

Background Guide

UN Security Council

Topic: How Climate Change Helps Violent Nonstate Actors

Created by: Caylee Sheaffer

Hood College

September 2023

I. Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the principal organs of the United Nations and is responsible for maintaining international peace and security. It is composed of 15 member states, with five member states (P-5) holding permanent seats and veto power: the People's Republic of China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States. The other ten seats are non-permanent, represent regional geographical caucuses, and are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms.

The Security Council has several key functions. According to the UN Charter, the Security Council's primary responsibility is the maintenance of international peace and security. This involves responding to conflicts, mediating disputes, and authorizing military actions, sanctions, and other measures to maintain or restore peace. Another function is to authorize peacekeeping operations. The Security Council can authorize the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces to conflict zones to help maintain peace and stability. These forces are usually made up of troops contributed by member states. Next is sanctions. The Security Council can impose economic, diplomatic, or military sanctions on countries or individuals involved in activities that threaten international peace and security. Another function of the Security Council is resolution adoption. The Security Council adopts binding resolutions that provide guidelines and directives for addressing various international issues. These resolutions can cover a wide range of topics, including conflicts, humanitarian crises, and disarmament. Lastly, the Security Council has the power to refer cases to the International Criminal Court (ICC). The Security Council can refer cases involving serious international crimes, such as genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, to the International Criminal Court for potential prosecution.

The Security Council's decision-making process requires a minimum of nine affirmative votes out of the fifteen members, including the concurring votes of all five permanent members to pass substantive matters. This veto power held by the permanent members is intended to prevent any single country from unilaterally taking action that could escalate conflicts or undermine global security.

The Security Council is a central forum for discussing and addressing major international crises and conflicts, but its effectiveness has at times been hampered by the differing interests and priorities of its member states, particularly those with veto power. This can sometimes lead to deadlock and inaction on critical issues.

II. Statement of the Problem

Climate change has been an ongoing issue for decades, with temperatures increasing at a faster rate than previous years. The term climate change refers to long-term changes in temperature and weather patterns through human activities (mainly due to the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas). Moreover, greenhouse gas emissions are being trapped in the Earth's atmosphere, creating more heat to be generated. As of today, the Earth is 1.1 degree Celsius warmer than it was in the 1800s (UN, 2023). Global temperatures have been increasing at an alarming rate.

Due to this, there have been many environmental disasters and other impacts including intense droughts, water scarcity, severe fires, rising sea levels, flooding, melting polar ice, and catastrophic storms. People all over the world are affected by climate change. It has increasingly become worse, and it has led to increased fears amongst scientists and governments across the world.

Climate change puts everyone at risk. It is affecting governments, the economy, and citizens. However, climate change can put violent nonstate actors at an advantage to exert power. This is because climate impacts can impair governance in ways that reduce state capacity and legitimacy, which could intensify competition for resources and livable territory, and necessitate invidious policies (Gordon, 2022). Nonstate actors could respond to these developments by using violence, either to influence state behavior or to replace the role of the state in certain areas.

There are six climate factors that could drive violent nonstate actors. These factors include: interconnected food, water, and energy crises that undermine state capacity and legitimacy, more environmentally inhospitable areas, more restrictions on resources, higher demand for people smugglers and armed border guards, chaos and injustice after climate-exacerbated disasters, and anger towards those responsible for climate change (Gordon, 2022).

III. History/Past UN Action

The United Nations has debated and passed multiple resolutions, as well as created agencies and treaties, to try and slow climate change. Examples include: the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement, and most importantly, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). These organizations and strategies have contributed to some reduction in greenhouse gas emissions; however, there is a lot more which needs to be done.

The establishment of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 1988 on December 6. In Resolution 43/53, it states that its initial task is to prepare a "comprehensive review and recommendations with

respect to the state of knowledge of the science of climate change; the social and economic impact of climate change, and potential response strategies and elements for inclusion in a possible future international convention on climate” (IPCC). Since 1988, the IPCC has had five assessment cycles and delivered five Assessment Reports, but the body also provides Methodology Reports, Special Reports, and Technical Papers (IPCC). The collective work by thousands of scientists from across the world over the course of many decades have provide valuable information to policy makers and government officials as they continue to debate and craft both short and long-term solutions to climate change.

There are a number of factors that follow from projections of likely climate outcomes compiled by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), such as more severe droughts or floods, that will at the very least put upward pressure on the number of openings for violent nonstate actor activity (Gordon, 2022).

Climate change can reduce a state’s outcome or performance legitimacy. When states are seen as illegitimate because they fail to deliver security and prosperity to citizens, powerful nonstate actors, such as insurgencies or warlord-led groups, can thrive. For example, in Syria in the late 2000s, drought led to food insecurity, so protests broke out that triggered the Syrian civil war (Gordon, 2022). Again, in late 2021, Iran was struck with severe droughts that caused two separate clashes between farmers experiencing water stress and scarcity and the police leading to dozens of injuries (Gordon, 2022).

Climate change contributes to increased conflict, making the most vulnerable even more vulnerable. Both climate change and conflict cause those in fragile countries to be displaced. People who have been displaced by a combination of both conflict and the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation are extremely unlikely to be able to return home.

IV. Latest Developments

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently found that climate change is likely to worsen conflicts in fragile and war-torn states, resulting in higher death rates and greatly reduced GDP (Savage, 2023). The World Bank updates and revises a list of countries classed as “fragile and conflict-afflicted states,” and as of now, there are sixty-one countries on the list since 2006 (Savage, 2023). Climate change itself does not cause conflicts, but rather worsens the existing unrest and “exacerbates other underlying fragilities,” such as hunger and poverty (Savage, 2023).

In Africa, African leaders have said richer countries should provide more money to help adapt to climate change and transition to greener energy. Many African countries produce a tiny share of the emissions causing global warming (Savage, 2023). However, a consensus climate position is favored at the African Climate Summit, and the UN climate summit at the Conference of the Parties (COP28).

At the last Conference of the Parties (COP27), world leaders focused on talking about the impact of climate change on conflict and security (Crisis). They discussed the countries who receive less funding than war-free states and why that is, and addressed the imbalance to ensure that countries receive their share of funding. At COP27, many leaders talked about the link between climate change and conflict.

In the 2023 Climate Change Synthesis Report, the IPCC talks about reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to human-caused climate change. The report discusses impacts, adaptations, and vulnerability, which includes conflict from climate change. They find ways to reduce these issues and try and solve them.

For your research, consider the following questions from your country's perspective:

1. What are some of the statistics about climate change?
2. Have previous treaties on climate change addressed this question- why or why not?
3. What are some real-world examples of this phenomenon?
4. How do violent non-state actors' 'benefit' from climate change?
5. What can be done by the United Nations to address this question?
6. How does this topic impact international peace and security?

V. Problems a Resolution Should Address

Efforts to address the potential impacts of climate change on violent non-state actors involve a combination of conflict prevention, community resilience-building, sustainable development, and global cooperation. Recognizing and addressing the interconnectedness of climate change, conflict, and security is crucial for fostering stability in vulnerable regions.

VI. Helpful Sources

About the UN Security Council: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/>

IPCC: <https://www.ipcc.ch/>

How Climate Change Helps Violent Nonstate Actors: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/12/14/how-climate-change-helps-violent-nonstate-actors-pub-88637>

IMF Article: <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/climate-change-may-increase-conflict-deaths-says-imf-2023-08-30/>

References

- Gordon, N. (2022, December 14). *How climate change helps Violent Nonstate Actors*. How Climate Change Helps Violent Nonstate Actors. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/12/14/how-climate-change-helps-violent-nonstate-actors-pub-88637>
- IPCC. (2023). *The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. IPCC. <https://www.ipcc.ch/>
- Savage, R. (2023, August 30). *Climate change may increase conflict deaths, says IMF*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/climate-change-may-increase-conflict-deaths-says-imf-2023-08-30/>
- United Nations Climate Change. (2022, July 12). *Conflict and Climate*. UNFCCC. <https://unfccc.int/blog/conflict-and-climate#:~:text=The%20evidence%20is%20clear%20that,climate%20change%20into%20conflict%20risks.>
- United Nations. (2023). *United Nations Security Council*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/>