated to this process in the following definition: 'The term can be used to designate both the adoption of a generic environmental discourse by different social groups, as well as the concrete incorporation of environmental justifications to legitimate institutional, political and scientific practices.' The environmentalization of security can be approached as akin to Elbe's (2010) formulations on the medicalization of security: He demonstrates how the connections between security and global health depend not only on the securitization of global health threats, but also on a process of medicalization of insecurity which impacts security practices. The environmentalization of security then aims to establish security activities as part of the environmental protection norms, policies and mandates (Maertens 2019). It also appears through practices and devices, shifted from the environmental sector to the security field.

Derived from the concept of environmentalization, climatization describes the process that defines a given issue as being part of the climate domain and relevant to climate policies. In the case of security, climatization is not a way that 'new phenomena are being constructed and exposed to the public sphere,' but rather the way that 'old phenomena are renamed' (Acselrad 2010, p. 103) as pertaining to the climate field. Aykut et al (2017) study how the climate governance extends its sphere of influence by climatizing other domains of global politics. They rightly show that climatization highlights a powerful yet uneven process in which climate change increasingly becomes the dominant frame through which other issues and forms of global governance are mediated and hierarchized. It depends less on legal dispositions in climate treaties or institutionalized linkages between international organizations. Instead it rests on the work of numerous actors which 'translate' issues and concerns using a climate lens. Work on environmentalization and climatization has been rather sparse in critical security studies, which has largely focused on the securitization of the environment and climate change. Without employing the concepts of climatization and environmentalization Trombetta (2008) approaches these questions by showing that the securitization of environmental issues leads to changes in terms of practices within the security field. Security actors integrate new logics of



action inspired from traditional environmental policies such as preventive actions and nonconfrontational responses. These conclusions echo Oels's (2012, p. 197) definition of the climatization of security: "'Climatization' of the security field means that existing security practices are applied to the issue of climate change and that new practices from the field of climate policy are introduced into the security field." Drawing on a Foucauldian approach and the Paris school's perspective on (in)securitization and security professionals, she shows that 'practices of disaster management are emerging in the defence sector while practices of adaptation are featured in migration and development policy' (2012, p. 202). By identifying these emerging practices, she sheds light on the progressive climatization of the sectors of migration, development and defense while advocating for more research on the implications of the climatization of the security field.

Building on Oels's work, Maertens and Baillat (2017) questioned the climatization process through a detailed empirical case study. They looked at 'how migration, security and conflict are framed as issues relevant to the climate convention' during the climate summit COP21 held in Paris in December 2015 and concluded that 'COP21 witnessed continued use of climatisation as a tool for alert, instrumentalised to shed light on climate change and sometimes also on issues completely unrelated to climate' (2017, p. 130). This study captures different objectives behind the climatization of migration, security and conflict, stresses the uneven degrees of climatization between these issues and points to the resistance that limits climatization. Yet it does not fully address the analytical implications of conceptualizing the relation between security and climate change as a process of climatization. Going further the present article unpacks the interrelated elements which compose the climatization process.

The literature on the medicalization of security provides a strong basis to conceptualize the various components of climatization processes. Drawing on different disciplines and Foucault's work, Elbe identifies three developments which support the medicalization of security: Insecurity is framed as a medical problem with a medical origin; medical professionals acquire a greater role in world politics; medical interventions are applied to secure populations (2010, pp. 22–29). Building on these conclusions, the present article approaches climatization as a definitional process which extends the realm of climate politics and identifies the different elements through which issues, actors and institutions are being climatized. Following an inductive and interpretative approach, I argue that the climatization of the UNSC consists of four interrelated developments: Climate change becomes an inescapable topic repeatedly put on the UNSC's agenda; the UNSC is enjoined to assume a responsibility in the climate crisis; climate actors expand their roles in the Council; climate policies steer solutions to maintain international security. This demonstration expands Elbe's initial framework in two ways. First, when applied to an actor like the UNSC instead of an issue, the framing process is twofold: The actor is progressively conceived as unavoidably concerned with climate change; and its role is becoming redefined in relation to its responsibility in the climate crisis. In other words, a climatized Council cannot escape climate change discussions. Secondly, while Elbe focuses on medical professionals, the case of climate change shows a growing role of not only climate professionals, including climate scientists, experts



and international organizations whose mandates address climate change, but also climate activists and climate change ‘victims.’ These elements are further explored in the following sections.

The multiple studies which have analyzed the content of the debates held within the UNSC on climate change highlight opposing arguments, agenda setting strategies, alliances’ reconfigurations (especially since the North/South divide has been challenged by dissensions within both blocks) and member states’ evolving discourses and positions over time (Born 2017; Scott and Ku 2018). Building on this work, this article revisits these debates (official and informal) in light of the concept of climatization. To do so, it relies on a qualitative content analysis of different primary sources: Official records of the five open debates held in the UNSC,² UN press releases, on site³ and online information⁴ regarding informal discussions organized under the UNSC’s umbrella, complementary gray literature on the UNSC and think tanks’ advocacy and outreach communications on the UNSC’s engagement in climate politics. While the analysis covers all the debates, it does not intend to present each discussion in detail or review every member states’ positions—this would repeat the detailed accounts available in the literature. Instead the article mentions selected abstracts representative of a specific discourse and presents illustrative examples of member states’ strategies that shed light on the process of climatization of the UNSC.

Drivers of climatization

Before delving into the four components of the climatization process, this section discusses the factors and contextual elements which drive the Council’s climatization. Extensive work has explored which states are driving the introduction of climate change at the UNSC and why (Conca 2019; Conca et al. 2017; Dellmuth et al. 2018; Scott and Ku 2018). Previous research on the securitization of climate change at the UNSC has also shown that the Council’s debates took place in a context of growing concerns over the magnitude of the climate crisis with securitizing moves aiming at sounding the alarm and advocating for stronger governmental commitments. They also occurred when key security actors such as the US military showed increasing interest in the security implications of climate change. This section does not intend to reiterate these conclusions but rather pinpoints contextual elements which inform on the way the climatization process unfolds.

First, a key driver relates to the political gain expected from climatization. Scholars, as India also pointed out, have shown that securitizing actors often expect to attract attention by designating climate threats while profiling themselves on this

² The article mainly focuses on the four first open debates.

³ I conducted a three-month participant observation within the UN Secretariat from October 2012 until February 2013. In that context, I attended the Arria-formula meeting dedicated to the security implications of climate change on 15 February 2013.

⁴ Some governmental position papers presented in the context of informal and non-recorded debates on climate change are available online on the official page dedicated to the permanent representations of member states to the UN or circulated to think tanks and medias for distribution and discussion.



topic, especially for non-permanent members (Conca 2019; Maertens 2018; Scott and Ku 2018). The climatization of the UNSC also follows political strategies to raise awareness, create political momentum, acquire resources and gain material and symbolic power thanks to a specific expertise or a critical exposure to climate risks. The election of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines as the smallest state (about 110'000 inhabitants) to secure a seat at the UNSC (starting from January 2020) can be interpreted as an example of the capital acquired by the climatization process. The permanent mission of the Caribbean multi-island nation defines its 'unique opinions on the issue of climate change' as the reason why it was elected⁵: In this case the political gain does not result from proclaimed climate threats (securitization), but from the growing significance of climate change in international relations (climatization). Climatization is about giving a voice to actors specifically concerned with climate change.

Secondly, UNSC's climate debates connect to the chronology of the international negotiations on climate change. While the 2007 debate took place after the Kyoto protocol entered into force in 2005, it was also after a failed COP12 where emission cuts were hardly discussed. Later that year, the IPCC and Al Gore received the Nobel Peace Prize, a key milestone mentioned in introduction of the letter from the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General to justify the organization of the 2011 debate (S/2011/408, 5 July 2011). The 2011 debate was scheduled after the failure of the COP15 in 2009 in Copenhagen, soon accentuated by the declaration of withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol by the Canadian government in December 2011. If the debate at the UNSC could not entirely compensate for these governance failures, it did produce the only agreed decision on the overall links between climate change and international security through a Presidential Statement (S/PRST/2011/15).⁶ The more recent discussions also took place in a controversial context with the US withdrawal from the Paris agreement and the climate denial of the Trump administration. During the UNSC's debates, member states thus reiterated their commitments to the different instruments attached to the climate convention (Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement) or called for their ratification and strengthening. They also punctually denounced their 'unfinished business' (Ghana, 2007) referring to states having 'too often failed to honor their commitments to such frameworks' (Nigeria 2011). The UNSC therefore appears as an alternative to global climate governance that has failed to mitigate global warming as put by the delegate from Namibia in 2007: 'Kyoto 2 will probably come and go, and so will Kyoto 3 and 4, while our peoples and countries are rendered more and more vulnerable. What we need is action now and not mere debates that do not produce concrete results. In this regard, my delegation would like to see

⁵ Permanent Mission of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations. (2019) Facebook Profile, <https://www.facebook.com/SVGMissionUN/>. Accessed 14 October 2019.

⁶ Other decisions were only agreed on a case-by-case approach.



the establishment of an effective mechanism to take charge of the governance of climate change.’⁷ Climatization is about attributing responsibility.

Third dealing with sudden crisis as much as long-term political tensions, the UNSC is the international forum mandated to address cross-border ‘emergencies.’ Since 2007 (year of the first official debate held on climate change), the idiom of emergency has been increasingly used to describe the current climate situation. For instance, a growing number of public actors, including national parliaments, local governments and cities, are declaring climate emergency (The Climate Mobilization 2019). In the face of this ‘emergency,’ the UNSC’s involvement therefore appears logical, even if the emergency framing has been less used by member states during the official debates,⁸ with the notable exception of some small island countries such as Barbados whose delegate declared climate change as a ‘global emergency’ in the 2007 debate (S/PV.5663, 17 April 2007). Climatization is about ensuring the Council’s legitimacy and up-to-date agenda in a changing world.

Building on this development, I suggest summarizing the drivers for climatizing the UNSC into three categories. First, they are strategic: Some member states can gain agency through symbolic and material capital by climatizing the UNSC, while others can benefit from shifting from the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change’s universal venue to the exclusive club of the UNSC where they may already have more power.⁹ Second, they are instrumental: The UNSC is addressed to overcome the failures of global climate governance and take responsibility *with* the (though unlikely) possibility to use coercion, *but without* the political and ethical implications of a security framing. Climatization of the UNSC places climate change in the highest international political forum while avoiding the security logic(s). Third they are symbolic: The climatization of the UNSC helps raise attention while keeping the Council’s legitimacy as the main multilateral body in charge of managing global emergencies. In other words, climatization concerns agency and responsibility. The following section further develops these elements by unpacking the different dimensions through which climatization processes unfold.

Climatizing the UN Security Council

The analysis of UNSC’s debates on climate change reveals that the Council’s climatization consists of four interrelated developments which expand climate politics and help understand the continuous efforts to introduce climate change at the Council.

⁷ Namibia, however, did not call for a direct engagement from the UNSC in 2007, endorsing the statements by the G77 + China and the Non-Aligned Movement.

⁸ The other mentions referred to emergency aid and emergency preparedness, especially in the 2019 debate (UN Security Council, S/PV.8451, 25 January 2019).

⁹ Some developing countries have, for example, claimed that developed countries were bringing climate change at the UNSC to impede their development.



Securing a Steady Climate Agenda

First despite recurring oppositions by key member states such as China, India and Russia, the Council keeps on organizing official debates, but more importantly informal meetings on climate change. If states can refuse to attend these meetings, such sessions maintain the issue on the agenda or ‘ensur[e] the continuity of this debate’ as Spain and Malaysia claimed in the concept note presenting the ‘Open Arrria-formula meeting on the role of Climate Change as a threat multiplier for Global Security’ held on 30 January 2015.¹⁰ Since 2013 five Arrria-formula meetings have been entirely dedicated to climate change (Table 1).

Moreover, consistent advocates have also bypassed oppositions by indirectly tackling climate change through related issues. While climate change appeared among the issues addressed during the open debate on the ‘new challenges to international peace and security and conflict prevention’ (convened by Portugal on 23 November 2011), it was also a critical matter raised during an open debate on ‘Peace and security challenges facing small island developing States’ (convened by New Zealand on 30 July 2015). Climate change was also addressed during official and informal debates on water and security, on the Lake Chad Basin, on the Sahel region (Born 2017; Maertens 2018) and more recently on terrorism and violent extremism in Africa,¹¹ interested member states seizing every opportunity to keep it on the agenda. This strategy however has not gone unnoticed as expressed by the Russian representative during an open debate on hunger and conflicts (convened by the Dominican Republic on 29 April 2020): ‘We understand that climate change is very trendy now, and there is always a temptation to insert it into every discussion. But we need to be frank with ourselves and not to exaggerate its significance in every crisis’ (S/2020/340, 29 April 2020). Despite such recurring opposition, the UNSC has developed a steady and even growing climate agenda since the first debate in 2007.

Climate change has also become a campaign issue for member states that seek to obtain a seat as a non-permanent member. During the 2011 open debate, Finland, at the time campaigning for a seat for the 2013–2014 period,¹² stated: ‘The Security Council should, given its pre-eminent role in maintaining international peace and security, keep an eye on the emerging security implications of climate change. If elected to the Security Council next year, Finland will contribute actively to any such assessment and action’ (S/PV.6587 (Resumption 1), 20 July 2011). More recently the Canadian ambassador to the UN has announced that Canada’s bid for UNSC’s seat was to focus on economic security, climate change and gender equality (McParland 2019). Ireland (Houses of the Oireachtas 2018), Kenya (Kibii 2019) and Norway, also running for a seat in 2021–2022, all referred to climate change in connection with their candidacy, like the Norwegian delegate during the 2019

¹⁰ http://www.spainun.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Concept-Note_ClimateChange_20150630.pdf. Accessed 9 July 2019.

¹¹ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14140.doc.htm>. Accessed 29 May 2020.

¹² Luxembourg was eventually elected.



Table 1 Official and informal debates directly addressing climate change at the UNSC, 2007–2020. *Source:* Compilation by the author based on UNSC official records and the compilation of Arria-formula meetings by Security Council Report (2019). Data updated through July 2020

Date	Meeting type	Title	Convenors
17 April 2007	Open debate	Climate Change	UK
20 July 2011	Open debate	Maintenance of International Peace and Security, Impact of Climate Change	Germany
15 February 2013	Arria-formula meeting	Security Dimensions of Climate Change	UK and Pakistan
30 June 2015	Arria-formula meeting	Climate Change as a Threat Multiplier for Global Security	Spain and Malaysia
10 April 2017	Arria-formula meeting	Security Implications of Climate Change: Sea Level Rise	Ukraine (with the support of Germany and Sweden)
15 December 2017	Arria-formula meeting	Preparing for Security Implications of Rising Temperatures	France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Maldives, Morocco, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden and the UK
11 July 2018	Open debate	Maintenance of International Peace and Security, Understanding and Addressing Climate-Related Security Risks	Sweden
25 January 2019	Open debate	Maintenance of International Peace and Security, Addressing the Impacts of Climate-Related Disasters on International Peace and Security	Dominican Republic
22 April 2020	Arria-formula meeting	Climate and Security Risks: The Latest Data	France together with Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, Germany, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, the UK and Viet Nam ^a
24 July 2020	Open debate (video-teleconference)	Maintenance of international peace and security: climate and security	Germany with the support of Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Niger, Tunisia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the UK and Viet Nam

Security Council Report. (2019) Arria-Formula Meetings, 1992–2019. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-security-council-working-methods/arria-formula-meetings.php>. Accessed 30 August 2019

^a<https://onu.delegfrance.org/Event-on-Climate-and-Security-risks>. Accessed 29 May 2020



open debate: ‘The climate-security nexus merits, in our view, being firmly placed on the Council’s agenda. It is also a priority for Norway, as a candidate country for a non-permanent seat in the Council’ (S/PV.8451, 25 January 2019). Furthermore, the Undersecretary for Political Affairs of Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs pointed that ‘during our election campaign we *rightly* focused on climate change’ (Teesalu 2019, emphasis added), almost admitting the strategic dimension of such a focus since Estonia was elected for the period 2020–2021 (like Saint Vincent and the Grenadines). Germany is also presenting its two-year term (2019–2020) as one of advocacy in favor of climate change at the UNSC (Maas 2018) with the ultimate goal ‘to *mainstream* matters of climate-related security in all resolutions and in the policy of the Security Council’ (Climate Diplomacy 2019, emphasis added). Not surprisingly, the German representative expressed disappointment that the security implications of climate change were not included in the language of the resolution on South Sudan adopted in March 2020 (S/PV.8744, 12 March 2020). Germany, together with the Pacific state Nauru, also established a Group of Friends on climate and security at the United Nations in August 2018 (with 27 founding members) in order ‘to bring the topic into even sharper focus on the United Nations political agenda’ (Federal Foreign Office 2018). In other words, climate change has become a repeated item on the Council’s agenda with continuous efforts to increase the UNSC’s involvement in the matter. This first sign of climatization is supplemented by the responsibility attributed to the UNSC in the climate crisis.

Attributing responsibility in the climate crisis

The climatization of the UNSC also entails a definitional process in which the Council is framed as enjoined to assume a responsibility toward the climate crisis and the necessary political responses.

Over the past years, member states and other speakers intervening during the Council’s meetings have asked the UNSC to take responsibility in the global climate crisis, like it has been called to do so in matters of human security in the 1990s. Most speakers emphasized the urgency of climate change to justify UNSC’s debates. They refer to ‘unprecedented’ ‘threat,’ ‘challenges,’ ‘changes,’ ‘scale’ or ‘impacts’ while pointing to the ‘new’ or ‘novel’ character of climate change influence on societies, making clear reference to ‘humanity’ and calling for ‘collective action.’ In 2019 the delegate from Mauritius expressly emphasized the global dimension of climate change: ‘no country is immune to the perils of climate change. [...] The Security Council is therefore the appropriate platform to address this threat to the security and prosperity of the globe’ (S/PV.8451, 25 January 2019). Climate change is defined as an urgent and unprecedented priority for the UNSC. The UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs who opened the 2019 debate also stated: ‘Given the *critical role* and *responsibility* of the Security Council, I am encouraged by today’s debate. It signals our willingness to establish a shared understanding of the impact of climate-related security risks on international peace and



security' (S/PV.8451, 25 January 2019). After her statement, several member states also refer to the Council's responsibility and obligations:

'[I]t is our view that it is not illegitimate to think that the Security Council has a *role, a mission and a responsibility* that are yet to be defined.' (Algeria);

'It is clear that taking climate risks into account is no longer an option but a *necessity*, if the Council is to *assume its full responsibility* and strengthen its capacity to prevent conflicts.' (Belgium);

'The Security Council *must* become an early-warning system for international policy.' (Germany);

'The Security Council has the *primary responsibility* for maintaining international peace and security. The climate-security nexus *merits*, in our view, being firmly placed on the Council's agenda.' (Norway);

'The consequences certainly transcend the mandate of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and could require a response from the Security Council in *the context of its responsibilities* related to conflict prevention and resolution.' (Peru).

'The Council *needs* to equip itself with a system of risk assessment and strategies that integrate the impact of climate change into its analysis and into conflict prevention and peacekeeping.' (Spain).

Such responsibility is further invoked when international security practices are designated as climate problems. The UNSC is the main multilateral arena responsible for 'the maintenance of international peace and security' (UN Charter, Art. 24, §1) and plays a critical role in the regulation of international security practices. Yet the recent debates at the UNSC have revived the discussions initiated in the 1980s on the environmental impacts of conflicts. During their interventions, multiple member states emphasized the consequences of (in)security on climate change. For instance, in 2018, the delegate from Bolivia argued against discussions on climate change held in the UNSC, preferring the UN climate convention, but then dedicated a full paragraph to the impacts of 'military machinery of the most powerful countries on the planet' on the environment (S/PV.8307, 11 July 2018). In 2019, the Slovakian delegate called for an integrated approach 'linking humanitarian, development, climate-mitigation and peace and security-related action,' while advocating for 'further steps to more effectively address the critical threats that war and armed conflict pose to the environment and conservation efforts' (S/PV.8451, 25 January 2019). Growing debates over the climate footprint of peacekeeping operations further attest how international security issues and practices are understood as part of the climate problem.¹³ Other interventions have also proposed a new account of warfare: 'Our conflict is not being fought with guns and missiles but with weapons from everyday life—chimney stacks and exhaust pipes. We are confronted with a chemical war of immense proportions.' (Tuvalu, 2007); 'Humanity, and the developing countries in particular, have been subjected to what could be described as low-intensity biological or chemical warfare.' (Namibia, 2007). Such reframing is reinforced in the

¹³ <http://greeningtheblue.org/what-the-un-is-doing/field-missions>. Accessed 29 May 2020.



concrete suggestion of the Indonesian delegate during the 2019 debate: ‘One concrete step that we can take is to better equip our peacekeepers with the capacity to undertake military operations other than war—to carry out not only peacekeeping operations but also climate peace missions’ (S/PV.8451, 25 January 2019). In these quotes, a climate lens redefines what counts as war implying an (in)direct responsibility for the UNSC, while allowing a closer involvement of climate actors.

Expanding Climate Actors’ Role

The climatization of the UNSC facilitates a greater role for three types of climate actors: climate experts, including climate scientists, international organizations mandated on climate change and think tanks; climate activists like non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and climate change ‘victims’ understood as states, communities or specific populations with a critical exposure to the adverse effects of climate change. Two main techniques have been used to open the Council’s doors to these actors.

First during open debates, any UN member state has the right to request the UNSC’s President ‘to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure’ (S/PV.5663, 17 April 2007). In 2007, 40 states representatives expressed their wish to take the floor alongside the 15 UNSC members, 47 in 2011 and 60 in 2019 (Table 2), setting a record for number of non-Council members participating in open debates (in 2007 and 2011). If only five extra states participated in the 2018 debate, the President of Nauru attended the debate and Iraq was represented by its Minister for Water Resources. In 2019, 15 delegations were represented at the ministerial level. During the 2020 video-teleconference open debate, six non-Council members intervened, among which Belize delivered a statement on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), Nauru on behalf of the Group of Friends on Climate and Security and Denmark on behalf of the Nordic countries, but 29 delegations also submitted written statements to express their views on the matter (S/2020/751). Among the non-Council members, states infamously well-known for their vulnerability to climate change, such as Bangladesh or Pacific small island developing countries, requested to participate, sometimes through a spokesperson like in 2018 when the representative of the Maldives addressed the Council on behalf of AOSIS. Their statements emphasized the legitimacy of their voice within the Council as the first ones concerned with the adverse effects of climate change: ‘We are likely to become the victims of a phenomenon to which we have contributed very little and which we can do very little to halt’ (Papua New Guinea, on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum Small Island Developing States, 2007). Moreover, the closer involvement of those actors in the Council has not been limited to punctual interventions, but also appears in their access to non-permanent seat as mentioned previously with the case of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The climatization of the Council calls for a greater role for states with a critical exposure to the effects of climate change.



Table 2 Participation during open debates on climate change at the UNSC, 2007–2020. *Source:* Author's compilation based on UNSC's official records

Debates	Number of participating member states	Invited guest speakers
17 April 2007	55	UN Secretary-General
20 July 2011	62	Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme Acting Head of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations
11 July 2018	20	UN Deputy Secretary-General Representative from the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change
25 January 2019	75	Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme Chief Scientist of the World Meteorological Organization Research Assistant at the Environmental Security Program of the Stimson Center Minister Counsellor of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations Permanent Observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross to the United Nations Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See
24 July 2020	21 interventions and 29 written statements	Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas Director of Niger's Centre National d'Études Stratégiques et de Sécurité Director of the Sustainable Pacific Consultancy Niue Head of Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations



Except for the first debate in 2007, each of the UNSC's meetings also welcomed UN senior officers, regional organizations' representatives and even members from civil society (NGOs and think tanks)—detailed list available in Table 2. During these debates, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) intervened at the UNSC for the first time in their history, respectively, in 2011 (through its executive director) and 2019 (through its chief scientist). UN representatives and non-state actors were also key speakers during the Arria-formula sessions. Indeed if this format is mostly used to overcome some member states' reluctance, it also allows the interventions of multiple experts and NGOs' representatives that are at the frontline of the advocacy work in favor of mandating the UNSC on climate change. For instance, in 2013, the introductory messages by the UK, Pakistan (both convenors), the Marshall Islands and Australia (through a video), were followed by four interventions by the UN Secretary-General, the president of the German Advisory Council on Global Change, the Vice-President and Special Envoy on climate change of the World Bank, and the UN Under-Secretary-General for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. NGOs' voices were represented by the intervention of the director of Climate Action Network. In the April 2020 Arria-formula meeting, organizers invited the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs to intervene followed by representatives of the NGO International Crisis Group¹⁴ and the Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute (SIPRI).¹⁵ Likewise, NGOs and experts¹⁶ are highly active in support of the Group of Friends established by Germany and Nauru in 2018 (Adelphi 2019). While inviting guest speakers, organizing Arria-formula sessions and pursuing the debates outside the UNSC are not techniques specific to climate-oriented discussions, taken together they facilitate the greater involvement of climate experts, activists and 'victims' in the Council, signaling the progressive climatization of the UNSC.

Advocating for a Climate Fix

In their work on the securitization of climate change and the climatization of security, Trombetta (2008) and Oels (2012) shed light on the adoption of practices 'largely inspired by the practices developed within the environmental sector' by security actors (Trombetta 2008, p. 594). Trombetta (2008) shows the development of preventive and nonconfrontational measures (including insurance and compensation), and Oels discusses the 'new flexible military response capacities [that] are being developed in the North, so that the political order of overwhelmed Southern states can be re-established after climate change-induced disaster' (Oels 2012, p. 201). In the case of the UNSC, the renewed interest in prevention¹⁷ cannot be

¹⁴ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/climate-change-shaping-future-conflict>. Accessed 29 May 2020.

¹⁵ <https://onu.delegfrance.org/Event-on-Climate-and-Security-risks>. Accessed 29 May 2020.

¹⁶ For instance, see the independent Expert Working Group on Climate-related Security Risks: <https://www.sipri.org/research/peace-and-development/climate-change-and-risk/expert-working-group-climate-related-security-risks>. Accessed 30 August 2019.

¹⁷ For instance, see the first intervention by the newly appointed UN Secretary-General at the UNSC: Security Council, S/PV.7857, 10 January 2017.



directly attributed to climatization since prevention has been an essential dimension of the Council's work since the 1992 *Agenda for Peace* by UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. Yet the solutions put forward at the UNSC to address the security implications of climate change entail recourse to climate-oriented policies based on science, preventive risk management, 'climate proofing' and institutional adaptation. In other words, the climatization of the UNSC emerges from these suggested responses which reinforce both a preventive approach toward conflicts and insecurities and an adaptation strategy in terms of climate change.

First, debates at the UNSC have emphasized the need to collect and exchange scientific data and information, echoing decision making in the field of climate change where scientific assessments are requested in preparation of international negotiations. While the 'latest data' on 'climate and security risks' were the focus of the April 2020 Arria-formula session, during open debates, states called for more 'comprehensive information from the field' (Poland, 2018) and for 'aggregating data' (USA, 2019), while insisting on 'improving the flow of information' (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2011) and advocating for 'further informative exchanges with representatives and experts, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, on the security implications of climate change, as well as more integrated sharing of data and expertise' (Viet Nam, 2019). On the one hand, these recommendations reinforce the role of climate experts as relevant partners for the UNSC; on the other one, they encourage the application of tools used in climate science such as 'climate data collections, climate scenarios and early-warning systems' (Switzerland, 2019) to address climate and security risks. Such data and scientific mechanisms have been promoted to mainstream information throughout the UN system ('We must integrate that data into decision making across the entire United Nations system' (UK, 2019)) and to gather analysis tools in the hands of one 'guarantor of the scientific message that can build consensus on the links between climate and security' (France, 2020, Arria-formula session¹⁸). These tools also suggest a risk-management approach which aims to enhance 'a preventive assessment strategy' and 'anticipate the consequences' (France, 2020, Arria-formula session¹⁹). Echoing the work on processes of riskification through which the security implications of climate change are addressed based on a risk-management approach (Corry 2012; Estève 2020), these policy solutions suggest a climate fix to issues pertaining to international security.

The responses recommended during the UNSC's climate discussions also focus on 'climate proofing,' cross-cutting intersectoral mechanisms and institutional adaptation. For example, during the Arria-formula meeting held in December 2017, convenors invited one of the authors of the report 'A Responsibility to Prepare' published by the Center for Climate and Security alongside the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. This report defines a preventive agenda intending to 'climate-proof' security institutions, 'climate proofing' notably includes 'routinizing,

¹⁸ <https://onu.delegfrance.org/Event-on-Climate-and-Security-risks>. Accessed 29 May 2020.

¹⁹ Ibid.



integrating, institutionalizing and elevating attention to climate and security issues at these bodies' (Werrell et al. 2017, p. 1). This process echoes the German Federal Foreign Office's aim to 'mainstream' climate-security issues (Climate Diplomacy 2019) and the objective defined by the French permanent representation 'to ensure that the work of the UN in countries vulnerable to the effects of climate change is climate-proofed' (Arria-formula meeting, 22 April 2020).²⁰ To do so, different member states advocated for the appointment of a special representative on climate and security within the UN secretariat—Nauru in 2011 and 2018, Canada, Norway, Ireland and Tuvalu in 2019. They also encouraged the institutionalization of climate-security governance within the UN, through the establishment of the Climate Security Mechanism in 2018. Staffed by the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the UN Development Programme and UNEP and supported by the governments of Sweden, Norway, Germany and UK,²¹ it is tasked 'to provide integrated climate risk assessments to the UN Security Council and to other UN bodies' (Smith et al. 2019a; see also Smith et al. 2019b). The project intending to include climate considerations into peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding²² precisely illustrates a form of adaptation of security institutions through climate proofing. While mainstreaming and intersectoral management have been applied within the UN for other transversal topics such as gender, the solutions put forward in terms of climate change tend to adopt an adaptation strategy for UN institutions confronted with the adverse effects of climate change.

This section has identified four developments through which the UNSC is progressively being climatized. These different elements complement and reinforce each other, since for instance climate proofing sustains the Council's climate agenda and its responsibility in the climate crisis, while the recourse to climate policies and science increases the role of climate actors in the management of international security. They also promote a preventive approach and institutional adaptation seemingly raising less opposition than they did a few years ago.

Conclusion

Since 2007, the UNSC has debated the security implications of climate change on multiple occasions. Revisiting these discussions, this article enquires about the continuous efforts which aim to bring climate change on the UNSC's agenda despite apparent failures. Building on previous studies on the climatization of security, it considers the UNSC's debates as an example of a broader process of climatization of world politics and explores the different elements through which other domains of international politics can be climatized. More than analyzing these debates as a

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development/peace/conflict-prevention/climate-security.html>. Accessed 29 May 2020.

²² UNEP has been advocating for this since its report on greening the Blue Helmets (United Nations Environment Programme 2012). It echoes the growing literature in environmental peacebuilding (Swain and Öjendal, 2018) and recent publications on climate adaptation and peace (see, for instance, van Schaik et al. 2019).



new form of greenwashing, the article proposes to look into the expansion of climate politics and the potential ensued transformations within other international arenas.

The contributions of this article are twofold. First, it contributes empirically by revisiting the UNSC climate debates in connection with other UNSC practices such as member states campaigning. Second, it challenges established analytical frames on two levels. It disputes the dominant approach based on the securitization framework and demonstrates that, in the case of climate change, a focus on securitization does not tell the whole story. It then proposes to further develop the concept of climatization by shedding light on the different components through which climatization processes unfold: securing a steady climate agenda; attributing responsibility in the climate crisis; expanding climate actors' role; and advocating for climate-oriented policy solutions.

Further research on the climatization of other policy domains and actors could explore the role of these dimensions, as well as identify additional components, while informing on the broader trend of climatization of international relations.²³ Moreover, the analysis suggests three fruitful research avenues. First, by identifying dynamics of inclusion through the growing involvement of climate actors and that of exclusion through the involvement of a non-universal arena, it invites to investigate the tension between universality and club diplomacy in global climate governance. Likewise, the case of the UNSC shows signs of routinization, through climate proofing and mainstreaming, as much as it calls for exceptional measures. Future research could explore this paradox in greater detail. Finally, while the climatization of the UNSC mainly entails preventive and adaptation policies, additional work could further characterize climatizing moves by distinguishing adaptation- from mitigation-oriented climatization. Such distinction may help further conceptualize ongoing processes of climatization as the debates over the UNSC's involvement in climate politics continue.

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²³ See other papers in this special issue.



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