

Security Council | Issue 1

Environmental Protection

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BACKGROUND ON ISSUE

The UN Security Council first considered the implications of climate change on international security over a decade ago, when the United Kingdom presented the issue in 2007. Since then, many country representatives and diplomats have engaged in conversation and debate, but an official multilateral approach has yet to be determined.

Climate change is, undoubtedly, a broad and complex issue; but despite different country perspectives and contentions regarding a solution, all countries can agree that the task of protecting the environment from the effects of climate change has multiple intersections in various spheres of society, including politics, social life, and the economy. Even more, the consequences of environmental harm shift from region to region, with certain risks impacting certain populations more than others (e.g. coastal areas are more susceptible to rising sea levels, and areas with weak governance conflated with high corruption are more susceptible to conflict over scarce resources). Any region that is already fragile from dissension would be less likely to successfully cope with the aftermath of climate-related disaster.

Almost every instance of environmental crisis can be associated with more than one sphere of society. For instance, territorial disputes (most considerably affecting politics and economy) are fueled by countries' geopolitical pursuits and often reflect an underlying political motive behind their apparent climate stance. Antarctica is one of the most popular regions concerning territorial disputes: though the Antarctic Treaty has protected the continent from exploitation, pollution, and conflict for over sixty years, the treaty does not protect the land from the effects of climate change. With the new landscape and increased human activity in the region, Antarctica faces more pressure than ever from countries aiming to establish territorial control for exploitation of natural resources. On the contrary, because no country currently claims Antarctica, no country is responsible for any harm to the land. That is to show how complex the issue climate change can become.

There include other instances of overlapping environmental crises that will only be briefly mentioned:

- Air/waste pollution and natural disasters: this, if occurring across border lines, can cause both economical and political issues from the loss of resources to the displacement of large populations
- Refugee displacement: triggered by environmental conditions, this may lead to political and humanitarian conflicts as relocation can spark conflict or violence
- Toxic chemicals in our water sources: this may cause human rights and political security issues as water is necessary for national stability. In more extreme circumstances, this may lead to refugee displacement

- Rising sea levels: this will very likely affect the maritime boundaries of many Pacific islands State and mainly contribute to political security issues
- Melting glaciers: this contributes to rising sea levels as well as Antarctic territorial disputes mentioned above

Many issues listed above affect one another. In certain situations, the consequences of climate change are termed "risk multipliers," meaning it exacerbates the risk of another issue in place of or in addition to climate issues themselves.

The overall issue of climate change covers significantly more issues than the ones listed above, but the jurisdiction of the UN Security Council is to target the area where climate issues intersect with international peace and security. Yet, even the intersection is contentious. For many years, some countries have stated that the climate-security connection is not defined—China and Russia going as far as expressing that the Security Council's efforts would encroach on the work of other UN bodies, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, that are specified for climate change. Opposing countries to this viewpoint—mainly the United States, France, and the UK—contend that we must take a holistic approach that combines the efforts of multiple UN bodies. However, when the U.S. withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement around 2017, China stepped in to become an alternative partner to the EU and a new vocal advocate for multilateral collaboration. China's actions indicate, once again, how much a country's climate stance is influenced by their political motives.

Climate change will not wait or stall while nations contemplate setting aside their political agenda to work collectively in finding an approach. Though some countries are stepping up and taking action, protecting the environment is a massive global challenge that involves the collaboration of all countries. While conversations have taken place, the Security Council must begin implementing concrete actions to move forward, and they must be conducted in a multilateral approach or the issue can never be effectively addressed.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN POSITION PAPERS (3)

1. What is the biggest environmental issue in your country, and how is it being addressed? (Bonus points if you can connect it directly to environmental protection).
2. Has your country collaborated with other countries or planned to? If not, do you envision any potential partnerships that should be considered?
3. Have there been any security issues in your country because of the lack of environmental protection? How can the security council address/enforce new regulations?

SOURCES FOR RESEARCH (5)

1. <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/climate-change/>
2. <https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/climate-change-a-un-security-council-seeking-peace-warming-world/>
3. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/07/1068991>

4. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/a-short-history-of-climate-change-and-the-un-security-council/>
5. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14260.doc.htm>