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Global catastrophic risks mitigated	Risk multipliers managed	Implementation timeframe
Climate change	**Conflict or political violence**	**Short**

Closing the Gap in Climate and Security Governance

How can the UN tackle climate & security risks? I propose two elements: incrementally boosting the institutional capacity and reach of the UN Climate and Security Mechanism, and promoting the mainstreaming of climate- and security- sensitive risk assessments across the system.

DETAILS

Over the past five years, policy debates about how to deal with the climate-security nexus have intensified at the United Nations (UN) and other multilateral bodies, as well as in research communities. Research shows that the links between climate and security are indirect, but that climate can multiply and accelerate security, contributing towards instability, violence, crime, open conflict, and even violent extremism. A series of seven resolutions by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have acknowledged the relevance of climate change to peace and security, and both Sweden and Germany have raised this "flag" as one of their top priorities while occupying non-permanent seats at the Council.

The topic has algo gained visibility through engagement by top leadership in New York. Secretary-General António Guterres has given speeches recognizing the need to address the links between climate and security. There have also been some institutional innovations. In 2018, a Climate and Security was launched to develop new risk assessments and toolkits for the broader UN system. The Mechanism has received seed funding as well as expanding political backing by a Group of Friends that, to date, counts on over forty member states.

Therefore, incorporation of climate and security into global governance has only begun to emerge. Despite the clear need to mainstream climate and security, institutional homes are also needed to anchor debates, formulate normative frameworks, and drive initiatives and policies at all levels. At one end of the spectrum, some actors argue that climate should constitute a fourth pillar of the UN system, in which climate and security would find a natural institutional home. At the other end, some have defended that, rather than contributing to the silo effect that has plagued the UN since its inception, all of the parts of the system should be rushing to incorporate climate and security into their assessments, frameworks, and responses. A more balanced approach would instead recognize that advancing on this front against considerable political and financial offds requires both institutionalizing and mainstreaming climate and security in key components of the global governance system.

Given the evidence showing the world is approaching a "point of no return" in climate change, creating a governance system for C&S at this particular time has never been more urgent. Yet this task also faces unique challenges. International climate regimes, not least the Paris Agreement, have come under attacks from populist nationalists and have experienced reversals as key players either withdraw or lag behind in commitments, and/or seek to undermine the progress of negotiations and implementation. COP-25 showed little progress on negotiations

around key controversial issues such as Article 6 of the agreement.

At the same time, the institutionalization of climate and security depends in part on persuading a number of key players that incorporating climate change into security assessments will lead to more effective tackling of security issues rather than greater interventionism, excessive securitization, or undesired crossing over into firmly guarded policy territories. Some of those players are reluctant to endorse this agenda due to territorialism or belief that the Council agenda is already stretched thin without incorporating new topics.

Nevertheless, the international community must advance on this governance front, and not just through the UNSC. Even as climate and security policy debates have appeared within the UNSC they continue to lag behind in other parts of the UN system. There is interest and even urgency on the part of senior UN officials from all three pillars of the architecture—development, human rights and peace and security-- but there is also puzzlement at how to go about integrating climate and security into a preventive approach.

The structural reforms led by SG Guterres offer an opportunity to strengthen climate and security not only at the Secretariat, but also at the country level. The key step for institutionalization would consist of an annual Secretary General's report on Climate and Security with inputs from across the system. The Climate and Security Mechanism should develop a more robust capacity-building function to help components of the system to tailor their tools to the particular needs, for instance through the creation of a "Climate and Security Mobile Training Unit" that would circulate within the system, both at the secretariat and at regional and national contexts, as demands emerge.

In addition, climate and security analysis must be mainstreamed into the Security Council agenda and brought into a wider variety of debates at the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. At the country level, the empowerment of Resident Coordinators and the drive to do joint analyses means that climate and security stressors can be incorporated into UN initiatives across the policy cycle, from diagnostics to response design to impact assessment. It also means that climate and security can be eased into policy dialogues with national and subnational governments, as well as civil society entities and private sector actors. The merging of departments into the DPPA also offers a space in which to incorporate climate and security into peacebuilding, peacemaking and mediation efforts, beyond the limitations of the Security Council.

Climate and security governance, however, also requires more dialogue and coordination with regional organizations, including the African Union, European Union, ASEAN and Organization of American States. Some regional organizations, such as the Pacific Forum and CARICOM, have begun to approach climate and security in ways that are tailored to the stressors and impacts being felt or being projected for those particular regions of the world. The number of individual states recognizing climate and security is still limited, but some may serve as "champions" in raising the issue at regional forums and the UN.

Just as important as building and expanding governance structures is the need to make climate and security a more inclusive area. So far, the agenda is largely driven by rich countries, with a focus on poor conflict-affected states. The Climate and Mechanism's small staff has no Global South members, although the Group of Friends has become more diversified. Yet climate change affects the entire planet, and some of the more vulnerable parts of the globe are located within the global north, such as the Arctic region, which is also one of the world's most politically sensitive areas. Leaving out the global nature of the climate and security challenge may reinforce suspicions among some

Global South players that this is yet another North-driven agenda meant to advance the geopolitical and geoeconomic interests of global powers.

The UN's 75th birthday offers a chance to boost climate action by bringing attention to the overlooked security consequences of climate change through a combination of institutionalization and mainstreaming.

WIDER IMPLICATIONS

Reducing inclusivity and accountability in national and global governance

Strengthened governance in climate security would boost inclusivity, because effective preventive approaches require inclusivity in politics and climate action. It also requires a clearer understanding of how climate is multiplying security risks. It is therefore essential that this effort be framed not only as a UN governance initiative, but in fact as a lens that should be adopted by Member states, regional organization and other stakeholders.

Conversing effect in increasing poverty and inequality

There is already a body of literature suggesting that climate action can have perverse effects when poorly planned or implemented-- the so-called boomerang effect. For instance, climate adaptation efforts around major infrastructure projects can end up creating pockets of poverty and social exclusion. Thus governance in climate and security must avoid the narrow securitization of the topic, addressing the development and human rights aspects of this relationship as well. This is why climate and security governance is a transversal topic, cutting across the three existing pillars of the UN, rather than a theme that should be anchored narrowly in an isolated institutional home.

Reducing conflict and political violence

Evidence is growing that climate change can magnify, accelerate and diversify insecurity, from violence and organized crime in the Amazon to violent extremism in the Sahel. There are also likely geopolitical consequences to this relationship elsewhere in the world, such as growing tensions as the Arctic ice shrinks and new yet disputed routes open up. Finally, there are major humanitarian consequences to climate and security, as the sinking of Pacific islands and the destruction of Caribbean island states are already showing. By pushing established global governance structures to address the climate drivers of insecurity, rather than consider those spheres separately, this proposal will help curb different types of insecurity across a variety of contexts, especially through a climate-sensitive preventive approach.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Implementation strategy

The institutionalization of climate and security governance within the UN system depends in part on persuading a number of key players, among them permanent seat holders at the Security Council, that incorporating climate change into security assessments will lead to more effective tacking of security issues rather than greater interventionism, excessive securitization, or undesired crossing over into firmly guarded policy territories. Some of those players have been reluctant to endorse this agenda due to territorialism or belief that the Council agenda is already stretched thin without incorporating new topics-- however, they have not blocked the initial steps led by Sweden and Germany to create a Climate & Security Mechanism.

Nevertheless, there is interest and even urgency on the part of senior UN officials from all three pillars of the architecture—development, human rights and peace and security--regarding how to go about integrating climate and security into a preventive approach.

The structural reforms led by Secretary General Antonio Guterres offer an opportunity to build climate and security not only into UN structures at the Secretariat level, but also at the country level. At the Secretariat, the first key step for institutionalization would consist of an annual Secretary General's report on Climate and Security with inputs from across the system. In addition, the Climate and Security Mechanism should be granted a more robust capacity-building function to help components of the system to tailor their tools to the particular needs, for instance through the creation of a "Climate and Security Mobile Training Unit" that would circulate within the system, both at the secretariat and at regional and national contexts as demands emerge. And, even within the Security Council, only a few select crises on the agenda, such as those around Syria, Sahel and Yemen, are being debated taking climate into account in risk assessments.

In addition, climate and security analysis must be mainstreamed into the Security Council agenda and brought into a wider variety of debates at the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. At the country level, the empowerment of Resident Coordinator and the drive to do joint analyses means that climate and security stressors can be incorporated into UN initiatives across the policy cycle, from diagnostics to response design to impact assessment. It also means that climate and security can be eased into policy dialogues with national and subnational governments, as well as civil society entities and private sector actors. The merging of departments into the DPPA also offers a space in which to incorporate climate and security into peacebuilding, peacemaking and mediation efforts, beyond the limitations of the Security Council.

Political will exists to realise this proposal

At least six UN Security Council have addressed the links between climate and security. The UN Secretary General has also referred to how climate can multiply insecurity in different contexts. At the UNSC, Germany currently leads efforts to institutionalize Climate and Security, with support from Switzerland. The UN Climate and Security Mechanism has been implemented and is develpoping a risk assessment framework as well as a toolkit that can be used by other components of the UN system. Its associated Group of Friends already has over 40 states, both rich and developing countries. Given that the Mechanism is only one year old, this expansion in the membership of the Group of Friends indicates that-- despite hesitation by some actors-- interest in and awareness of climate and security risks have

grown sharply over the past 2 years.

What if political will does not exist yet

Expanding political will for Climate and Security governance requires at least three steps:
a) Expanding the UN Climate and Security Group of Friends, currently at 40 states, and ensuring that it includes a range of geographies, development levels and experiences with peace and security;
b) Identifying the next "climate and security" champions among candidates to the UN Security Council
c) Getting the Secretary General's office to commit to an annual Report on Climate and Security.

MITIGATING RISKS

Mitigating climate change

Given the growing evidence showing the world is approaching a “point of no return” in climate change, incorporating climate and security into the UN and partner organizations is an essential yet severely overlooked dimension of climate action. Yet this task also faces unique challenges. International climate regimes, not least the Paris Agreement, have come under attacks from populist nationalists and have experienced reversals as key players either withdraw or lag behind in commitments, and/or seek to undermine the progress of negotiations and implementation. COP-25 showed little progress on negotiations around key controversial issues such as Article 6 of the agreement. Part of the problem is that the regime is viewed by climate skeptics and "reluctant actors" as irrelevant or cumbersome, and that many of these actors neglect the security costs of climate change, from those related to climate migration to food and energy security. Bringing attention to the security implications of climate change will mobilize not just Member States but also other stakeholders (civil society, private sector, other international organizations) to better understand and act against the security implications of climate change.