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Fighting an existential threat: small island states bringing climate change to the UN Security Council*

This policy brief discusses how climate change related security challenges have been addressed by the UN Security Council (UNSC). Small Island Development States (SIDS) were among the first to push for this agenda, as rising sea levels pose a direct threat to their existence, which could inter alia lead to territorial disputes and also puts military bases at risk. The chaos in the aftermath of the intensified hurricane season in the Caribbean resulted in calls for military assistance to restore order. The active SIDS campaigning on climate change in relation to security is thereby highly legitimate, even though the appetite of some of the permanent members of the UNSC to heed that call for action is limited. They question the threat to international security rising out of this agenda and seem to fear calls for (financial) assistance. However, in relation to the SIDS, this policy brief argues that international peace is indeed likely to be threatened. Steps forward are identified for addressing this agenda.

Climate change and the UN Security Council: too hot to handle?

It was only in 2007 that the UNSC held its first debate on the impact of climate change on security and peace under the Presidency of the United Kingdom. Since then, the issue has featured on the agenda of this supreme body of global governance on several occasions (see Table 2). Several

states have repeatedly contested the mandate throughout subsequent meetings and questioned the need for the UNSC to deal with the matter. These states argue that the UNSC should focus on more urgent matters of war and peace and that other bodies would be better equipped to deal with climate change mitigation, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) being at the centre. Other states, to the contrary, complain about the UNSC's inability to effectively address non-traditional security threats, such as climate change.

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Over the recent decade both China and Russia, each permanent UNSC members with veto powers, have been rather critical about discussing climate change in the UNSC. During the latest informal debate, held on 15 December 2017, they once more questioned the mandate and expertise of the UNSC on the topic. However, Russia slightly shifted its position by acknowledging that for specific conflict settings addressed by the UNSC climate change could be acknowledged as one of the drivers of instability. Russia referred to its supportive vote for the 2017 Lake Chad resolution, which recognised the effect of climate change on instability in that region. Less than one year later, the UNSC Presidential Statement on West Africa and the Sahel was adopted, which expanded the previous Lake Chad resolution, adding that climate change can cause instability in the West Africa and Sahel regions. China also slightly adjusted its position in 2015, acknowledging climate change as a non-traditional security threat for the SIDS (see Table 2).

Before the adoption of the Paris Agreement on climate change in 2015, China and Russia might have feared that acknowledging climate change as a security issue would open up the possibility of using UNSC instruments for countries that were not reducing emissions. In this respect, the current US position is delicate, as President Trump has announced the withdrawal of the US from the Paris Agreement. However, it has been argued that within the US Congress there is still broad bipartisan support for the relationship between climate and security and that parts of its administration, such as the Pentagon and USAID still back it strongly as well.¹ This probably explains why the US has not undermined the latest UNSC debate on climate change.

Appetite for a strong role for the UNSC to fully embrace climate change as a security threat is thus still limited but is shaping up in specific cases. Some members argue for the

need to take more account of climate change in early warning and conflict prevention, and to have an institutional home on the issue within the UN and a Special Representative for Climate and Security. Indeed, the coordination of activities addressing climate change, as carried out by various parts of the UN family (UNDP, UNICEF, OCHA, UNHCR, UN Environment) and other international organisations (e.g., World Bank, IFRC²) – and their relevance for the political issues of security and migration – could benefit from a knowledge hub to help build capacity for climate-informed decision making across the UN.

Arguably, the secretariat of the UNFCCC, based in Bonn, already has a mammoth task in supporting implementation of the Paris Agreement but lacks the capacity and political mandate to take up this role within the UN system. For an institutional home to be established in New York, it still is not clear if UNSC approval is needed, but its backing or at least tacit approval might arguably be of help. The idea of an institutional home is advocated most strongly by Sweden, which is a UNSC Member in 2017–2018 and will be presiding over the Council in July 2018. The idea is supported by others, most notably the Kingdom of the Netherlands.³

The idea of for a Special Representative was proposed by Nauru on behalf of the Pacific SIDS in 2011⁴, and repeated in August 2016. The idea is strongly supported by Sweden, who would allegedly also be open to provide the necessary funding for it. Responsibility of such an envoy position could include⁵:

1 Janani Vivekandanda et al. 2017. Action on Climate and Security Risks, Planetary Security Initiative Report.

2 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

3 Intervention by Halbe Zijlstra, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 'From awareness & agenda-setting to action & adaptation', Arria formula meeting on climate and security, NY, 15/12/2017.

4 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/09/388552-pacific-island-states-call-un-measures-help-countries-fight-climate-change>.

5 <http://www.climatechangenews.com/2016/05/24/the-un-should-appoint-a-climate-and-security-envoy/>.

- Improving our understanding of the security dimensions of climate change,
- Reporting regularly to the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council on emerging climate-related security threats,
- Facilitating regional cooperation on cross-border issues that might be affected by climate change,
- Helping vulnerable countries evaluate their security-related national circumstances and develop action plans to increase their resilience,
- Identifying and monitoring potentially dangerous tipping points and the climate and security nexus,
- Engaging in preventive diplomacy as appropriate, and
- Supporting post-conflict situations when climate change is a risk factor that could undermine stability.

Existential threats to small islands states with an international security dimension

Knowledge surrounding the threat of climate change to SIDS dates as far back as 1990, when the first Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessment report noted that atoll countries and small islands are highly vulnerable, especially due to sea level rise.⁶ In 1992, SIDS were mentioned in the official text underpinning the creation of the UNFCCC, with Article 4.8 highlighting the adverse effects of climate change on small island countries. Many widely available sources stemming from various branches of the UN system, from governments, and from academia have reported on the impacts of climate change on the security of SIDS (see Table 1). Sea level rise and extreme weather events are obvious primary impacts; among the secondary impacts are food and water scarcity, as well as mounting pressure on governance structures in general and on law and order in particular. For many of these

challenges different types of adaptation programmes seem the appropriate response.

Less recognition, however, is given to possible impacts on *international* security and related responses.⁷ In general, the SIDS are acknowledged for their strong advocacy role in the adoption of the Paris Agreement on climate change, and due to their sheer number they are quite influential in the UN General Assembly (38 out of 193 UNGA members are SIDS⁸). In UNSC they lobbied strongly for their agenda, despite other developing countries not being supportive.⁹

During the first official UNSC meeting on *the security and peace implications of climate change*, held in 2007, the Maldives said that a mean sea-level rise of two metres would mean ‘the death of a nation’ for their country of 1,190 islands would be entirely submerged. Palau stated that its loss of coral reefs from climate change is ‘tantamount to the country’s destruction, and... the migration of its people’. And Papua New Guinea, on behalf of the Pacific Island Forum, asked for the UNSC to review sensitive issues, such as implications for sovereignty and international legal rights from the loss of land, resources and people. In an input paper for the UNSG report on climate and security of 2009, the Pacific SIDS argued that the in Solomon Islands, the combination of various adverse impacts of climate change had already led to armed conflict, requiring the deployment of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon

6 Ourback, T. and Magnan, A. 2017. ‘The Paris Agreement and climate change negotiations: Small Islands, big player’. *Regional Environmental Change* doi:10.1007/s10113-017-1247-9.

7 A notable exception is: Holland, A. and Babson, E. 2017. *Atlantis 2.0: How Climate Change Could Make States Disappear – and What That Means for Global Security. Epicenters of Climate and Security: <https://climateandsecurity.org/epicenters/>*.

8 SIDS are a distinct group of 38 UN Member States and 20 Non-UN Members/Associate Members of regional commissions facing unique social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities. The three geographical regions in which SIDS are located are the: Caribbean Sea, Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans and the South China Sea.

9 UN. Press Conference on Impact of Climate Change on Marshall Islands, 2013, https://www.un.org/press/en/2013/130215_MI.doc.htm.

Islands (RAMSI).¹⁰ In their contributions the SIDS illustrated above all how their *national* security was at stake, because of climate change. The interventions were less strong on how relations *between* states might deteriorate or to point to a specific “aggressor”, the traditional remit of the UNSC.¹¹

Ten years later, in 2017, the devastating hurricanes Harvey and Irma hit the Caribbean.¹² Together they caused a death toll of 38 and massive damage to island states.¹³ The French-Dutch island of St. Martin was left with destroyed homes, dysfunctional critical infrastructure, and communication networks brought down. Severe water and food shortages led to fights among residents.¹⁴ The resulting civil disorder and looting required the Netherlands government to deploy troops and police forces (see Table 1). It proved difficult to maintain control over 40.000 people living illegally on the Dutch part of the island, who are estimated to number as many as the official residents.¹⁵ The UK,

France and the US in a similar way sent support to affected territories.

The escape of criminals and terrorist suspects from prisons also posed an immediate threat with international implications. Indeed, although living a great distance from the Middle East, more than 100 men from the Caribbean island of Trinidad and Tobago joined Isis.¹⁶ Recruitment from Jamaica has also been reported. The US has expressed concerns about the inability of countries in the Caribbean to monitor terrorists returning home or operating domestically.¹⁷ Forty ‘high risk’ inmates escaped from a prison on the British Virgin Islands and were on the run after Hurricane Irma. It is not known if terrorists were among these prisoners, but fears of prisoner outbreaks, including suspects of international crimes and terrorism, were among the concerns of local authorities in the aftermath of the hurricanes. More analysis would be needed to identify the magnitude of this issue, and to what extent it poses an international security threat.

Peace is likely to be threatened when several SIDS – for example, the Maldives, the Marshall Islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu – will be fully or near-fully submerged by the end of the century.¹⁸ Threats arise from a humanitarian perspective, for such disastrous impacts would lead to forced human migration; and threats to peace might also arise following a geopolitical response to the loss of islands. More specifically, when islands turn to rocks due to sea level rise, it is unclear if resources within ‘Exclusive Economic Zones’ (EEZs) will continue to be protected under the United Nations Convention on the Law

10 Pacific SIDS, Views on the Possible Security Implications of Climate Change to be included in the report of the Secretary-General to the 64th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/resources/res_pdfs/ga-64/cc-inputs/PSIDS_CCIS.pdf.

11 UNSC. Security Council Holds First-Ever Debate on Impact of Climate Change on Peace, Security, Hearing Over 50 Speakers. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2007/sc9000.doc.htm>; see for a good overview of possible UNSC responses to climate change Shirley V. Scott, Implications of climate change for the UN Security Council: mapping the range of potential policy responses, *International Affairs* 91:5, 2015.

12 Hurricanes are, of course, common in the Caribbean but their increased intensity as a result of climate change is increasingly likely, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/06/twin-megastorms-irma-harvey-scientists-fear-new-normal>.

13 See <https://www.wsj.com/articles/irma-death-toll-rises-to-38-in-caribbean-1505170342>.

14 See <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/15/world/americas/hurricane-irma-st-martin.html>.

15 <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/10/04/het-friendly-island-is-na-de-orkaan-niet-zo-vriendelijk-meer-13333416-a1575949>.

16 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/02/trinidad-jihadis-isis-tobago-tariq-abdul-haqq>.

17 <http://www.newsweek.com/isis-recruiters-arrest-jamaica-reveals-link-between-jihadi-group-and-caribbean-656769>.

18 Holland, A. and Babson, E. 2017. ‘Atlantis 2.0: How Climate Change Could Make States Disappear – and What That Means for Global Security’. *Epicenters of Climate and Security*: <https://climateandsecurity.org/epicenters/>.

Table 1 Summary of climate change threats and associated security threats

SIDS climate change threats	Security implication
Rising sea level and land lost due to coastal erosion [1, 2, 7]	Territorial integrity and conflict over land [1, 2, 3], Human displacement and forced migration [1, 3]
Changing weather patterns and the natural disasters → Increase in frequency of floods and droughts → Reduction in rainfall that feeds the drinking water [1, 2, 5]	Water security [1, 2] Food security [1, 2, 6] Territorial integrity and conflict over land [1, 2, 3] Health security [4]
Soil erosion and rising sea levels → Endangers food and water supply [1, 2, 3]	Food security [1, 2, 6] Security of subsistence agriculture [1, 2, 3] Human displacement and forced migration [1, 3]
Loss of coral reefs due to rising sea levels limiting or even eliminating access to critical food sources, e.g., fisheries and the endangering biodiversity [1, 2, 3, 7]	Food security [1, 2, 6] Health security [1, 2, 4] Human displacement and forced migration [1, 3]
Increase in natural disasters that cause malnutrition, poor sanitation, increased incidence of waterborne, vector-borne and airborne diseases [1, 2, 3, 5]	Health security [1, 2, 4] Human displacement and forced migration [1, 3]
SIDS climate change threats	International security implications
Island disappearing	Economic zones (and natural resources within them) can be put in question Naval bases/military presence at risk
Increase of hurricanes	Citizens' security at stake Prisoner outbreaks (with unwarranted release of human and drug smugglers, international crime, terrorists)

1 UN, PSIDS. 2015. http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/resources/res_pdfs/ga-64/cc-inputs/PSIDS_CCIS.pdf; 2 UNFCCC. Climate change, small island developing states. 2005. http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/publications/cc_sids.pdf; 3 UNSC Press Release. 2007. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2007/sc9000.doc.htm>; 4 WHO. Climate change and its impact on health on small island developing states. 2017. <http://www.who.int/features/2017/climate-small-islands/en/>; 5 Holland, A. and Babson, E. 2017. Atlantis 2.0: How Climate Change Could Make States Disappear – and What That Means for Global Security. *Epicenters of Climate and Security*: <https://climateandsecurity.org/epicenters/>; 6 Albert, S. et al. 2017. Heading for the hills: climate-driven community relocations in the Solomon Islands and Alaska provide insight for a 1.5 C future. *Regional Environmental Change* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-017-1256-8>; 7 University of California, Santa Cruz. 2018. Innovative restoration of coral reefs helps protect Caribbean islands. *Science Daily*. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/02/180212130830.htm.

of the Sea (UNCLOS). New disputes could emerge easily over such resources. In the Marshall Island in 2016 declared their maritime baselines, which was driven in part by a desire to ensure the maintenance of sovereignty over resources, such as fisheries. Furthermore, various strategically important military bases located on small island states are at risk – for example, the US Pacific Command. And what will happen when some islands in the South China Sea cease to exist?

These humanitarian, military, economic, and geographic changes could become a source of geopolitical tensions and threaten peace.

Geopolitical tensions surrounding SIDS are already rising, for example, following China's recent acquisition of land in the Maldives. Reportedly, concerns have intensified among 'India and its allies' regarding China's interest in possibly turning the 'Indian Ocean into the China Ocean', by 'turning trade outposts into military outposts'.¹⁹

19 See <https://www.forbes.com/sites/panosmourdukoutas/2018/02/12/china-wants-to-turn-the-indian-ocean-into-the-china-ocean/#52b33e3d5bef>.

As its purpose is ‘to maintain international peace and security’, the UNSC appears to be an appropriate body to address these impending security concerns. In turn, this would help draw attention to the need for other parts of the UN family to address climate-related security impacts.

Presenting the SIDS case to the UNSC: a unique case of climate-security?

When SIDS first discussed climate change at the UNSC in 2007, it was seen as a ‘socio-economic development issue’ appropriate for the General Assembly and the UNFCCC.²⁰ Then, SIDS began their plea for greater recognition at the UNSC for its mandate on human rights protection and security and integrity of states. In addition, SIDS sought to ensure the advancement of concerted global action on climate security in line with the capacities of states to contribute. The Pacific Island Forum, a political grouping with 18 members including SIDS, Australia and New Zealand, has been a particularly active participant in UNSC climate debates since 2007. To a lesser degree their call have been echoed by Caricom, acting on behalf of Caribbean islands. Another body advocating strongly for the case is the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), which is very active in bringing forward the SIDS perspective on climate change in UN bodies.

But despite strong advocacy, little progress has been made in the UNSC. In 2009, Pacific SIDS then took the issue to the General Assembly. They extracted a compromise, Resolution 63/281 (2009), which invited the UN organs, where appropriate within their mandates, ‘to intensify their efforts in considering and addressing climate change, including its possible security implications’.²¹ Furthermore, the resolution requested the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) report on

security implications ‘based on the views of member states’.

Subsequently in 2009, the UNSG produced a report on the security implications of climate change, largely acknowledging it as a ‘threat multiplier’ and a threat to the survival of SIDS because of ‘sea-level rise and the resultant loss of national territory’.²² Nevertheless, the report did not convince permanent UNSC members to change their views during a subsequent informal debate in 2011 (using the so-called Arria formula that allows for an informal setting to which all UN members can contribute). During the meeting, Russia stated that the report held no arguments serious enough to place the issue on the agenda, and that report did not even once refer to the UNSC.

More than a decade later, we see that the SIDS campaign did not translate to high dividends such as a resolution. There are still no international legal norms designed to account for the disappearance of nations because of environmental processes nor is there a recognition of climate or environmental refugees.²³ However, recent developments in the UNSC might stir hopes for the SIDS. As noted above, in 2015, during the open UNSC debate on peace and security threats to SIDS, China acknowledged that SIDS are experiencing ‘non-traditional security threats’. And in 2017, Russia opened the door for acknowledging climate change in specific conflict regions, such as Lake Chad. Building on this background, it might be possible for the SIDS, given the uniqueness of the climate-security challenge they face (there are no prior similar cases), to be considered such a special case for climate security.

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

21 UN, General Assembly Sixty-Third Session. 2009. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/63/281.

22 UN, Climate change and its possible security implications. 2009. <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/sg%20report%202009.pdf>.

23 Femia, F and Werrell, C. 2017. Climate Change, the Erosion of State Sovereignty, and World Order. *Epicenters of Climate and Security*. The Center for Climate and Security. <https://climateandsecurity.org/epicenters/>.

Steps forward and alternatives

Despite the recent acknowledgement that climate security may be referred to in specific cases, it might still prove difficult to convince all permanent members of how climate change affecting the SIDS poses a threat to security and who could be blamed, let alone condemned for it. Powerful states may still fear links with the acceptance of (legal) responsibility for loss and damage resulting from not properly following through with the objective of the Paris Agreement to keep temperature rise below 2 or even 1.5 degrees Celsius. More analysis, for instance with regard to terrorists residing on SIDS and the geopolitical value of the resources in economic zones that may disappear, or the occurrence of an actual conflict over them, might moreover be needed to convince all permanent members of the UNSC of how climate change may now or in the future impact on *international security*. Nevertheless, several steps forward can be identified, including possible alternative options.

An opportunity to raise the case for acknowledging the security threat that climate change poses to SIDS might be via the recently pledged reforms to shape a 21st century UN – reforms backed by 120 countries.²⁴ When the UNSC Charter was established in 1945, there was little awareness of climate–security threats and the 70-year-old UNSC seems not ideally structured to address novel security threats. The Paris Agreement is essentially built on voluntary national commitments. When it fails to deliver sufficiently on climate change mitigation, it is unclear which international body would be on the frontline to respond when emergent security threats do arise for SIDS.

An opportunity outside the UNSC might be an international legal case. The International Court of Justice, according to Phillipe Sands, is a quite realistic venue to be receptive

for a case filed by one of the small island states.²⁵ In 2011, Palau considered to ask for an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on climate change being considered a security and human rights violation²⁶, but political pressure by the US and others, as well as scepticism among top-level international lawyers, put the idea on hold. Now the Paris Agreement has been adopted and evidence is mounting that emission reduction efforts are falling behind, new cases are more likely to be put forward. One such moment could occur with publication of the IPCC special report on 1.5 degrees, which is expected to be released in 2018.²⁷

The UNHCR, IOM and the UN General Assembly (UNGA) might be appropriate bodies to further campaign for recognition of migration issues facing small island states. With the impending threat of forced migration from small island states, there is a need to stimulate the discussion on legal recognition of *climate refugees* and *environmental refugees*, especially within the UNHCR. A starting point might be inclusion in the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration due for adoption by the UNGA by the end of 2018.²⁸

The UNGA might have another important role through revising resolution 63/281 on *climate change and its possible security implications*, which failed to convince the UNSC to integrate climate change structurally into its work. Now the situation has changed considerably, with increased recognition of the devastating effects of climate change, adoption of the Paris Agreement and the

24 See <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/09/565092-more-120-countries-back-pledged-reforms-shape-21st-century-un>.

25 Phillipe Sands. 2015. Climate Change and the Rule of Law: Adjudicating the Future in International Law, Public Lecture, UK Supreme Court, 17 September.

26 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/09/388202-palau-seeks-un-world-court-opinion-damage-caused-greenhouse-gases>.

27 See http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/vnd.openxmlformats-officedocument.wordprocessingml.document/cp10a1_en.docx.

28 See <https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration>.

apparent openness to discuss climate change as root cause or multiplier of insecurity in specific cases. This, in turn, could be linked to the greater recognition in the UN reform debate that the UNSC is ill equipped to address impending 21st century security concerns.

Indeed, today SIDS might have much more of a footing to seek direct UNSC acknowledgement as a special climate-security case. Recent developments such as the Lake Chad resolution and the Presidential Statement on West Africa and the Sahel are evidence that this is a possible route, even though climate change is more directly linked to conflict in these regions (and in the case of the SIDS it is, above all, considered a non-traditional security threat).

There is a need to identify how permanent and non-permanent UNSC members could best play their part in stimulating further momentum on the issue. Both Maldives (in competition with Indonesia) and the Dominican Republic (in competition with Argentina) are presently lobbying for a seat at the UNSC as a non-permanent member for the year 2019-2020. The Netherlands and the US are members representing AOSIS observer states; and some small island states likewise are overseas territories of France and the UK. Candidate members Germany and Belgium (2019-2020), and subsequently Canada (2021-2022) are expected to advocate more in general about keeping climate-security on the agenda of the UNSC. Similar to the Netherlands and Sweden they seem inclined to support a more pro-active UNSC role in the area of climate-security during their campaign, also to win support of the SIDS for their candidacy.

The currently ongoing effort by Sweden, supported by others, to establish an institutional home for addressing the issue of climate change and security at the UN can be considered a unique opportunity. This issue, and the possibility of establishing a Special Representative, is now on the table in the lead-up to the Swedish Presidency of the Council in July 2018. SIDS, and supporters of the SIDS agenda, can now make their case and argue the need for such a new structure to address climate-security risks.

A Special Representative and the 'institutional home' could help to prepare new debates on specific cases in the UNSC and beyond. They could also help in building political momentum for the issue ahead of the next UNSG Climate Summit in the Autumn of 2019 in New York.

Another high profile venue to make the case, and call for related action, could be the high-level event on climate and security convened by EU High Representative Federica Mogherini on 22 June in Brussels. This event is likely to feature an interesting mix of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Environment and will include discussions on the concept 'responsibility to prepare' and 'from early warning to early action'. The meeting will be able to build upon the recently adopted EU Council Conclusions on Climate Diplomacy in which its continued support for the SIDS was reiterated and in which the UNSC was called upon to increase its focus on the climate and security nexus. The EU recommends it becoming a recurrent item within deliberations for UNSC resolutions and statements, and looking at options, including institutionally, to strengthen climate risk assessment and management within the UN system.²⁹

This above overview illustrates the ongoing attention for climate-security and increasing potential to expand attention for climate-security in the UNSC and general UN context. Non-traditional threats, such as climate change, pose new security questions that need to receive more attention – and the UNSC can no longer look the other way.

29 EU. Council Conclusions on Climate Diplomacy, Brussels, 26 February 2018, <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6125-2018-INIT/en/pdf>.

Table 2 UN discussions on climate security, 2007-18

Date / Convener	Summary	SIDS relevancy
17 April 2007 / UK	First meeting on climate security in UNSC; no consensus ³⁰	SIDS broadly discussed, including SIDS and PIF statements
	Russia: not in UNSC mandate; China: UNSC not appropriate forum, and does not possess professional competence	
11 June 2009 / SIDS – UNGA	UNGA resolution (63/281) ³¹ was adopted stipulating climate as a security issue	As recorded in A/63/PV.85, Nauru introduced resolution on behalf of Pacific SIDS ³²
11 September 2009 / SG – Ban Ki-moon	Response to 63/281, SG report (A/64/350), ³³ identifying five climate security linking channels, delivered to UNSC	Fourth climate-security channel on SIDS, loss of national territory, displaced populations, and territorial disputes
20 July 2011 / Germany	UNSC meeting on maintenance of international peace and security. No consensus on climate-security. UNSC Presidential Statement requests that SG keeps UNSC updated (S/PRST/2011/15 ³⁴)	Broad discussion of SIDS climate-security implications. UNSC Presidential Statement expresses concern about sea level rise associated loss of territory and its security implications, particularly for small low-lying island states
	Russia: sceptical of UNSC climate agenda attempts, UNFCCC proper venue; Secretary-General report held no 'serious arguments to support its placement in the Council's agenda'. China: UNSC does not have the means or resources, UNFCCC is the proper venue ³⁵	
15 February 2013 / Pakistan and UK	'Arria-formula' UNSC special meeting on security implications of climate change	Press: Marshall Islands faith in UNSC to provide security, concerned regarding current UNSC position ³⁶
	P5 concern: Reportedly, China and Russia rejected UNSC climate security role	
30 June 2015 / Spain and Malaysia	UNSC Arria-formula meeting on climate as a threat-multiplier, a discussion beyond traditional alliances. UNSC Presidential Concept Note and country statements ³⁷	Concept note: climate change is a matter of survival for many small island states
	P5 concern: role for UNSC rejected by China and Russia	
30 July 2015 / New Zealand	UNSC open debate on peace and security threats to SIDS, including climate impacts. UNSC Presidential Concept Note (S/2015/543). ³⁸ Meeting script (S/PV.7499) ³⁹	SIDS climate-security threats targeted meeting, classifies 52 SIDS, counting 50 million people. New Zealand government report: 'Peace and security challenges facing small island developing states' ⁴⁰
	Russia: UNFCCC appropriate venue. China: SIDS non-traditional security threats	

30 UNSC. Security Council Holds First-Ever Debate on Impact of Climate Change on Peace, Security, Hearing Over 50 Speakers. C.

31 UN, General Assembly Sixty-Third Session. 2009. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/63/281.

32 UN, General Assembly Sixty-Third Session. 2009. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/63/PV.85.

33 UN, Secretary-General. Climate change and its possible security implications. 2009. <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/sg%20report%202009.pdf>.

34 UNSC. 2011. https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PRST/2011/15.

35 UNSC. 2011. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2011/sc10332.doc.htm>.

36 UN, Press Conference on Impact of Climate Change on Marshall Islands. 2013. https://www.un.org/press/en/2013/130215_MI.doc.htm.

37 SPAINUN, Climate change Security Council open Arria-formula meeting on the role of Climate Change as a threat multiplier for Global Security. 2015. <http://www.spainun.org/climatechange/>.

38 UNSC. Letter dated 15 July 2015 from the Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the UN addressed to the Secretary-General. 2015. http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2015_543.pdf.

39 UNSC. 7499 Meeting. 2015. http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_pv_7499.pdf.

40 Government of New Zealand. 2015. Peace and Security Challenges Facing Small Island Developing States. <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/Peace-Rights-and-Security/peace-security-challenges-facing-small-island-developing-states-30-july-2015.pdf>.

Date / Convener	Summary	SIDS relevancy
26 May 2016 / Egypt and Spain	UNSC meeting on challenges to the Sahel with a special focus on climate. Meeting script (S/PV.7699) ⁴¹	SIDS briefly mentioned only by New Zealand
	P5: China and Russia: did not mention climate; Russia: mentioned drought, desertification and land degradation, with UNCCD as appropriate platform	
April – November 2016 / Senegal	Informal Arria-formula meeting (April), and formal meeting (November) on water, peace and security. Transcript ⁴²	SIDS and climate-security raised in 7 country statements
	China: varying mechanisms, and ‘relevant’ UN bodies to work on water security. Russia: concerned: a search for ‘guilty parties’. Water resources are not a driver of conflict, threatening peace and security. The root cause is ineffective management ⁴³	
31 March 2017	Lake Chad resolution (S/2017/270) recognising climate impact on regional instability, under agenda Africa-Regional Security, and Terrorism. All P5 voted in favour ⁴⁴	
15 December 2017 / Italy	‘Arria-formula’ UNSC special meeting on. NL refers to Hague Declaration on Planetary Security; Sweden presents ideas for institutional home, supported by others (NL) ⁴⁵	Concept note: SIDS mentioned as one of the most affected regions ⁴⁶
	Russia: acknowledges that climate can be addressed in specific cases handled by the UNSC, e.g., Lake Chad; climate change as a general UNSC agenda topic is not appropriate; UNSC does not have the time nor expertise. China: climate should be addressed at international development forums such as UNFCCC Paris Agreement; UNSC has neither expertise, means or resources ⁴⁷	
30 January 2018	Presidential statement on West Africa and Sahel, expands on Lake Chad resolution, recognising climate impact on instability in West Africa and Sahel regions ⁴⁸	

P5: the five permanent members of the UNSC; **PIF:** Pacific Islands Forum; **SIDS:** Small Island Developing States; **SG:** Secretary-General; **UNGA:** United Nations General Assembly; **UNSC:** United Nations Security Council
Blue: UNSC meetings
White: UNSC climate-security related event

Source: Adapted from Born, C. 2017. A resolution for a peaceful climate: Opportunities for the UN Security Council. SIPRI. <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2017/sipri-policy-briefs/resolution-peaceful-climate-opportunities-un-security-council>.

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About the Planetary Security Initiative

The Planetary Security Initiative aims to help increase awareness, to deepen knowledge, and to develop and promote policies and good practice guidance to help governments, the private sector and international institutions better secure peace and cooperation in times of climate change and global environmental challenges. The Initiative was launched by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2015 and is currently operated by a consortium of leading think tanks headed by the Clingendael Institute.

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