



The Role of the UN Security Council in Addressing and Providing Responses to Peace and Security Risks Resulting From Sea Level Rise

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I INTRODUCTION

Over time, the climate-security debate has gradually evolved and contributed to our understanding of whether and how climate change-related sea level rise could affect sustainable peace and its diverse implications for law and policy (Palchetti, 2022).

Giuseppe Nesi has written Sect. 4; Sects. 2 and 3 is by Elisa Fornalé. The introduction and conclusions are the outcome of a common reflection.

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Insights from recent reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) contributed to providing scientific evidence of how climate change is contributing to increasing conflict risks and how addressing these risks at international level could be beneficial for international peace (IPCC, 2022).¹ By building this shared knowledge it allowed for identifying security implications with legal, economic, and political consequences for exacerbating existing vulnerabilities as well as driving new risks at global level beyond a state-centric perspective (Schroeder, 2021). The UN Secretary-General highlighted that: ‘[i]t is clear that climate change and environmental mismanagement are risk multipliers. Where coping capacities are limited and there is high dependence on shrinking natural resources and ecosystem services, such as water and fertile land, grievances and tensions can explode, complicating efforts to prevent conflict and to sustain peace’ (UNSG, 2021b).

Sea level rise is becoming one of the most serious threats to human and international security (Arias, 2022a and 2022b; Maertens, 2018). Not surprisingly, attempts to link security and climate change have been brought to the debate of the United Nations Security Council (hereinafter, the UN Security Council), one of the main organs of the United Nations with the primary responsibility in the preservation of peace and security (Dietz et al., 2016; Maertens & Trombetta, 2023; Webersik, 2012).

It held its first debate on this topic in 2007 and over 50 States participated and presented their statements (Maertens & Trombetta, 2023). The United Kingdom led the move to include this issue in the agenda by highlighting the role of climate change in ‘exacerbating many

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¹ ‘Climate change undermines human livelihoods and security, because it increases the population’s vulnerabilities, grievances and political tensions through an array of indirect—at times nonlinear—pathways, thereby increasing human insecurity and the risk of violent conflict’ (Chapter 18, p. 2673) See also Chapter 8: ‘Poor institutional responses [to climate change] can directly drive violence, and there is robust evidence that inequitable responses further exacerbate marginalization, exclusion or disenfranchisement of some populations, which are commonly recognized drivers of violent conflict’ (p. 1190).

threats, including conflict' (UNSC, 2007a).² This topic remains quite contested: initially the general positioning of States was not unanimous; some States—notably China and Russia—strongly opposed the opportunity to add climate-security implications to the agenda of the UN Security Council, and there was not a consensus on discussing climate change as a security issue instead of a development issue, for instance.³ But already at this meeting small island states stressed the need to consider the challenges raised by climate change as an 'existential threat' (Torres Camprubi, 2016).

In 2011 under the Presidency of Germany another meeting on the topic took place.⁴ After four years, the President of the UN Security Council acknowledged that 'the Security Council expresses its concern that possible adverse effects of climate change may, in the long run, aggravate certain existing threats to international peace and security' (UNSC, 2011a).⁵ Despite the growing recognition of this topic, the role and competence of the Security Council in this regard remain an issue of debate (Bonafé & Arcari, 2021; UNSC, 2017b).

This chapter aims to explore how the debate has evolved by focusing on: (1) which are the security risks raised by sea level rise; (2) what legal challenges need to be addressed; and (3) what role the UN Security Council could play in facing the increasing uncertainty because of climate-related impacts. To this end the first part provides an overview of the 2007–2021 debates held at the UN Security Council on climate change and their evolution to identify the key trends and the connection with sea level rise. The second part is based on official documents and the emerging literature and focuses specifically on the adverse impacts of sea level rise on international security and peace. The final part will consider the role of the UN Security Council in this respect.

² Open Debate on 'Energy, Security and Climate', 3 April 2007, chaired by the United Kingdom.

³ The Security Council includes 15 members, 5 are permanent members, and the decisions adopted by the Security Council are binding for all UN Members (article 25 of the United Nations Charter).

⁴ The Open Debate on 'Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Impacts of Climate Change?' was scheduled on 20 July 2011.

⁵ This Declaration was the first official document adopted on this issue (Palchetti, 2022).

2 SECURITIZATION OF SEA LEVEL RISE: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Over the years, the adverse impacts of climate change have become part of what Boas defines as the ‘process of securitisation’, which is seen as ‘the process through which non-traditional security issues’ are drawn into the security domain (Boas, 2015, p. 1). The way in which security is understood requires a theoretical reflection because several of the threats raised by climate change do not fit in the traditional security agenda (Scott & Ku, 2018).

Even though the climate-security nexus has been widely discussed, this connection raises tensions, particularly when it comes to its conceptualization and the legal implications of the complexity of the interests involved (Cusato, 2022; Maertens, 2018; Trombetta, 2023; UNSG, 2009). This link requires specific choices connected to clarifying ‘whose security is at stake and prioritized’—thus protection needs as part of human security, who is supposed to act—in terms of national and international security, and the ways to provide responses—preventive or reactive approaches. Engaging with this ‘indeterminate concept’ raises crucial normative implications (Benton Heath, 2022, p. 291; Cusato, 2022).

For many, security is strictly connected with the ‘survival of the State’ and the legitimation of the use by States of ‘emergency measures’ (e.g. defensive and reactive measures). In particular the use of ‘security’ as an ‘evocative term’ can mobilize ‘powerful emotions and [the term] belongs to a political tradition that uses it to justify exceptional measures’ by creating a ‘sense of urgency’ (Cusato, 2022; Maertens & Trombetta, 2023, p. 190; Trombetta, 2023, p. 2). This could mobilize divergent approaches to security by raising disagreement in the development of policy measures at domestic and international levels (Davies & Riddell, 2017; Nasu, 2021).

At the same time, the debate has evolved to include human-related risks of climate change (Joyeeta & Hilmer, 2021). The major challenge will be to identify ways of re-focusing on how to make people more secure by including the needs of the most vulnerable in the measures. Different concepts of security could in fact promote different responses to climate risks, and the needs of the most vulnerable—who are the most insecure due to the adverse impacts of climate change—could not be prioritized by exceptional and reactive measures. It is important to translate climate security into achieving human security by increasing the enjoyment of

fundamental rights. As suggested by Ban Ki-moon in 2009, the ‘interdependence between the security of individuals and communities and the security of nation States’ (UNGA, 2009a) requires us to interrogate our traditional analytical frameworks to meet competing interests by including other actors (e.g. individuals/IOs) in the process to foster a more interconnected approach that would be attentive to cooperative approaches (Elliot, 2023).

This is particularly problematic in the context of international security⁶ and its relationship to international law (Torres Camprubi, 2016; White & Davies-Bright, 2021). To this end, it is useful to explore how the emergence of this topic in the agenda of the UN Security Council as a security issue could be framed by addressing some of the linkages between human and international security (Palchetti, 2022).

The UN Security Council, in line with Article 24 of the UN Charter, has the ‘primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security’. Under Chapter VII, the UN Security Council can define a ‘threat to peace determination’ (Wood, 2022).

Article 39 of the UN Charter in particular establishes that the UN Security Council has the authority to

determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security.

There is no definition of ‘what constitutes a threat to the peace’, and this made it possible for the fifteen members of the UN Security Council to address non-traditional security threats and include them in the agenda (Poku, 2013; Schroeder, 2021).⁷ In the past decades, several examples

⁶ The concept of ‘collective security’ has been defined by de Wet and Wood as a ‘system, regional or global, in which each State in the system accepts that the security of one is the concern of all, and agrees to join in a collective response to threats to, and breaches of, the peace’ (De Wet & Wood, 2012).

⁷ See, for instance, the Ebola health crisis in 2014 (Day et al., 2023). See also the following statement made by Tunisia: ‘During its term on the Council, my country has sought to include unconventional threats, such as climate change and pandemics, on the Council’s agenda. That is because we are convinced that those phenomena pose a threat to collective security and therefore should not be overlooked by the Security Council. Since peace and security are interlinked with many factors, it is necessary to take an

confirmed the trend in which the role of the Security Council expanded so that it could affirm its authority in regard to diverse issues (e.g. the coronavirus pandemic, gendered violence, human trafficking).

For this, an overview of the ways in which the links between climate change and security have been established by States could provide some insights into the legal impacts of this understanding, as suggested by legal scholars (Palchetti, 2022; Tomuschat, 2022).

In the first debate on the topic held in 2007, low island states raised their concerns about how sea level rise was undermining the very basis of their existence (Torres Camprubi, 2016). Papua New Guinea highlighted how in the Pacific ‘the people may have to abandon their traditional lands, their home and possibly their nations’ (UNSC, 2007b, p. 27).

Then the turning point came in 2009 with the adoption by the General Assembly of Resolution 63/281 on ‘Climate Change and its Possible Security Implications’ (UNGA, 2009b, p. 6),⁸ which led to the Report of the UN Secretary-General on the subject that included the notion of a ‘threat multiplier’ to define climate change (Cusato, 2022; UNSG, 2009a). This report identified a threat posed to the ‘viability and even the survival’ of states as the fourth pathway through which climate change could reduce security. The major concern was to examine how to support the affected States in terms of safeguarding their statehood, protecting displaced populations and dealing with territorial disputes over exclusive economic zones.

In 2011, the UN Security Council convened a new meeting to engage with the mid- and long-term implications of sea level rise, nurturing the policy and the academic attention to the current and potential impacts for affected States, and the security implications of loss of territory for the protection of the rights of their citizens and communities (UNSC, 2011b, 2011c). In this meeting, the Pacific small islands states started to be more vocal by raising attention to their concerns about the potential loss of their territory. Still disagreements were raised by China, India, and Russia.

evolving approach as we address those factors that fuel conflicts and violence’ (UNSC, 2021b, p. 14).

⁸ The resolution suggested ‘relevant organs of the United Nations, as appropriate and within their respective mandates, to intensify their efforts in considering climate change, including its possible security implications and requested the UN Secretary General to report on climate change and its security implications’ (UNGA, 2009b, p. 2).

In 2015, New Zealand held an open debate on ‘Peace and Security Challenges Facing Small Island Developing States’ that confirmed how small island states were already facing ‘an increasing rate of domestic migration and relocation, with people from rural areas and outlying islands moving to urban centres as they lost their livelihoods and lands’ (UNSG, 2009, p. 16).

Also, the two informal discussions held under the Arria Formula Meeting (UNSC, 2020) in 2017 and 2021, identified sea level rise as a threat multiplier which could affect global security and development challenges (Elliot, 2023). The UN Secretary-General highlighted that ‘a concept that puts people at its center’ is required in the context of climate change (UNSG, 2021).

In 2021, a suggestion to adopt a thematic Resolution⁹ was co-sponsored by Niger (the then Security Council President) and Ireland but it was rejected.¹⁰ This draft Resolution represented a crucial attempt to define a role for the UN Security Council (Maertens & Trombetta, 2023, p. 182). The draft Resolution highlighted in particular

that Small Island Developing States are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, and [the Security Council] expresses deep concern that the impacts, including the loss of territory caused by the rise of the sea level, may have implications for international peace and security, in addition to humanitarian, economic, social, cultural and ecological consequences (UNSC, 2021, p. 3).¹¹

A major aim expressed in the draft text was to take preliminary steps to ‘integrate climate-related security risk as a central component into

⁹ It was requested ‘to integrate climate-related security risks as a component into comprehensive conflict-prevention strategies of the United Nations’.

¹⁰ India voted against it, China abstained and Russia invoked its right to veto. ‘12 Council members voted in favour of it, and 113 non-members co-sponsored the resolution’ (Buhaug et al., 2023).

¹¹ See also the statement of Viet Nam: ‘Viet Nam is among the countries most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change, including sea level rise . Combating climate change has consistently been our priority during and prior to our term on the Security Council, and it will continue to be so beyond our term in the Council and within other international forums in the framework of comprehensive efforts to support strong and meaningful climate action. We concur that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change remains the primary and inclusive forum for negotiating climate action’ (UNSC, 2021b, p. 11).

comprehensive conflict-prevention strategies' (UNSC, 2021, p. 4).¹² In particular the draft text requested that the UN Secretary-General submit a thematic report; and that peacekeeping operations and the UN explore the role of environmental concerns while providing adequate training to personnel involved. In addition, the text encouraged collaboration between the scientific community and Member States.

The negative outcome confirmed the absence of a unanimous consensus among the permanent Members and the elected Members.¹³ This was so despite the draft text noting

that an increasing number of Member States are recognising the adverse effects of climate change on their security in their national contexts, and stressing the primary responsibility of States to develop and implement measures to manage and address climate-related security risks, and, in this regard, [the Security Council] emphasises the need for stronger and sustained international cooperation and capacity-building (UNSC, 2021, p. 2).¹⁴

In addition, among the arguments invoked to oppose the adoption of this Resolution was the lack of sufficient scientific evidence for connections between climate and security implications (Arias, 2022a).

Despite the failure to adopt this Resolution, the constant evolution of the debate is in favour of broadening the UN Security Council's mandate by contributing to what some authors define as a progressive 'climatization' of its role (Maertens & Trombetta, 2023). States, in their statements, contributed to a progressive conceptualization of the climate

¹² See the statement of Ireland: 'Today, we come to the Council to ask it to take the modest first steps to strengthen its ability to begin to assume its own responsibility on the defining issue of this generation: climate change. The draft resolution is aimed at responding to the climate-related security risks affecting the conflicts on the Council's agenda—no more, no less' (UNSC, 2021a, p. 2).

¹³ The opposition to the role of the Security Council in engaging with this topic came mainly from Brazil, China, and Russia (Palchetti, 2022).

¹⁴ See also the statement by Niger: 'For the 113 countries that sponsored draft resolution S/2021/990, on the impacts of climate change on conflict situations, a link clearly exists in the sense that climate degradation serves to exacerbate security challenges, especially in the Sahel and Lake Chad basin regions. For landlocked countries, their very existence as geographical entities is at stake. That is a fact and the reality. The force of the veto can block the adoption of a text, but it cannot hide that reality—the truth' (UNSC, 2021b, p. 6).

change-security nexus by selecting specific issues of concern. As described above, the attempt to include climate change under the mandate of the UN Security Council is taking into account how one could ‘[answer] the security implications of climate change’ without necessarily imposing ‘securitizing moves’ that rest on ‘alarmist rhetoric’ or the adoption of extraordinary measures (Cusato, 2022). As suggested by scholars, these new concerns require challenging the traditional understanding of security by adopting a pragmatic and cooperative approach (Murphy, 2019). At the same time, human security needs to be included in the debate in order to focus on possible future threats (Joyeeta & Hilmer, 2021). The way in which the growing recognition of the adverse impact of sea level rise could drive security risks reflects this trend as it will be explored in the next section, dealing with the open debate held in 2023 on this topic.

3 THE 2023 OPEN DEBATE: SEA LEVEL RISE—IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

The debates hosted by the UN Security Council confirm its progressive engagement on this pressing issue (Bonafé & Arcari, 2021; Day & Harper, 2023). Particularly prominent was its expression of the need to understand the legal implications of climate-induced sea level rise, namely clarifying the nature of the ‘security’ threats and who is affected by these risks.

This section focuses on the UN Security Council’s open debate on ‘Sea Level Rise—Implications for International Peace and Security’ held on 14 February 2023. This event marked a significant stage by illustrating how new challenges continue to appear and by promoting a new engagement on these critical issues at domestic level. It aimed to share State concerns and their views on how to frame a coordinated approach in response to the security implications of this phenomenon. The open debate was held under the presidency of Malta and under the agenda item ‘Threats to International Peace and Security’. Malta’s Presidency shared a concept note (UNSC, 2023a) asking the participants to explore how the Security Council could be involved in addressing these risks. In its concept note,

Malta's Presidency formulated four key questions to guide the sharing of good practices and lessons.¹⁵

The following points were raised. It was noted that the accelerating path of sea level rise can subject island States and low-lying coastal communities to territorial loss. For certain States the adverse impacts of sea level rise represent a 'direct security threat'. This was highlighted by Bangladesh, a low-lying coastal country where 'just a one-metre rise in sea level could result in an inundation of a large area of [the country] and potentially displace more than 40 million people by the end of the century' (UNSC, 2023b, pp. 38–39). Also, 'the Maldives could become uninhabitable by 2050'. 'This means 27 years from now' (UNSC, 2023b, p. 35). Also, Singapore, 'a small and low-lying city State with more than 50 per cent of [its] population living within about two miles of the coast', clearly identified the threats posed by sea level rise and said that they are of 'existential proportions' (UNSC, 2023b, p. 25). The Philippines, like other island nations, has observed that sea level rise has reached 60 centimetres. In its statement, it defines the impacts of sea level rise as a major 'national security' concern because the 'nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity, its peoples' well-being, core values and way of life, along with the State and its institutions, could be affected. All those elements of security are at risk, and this will result in compromising the lives and livelihoods of people living in coastal areas (UNSC, 2023b, p. 2).

Sea level rise is also seen as a 'threat multiplier' that could exacerbate existing challenges (e.g. water scarcity, poverty, food security)¹⁶ or create new risks (loss of statehood, threats to maritime delimitations).¹⁷

¹⁵ The questions were as follows: '1. How can the Security Council, in synergy with other United Nations bodies, best contribute to driving actions to address risks and responses to peace and security resulting from sea level rise as well as preventing tensions and conflict risks resulting therefrom?; 2. How will sea level rise jeopardize statehood, including that of small island developing States, and how is the limited and unambitious action to address climate change impinging on their sovereignty and territorial integrity?; 3. What role can national Governments, regional organizations and local actors play in addressing the security and humanitarian risks related to sea level rise?; 4. How can the Security Council respond to the triple nexus of gender inequality, State fragility and climate vulnerability, and what actions can be identified to strengthen women's leadership and inclusion in decision-making?' (UNSC, 2023a).

¹⁶ These challenges apply to Singapore; Indonesia; Haiti; the Holy See; Bangladesh (water scarcity); Egypt (food security); Guyana; and Bangladesh.

¹⁷ These risks apply to Costa Rica; Ghana; Malta; Switzerland; Denmark; Slovenia; Mexico; Guyana; Greece; Thailand; Ukraine; and Argentina.

As highlighted by the UN Secretary-General, who briefed the UN Security Council, ‘for the hundreds of millions of people living in small island developing States and other low-lying coastal areas around the world, sea level rise is a torrent of trouble’ (UNSC, 2023c, p. 2).

Sea level rise can increase instability. The Republic of Haiti gave an accurate account of how the country is already ‘grappling with the many challenges of resource scarcity, exposure to natural disasters, ecological crises and vulnerability to external economic shocks’ (UNSC, 2023b, p. 21). The United States mentioned the case of Louisiana, where fishers report that rising water is causing damages to livelihoods and forces local communities to move to higher areas (UNSC, 2023b, p. 12).

In addition, sea level rise undermines prosperity also in the Caribbean, where forced migration could cause social instability and demographic tensions. Besides the long-term implications it raises issues related ‘to the integrity of maritime boundaries, the ownership of marine resources’, and jurisdictions (UNSC, 2023c, p. 20). It is crucial to address in legal terms how human-security-related sea level rise will affect lives and livelihoods in the course of the long-term process (Krieger et al., 2020). As highlighted by Gabon, ‘the strong correlation between the vulnerability caused by climate change and insecurity results in a negative feedback loop’ (UNSC, 2023c, p. 17).

Finally, concerns have been raised by the States about how human insecurities—for women and climate migrants—could amplify threats to international security.

3.1 *Women*

At international level the gender-climate nexus is becoming extremely relevant (Fornalé, 2023). This requires to advance its conceptualization by addressing some of the protection needs faced by women and girls (Borras-Pentinat, 2022; Campbell, 2023; Fornalé, 2023; Rowena, 2019; UNSG, 2022). The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women Reem Alsalem, in her 2022 report, raised the attention on how the climate change risks disproportionately affecting them by increasing their vulnerability to violence (UN Special Rapporteur, 2022; UN Special Rapporteur, 2023). As highlighted in the report on ‘Women, Girls and the Right to a Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment’ (2023) by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment,

David R. Boyd, the climatic crisis ‘affects everyone, everywhere, but not equally’ (para. 2).

The Special Rapporteur warns that the ‘effects of the climate crisis could deepen gender divides’, ‘which [is] exacerbated by discriminatory legal systems and governance structure and unequal power distribution’ (UN Special Rapporteur, 2022, para. 23; Fornalé, 2023). Slow-onset climate events particularly exacerbate the inequalities women in SIDS face and lead to greater harm and violence due to ineffective and unavailable reporting mechanisms (UN Women, 2021; UNGA, 2019).¹⁸

It is not surprising that the adverse impacts of sea level rise on women and girls have been identified as critical during the open debate (Sea Level Rise: Implications for International Peace and Security) organized by the UN Security Council in February 2023.¹⁹ As mentioned above, among the key questions raised by Malta in its concept note, the member States were requested to address the question ‘how can the Security Council respond to the triple nexus of gender inequality, State fragility, and climate vulnerability and what actions can be identified to strength women’s leadership and inclusion in decision-making?’ (UNSC, 2023a).

In the last years, some measures have been adopted to address gender-based discrimination and climate change (ILA, 2024, p. 30; Asian Development Bank, 2022).

¹⁸ For instance, environmental degradation could expose ‘women and girls into sexual exploitation in exchange for food’ (e.g. Mozambique, South Africa, Jordan) (Fornalé, 2023; UN Special Rapporteur, 2022).

¹⁹ ‘The humanitarian consequences will have disproportionate impacts on women and children, in particular girls, by further exacerbating instability in regions with already existing tensions over resources, such as food and water. The gender dimensions of these risks and vulnerabilities are to be analysed, also within the changing global context of advancing the women and peace and security agenda’ (UNSC, 2023a).

Key statements have been made to highlight the urgent need to adopt gender-responsive frameworks (Albania,²⁰ Liechtenstein,²¹ Chile²²) and ensure women's empowerment, here understood as increasing women's participation and leadership in measures and decisions that need to be developed (Ecuador,²³ Denmark,²⁴ Kiribati,²⁵ Nauru,²⁶ the Maldives²⁷).

In line with this, the Special Rapporteur called for adopting a 'gender-transformative change' that could enhance rights-based climate action

²⁰ 'Climate and environmental action and disaster risk reduction therefore need to be gender responsive, value and promote all women and girls as agents of change and directly address the specific risks that they face' (UNSC, 2023c, p. 15).

²¹ 'Especially for people living in low-lying atoll States, sea level rise is the most pressing security threat. As with all questions of peace and security, women and girls undoubtedly shoulder a disproportionate burden. At the same time, they remain crucial agents of change. A gender-sensitive lens is therefore urgently needed in all climate and security responses' (UNSC, 2023c, p. 26).

²² 'Fourthly, we underscore that women are disproportionately affected by climate-related disasters. The reasons underlying that disparity are multidimensional, ranging from economic to cultural factors. Furthermore, the persistence of a humanitarian response that lacks a gender perspective exacerbates the disproportionate impact of climate emergencies' (UNSC, 2023b, p. 7).

²³ 'Women's leadership and full and equal participation must be included at all levels of decision-making, especially in addressing the impacts of climate change' (UNSC, 2023c, p. 24).

²⁴ 'The participation of rights holders, especially women, youth and the local community, must be at the centre of those efforts in order to ensure that solutions are locally owned and led, that marginalized groups are empowered and that we do not inadvertently harm those we seek to protect' (UNSC, 2023b, p. 5).

²⁵ 'Kiribati strongly believes that the international community, including the Security Council, must invest in women and girls in order to help alleviate the effects of sea level rise on sustainable peace. They have the voice and agency to withstand multiple hazards. In that respect, we need to advance gender-responsiveness in climate processes by ensuring that global knowledge is shared and provide platforms for both intergovernmental agencies and non-governmental organizations to brief the Council on gender-responsive resilience policies' (UNSC, 2023b, p. 23).

²⁶ 'Measures must also be taken to fast-track women's full, equal and meaningful participation in preventing and addressing climate-affected conflicts in relation to sea level rise' (UNSC, 2023b, p. 33).

²⁷ 'Maldives, we are working to empower women and provide inclusive decision-making environments. We believe it is imperative that the Council do more to increase the participation of women in all aspects of decision-making and peacebuilding processes, including as mediators, negotiators and leaders of security forces' (UNSC, 2023b, p. 36).

and robustly address the protection needs of people from Small Island Developing States in the Pacific region.

3.2 *Climate Migration*

The second prominent theme related to the climate-security nexus has been the issue of climate migration.²⁸ Since the first meeting on the subject held by the Security Council, climate migration was an issue of concern, and in the open debate, it has been increasingly recognized, particularly by small island States (Mègret & Mayer, 2018; Joyeeta & Hilmer, 2021). In fact, successive reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have illustrated that rising sea level will increase human mobility at domestic and international levels (IPCC, 2022).

As Verónica Nataniel Macamo Dlhovo, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mozambique, observed, ‘small island developing States are some of the most peaceful nations in the world today. However, population displacement, loss of territory and possible threats to national identity may deeply affect their stability, peace and security’ (UNSC, 2023c, p. 11). Yet the concerns expressed by small island states are connected with other human insecurities:

Since rising sea levels destroy people’s livelihoods, lead to displacement and conflicts over fresh water and fertile land and threaten their very existence, the international community must not ignore their fate and must demonstrate its solidarity.²⁹

Other States, such as the Netherlands, highlighted how throughout history, conflicts over resources have been connected with disruption and increased vulnerability by influencing the movement of populations.

²⁸ See the statement of the President: ‘It goes without saying that the displacement of hundreds of millions of people is a security risk. With a good part of global agriculture concentrated on coastal plains and low-lying islands, sea level rise is also bringing up long-term questions about humankind’s survival’ (UNSC, 2023c, p. 4).

²⁹ See the statement of Alexander Marschik (Austria) who encouraged the Security Council to address climate-security issues as a key priority (UNSC, 2023b, p. 10).

Several States include the protection needs of climate migrants at the core of their statements.³⁰ It is worth mentioning that some scholars highlighted how ‘viewing forced migrants as a threat to international peace and security, however, does not automatically mean a genuine interest in the protection of the human rights of these migrants’ (Mègret & Mayer, 2018, p. 91). They also highlighted the real risk that the security narrative could be used to ‘promote a Western agenda of containing migrants in developing countries at the expense of the effective protection of the human rights [of] migrants and other populations affected by the adverse impacts of climate change’ (Mègret & Mayer, 2018, p. 96).

Despite this growing interest, no concrete measures to address this issue have been identified within international law.³¹ It appears difficult for the UN Security Council to take action in this specific domain.

4 THE ROLE OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL AND ITS PROGRESSIVE CLIMATIZATION

This short overview illustrates how the impacts of sea level rise are creating new sources of instability and aggravating existing threats to peace, security, and the identities of States and people. The statements of States and their practice confirm this global trend by consolidating the need for global action. As highlighted by the literature, under international law, the recognition of climate change as a critical ‘threat to peace’ under Article 39 of the UN Charter could open the door to specific measures such as the adoption of specific sanctions (e.g. Article 41 of the United Nations Charter) or the adoption of specific resolutions (Conca, 2019; Scott & Ku, 2018). Legal scholars have tried to map potential options for the UN Security Council in terms of its taking action in this regard (Scott, 2015).

³⁰ Jordan; Denmark; Austria; Dominican Republic; Botswana; Papua New Guinea; EU; Ukraine; Bahrain; Niger; Netherlands; Bangladesh (UNSC, 2023b; UNSC, 2023c).

³¹ The UN Secretary General recalled that: ‘[t]he current legal regime must be forward-looking and fill the gaps in existing frameworks. That includes international refugee law. It also means putting in place innovative legal and practical solutions to address the impacts of sea level rise on forced displacement and on the very existence of the land territory of some States’ (UNSC, 2023c, p. 3).

4.1 *Knowledge Sharing for Supporting Cooperative Actions*

The majority of the UN Security Council members support and encourage its role as a catalyst of concerted actions (Allen & Yuen, 2022). They consider the UN Security Council as the appropriate actor for this role by arguing that climate change that can increase insecurity.

Antigua and Barbuda made clear how the absence of concrete collective actions ‘has made sea level rise a devastating and crippling reality’ for many countries.

When looking closely at the suggestions formulated during the open debate, one can see that the role of the UN Security Council could be strengthened by focusing on sharing knowledge and building a common understanding. The States invited to the open debate suggested that the Council should play an influential role by raising awareness of threats to peace by building a shared and deeper understanding of the climate-related security risks and giving States the opportunity to contribute to promoting human security (UNSC, 2023b).³² As described by Allen and Yuen, the UN Security Council could use a mix of formal and informal procedures together with diverse kinds of meetings to accommodate emerging challenges (Allen & Yuen, 2022, pp. 21–22).³³

In order to deliver effective responses, Vietnam suggested the ‘development of a comprehensive UN Database on the multidimensional impacts of climate change’ that could facilitate global climate action (UNSC, 2023b, p. 6). And the Maldives urged the ‘Council to monitor and consider the planetary boundary thresholds’ ‘for maintaining a safe operating space for humankind’ (UNSC, 2023b, pp. 34–36). Finally, several States reiterated the need for the appointment of a UN Special Representative on Climate Change and Security.³⁴

Overall, it is worth noting that this practice of States confirms that the UN Charter does not prevent the UN Security Council from contributing

³² See the statements by Albania; the United Arab States; Denmark; Greece; Italy, Korea; Vietnam; Denmark; Lebanon; Georgia; the Marshall Islands; Kenya; Niger; Sierra Leone; and the Maldives (UNSC, 2023b, 2023c).

³³ There are, in particular, four types of meetings: public meetings, Arria-formula meetings, informal consultations and private meetings. Arria-formula meetings are informal meetings that involve UN delegations, stakeholders and non-State actors.

³⁴ See the statements by Albania; the Federated State of Micronesia; Palau; Papua New Guinea; the EU; and Nauru.

to the dialogue on these issues with other UN organs by strengthening the UN system (Allen & Yuen, 2022).

4.2 *Facilitating Normative Developments*

Furthermore, going forward, as ‘an agenda setter’ the UN Security Council could shape international responses to emerging security challenges (Day & Malone, 2021). The notions of prevention and cooperation need to become more powerful in the sense of their practical meaning via the Security Council acting unilaterally and concertedly according to commonly agreed rules. This could be beneficial in translating preventive diplomacy (as suggested by Japan) for present and future generations and developing a common agenda that would enable the full realization of the rights of the affected populations. However, it remains unclear how the UNSC could place input into a coordinated approach to addressing ‘this common concern’ (UNSC, 2023b).

The UN Security Council could contribute to this not only by adopting decisions of a recommendatory nature, but also by requiring States to act under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (Scott & Ku, 2018). The UN Security Council has the power to impose obligations on the UN member States, acting ‘de facto’ as a ‘global legislator’. So even in the absence of an explicit power to legislate, in the last years the Council has adopted significant resolutions that have created new international obligations (Scott, 2015).

So far, in terms of States’ obligations, many States expressed great expectations for the outcomes of three requests for advisory opinions that have been promoted before three major international courts (the International Court of Justice, the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea³⁵ and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights). For the very first time, these courts were confronted with the extremely controversial questions of how to frame the obligations and duties of the international communities in response to global climate risks that disregard the borders of nation-States. In this vein, one could wonder whether the UN Security Council, through its decisions in the field of climate change, could work

³⁵ ITLOS (2024, May 21). Advisory Opinion. <https://www.itlos.org/en/main/cases/list-of-cases/request-for-an-advisory-opinion-submitted-by-the-commission-of-small-island-states-on-climate-change-and-international-law-request-for-advisory-opinion-submitted-to-the-tribunal>. For a detailed analysis see Chapter 9 by Doebbler.

in parallel with the climate and human rights regimes by supporting their implementation.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The article offered some preliminary insights into the attempts to ‘climatize’ the role of the UN Security Council by illustrating the unsettled meaning of climate security. To invoke this notion some key questions still need to be addressed: Whose security? Who is responsible for providing security? The literature highlights the need to shift from a traditional approach that focuses on the role of States as ‘the referent of security’ to bring into this field ‘real human insecurities and vulnerabilities’ (Elliot, 2023, p. 39). This requires redefining existing practices and calling for new roles for existing institutions.

The chapter allowed us to engage with the debate at the UN Security Council, which is still contested, to explore how States understand the linkages between climate change and security and frame their practices to address major issues of concern (e.g. human mobility, State disappearance, the impact on human rights protection). In a possible articulation of this field, a better understanding of how threats of climate change—namely induced sea level rise—raise direct and indirect security threats has been repeatedly suggested by States. Consequently, the legal dimension of the debate requires us to focus on responsibilities of those failing to adapt to them because it risks perpetrating traditional ways of dealing with these problems.

Significant concerns remain as to how global challenges such as the adverse impacts of climate change could be addressed at the international level. How can we foster coordinated approaches at different levels? The overview has sought to illustrate some of the critical questions that persist for the international community in its efforts to establish concerted efforts in the face of sea level rise/climate change, particularly with regard to its security implications.

As stressed by the UN Secretary General,

[t]he Security Council has a critical role to play in mobilizing the political will to address the devastating security challenges posed by rising seas. We must all continue to give this issue the visibility it deserves and to support the lives, livelihoods and communities on the front line of this crisis (UNSC, 2023c, p. 4).

The UN Security Council could play a key role by building a closer cooperation by meeting existing, new, and emerging threats. More specifically, facing unprecedented challenges requires overcoming the limits of nationally driven legislation by designing and collectively implementing multilateral, cooperative responses.

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