

Chapter 6

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# The securitisation of climate change in the European Union

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## Summary

The securitisation of climate change has entered the international agenda creating concerns about the appropriateness of security responses to an issue such as climate change. Nevertheless, the European Union (EU) has identified climate change as an international security issue and is seeking to take the lead in shaping international response to the security implications of climate change.

This chapter addresses the securitisation of climate change in the EU and analyses the policy implications of such a process. It argues that contradicting predictions of militarisation as well as the causes and consequences of climate change are being addressed through mitigation and adaptation measures. Moreover, at the international level, the EU is enhancing dialogue and co-operation with key partners and countries most at risk.

The chapter further addresses the specific case of the African continent and in particular the Sahel region, demonstrating how climate related conflicts and climate induced migratory pressures are issues of main concern to the EU. Although acknowledging the possible negative implications of such a narrow focus, it is argued that as current EU policy for the region emphasises development assistance, there is no strong evidence that securitisation will have a negative impact for the region.

Overall, it is argued that although the securitisation of climate change did not result in the adoption of traditional security measures, it instead reinforced environmental measures. As these were invested with a security purpose, it can be argued that the securitisation of climate change is contributing to the transformation of security practices.

## The environment–security nexus

From the late 1970s, conventional security discourse and practice came under criticism for its inability to manage environmental risks to national and international security. Authors such as Lester Brown (1977), Richard Ullman (1983), Norman Myers (1989), Jessica Tuchman Mathews (1989) and Arthur Westing (1989) called for a new conception of security that moved beyond military security.

The end of the bipolar confrontation enabled a more significant consideration of potential non-military threats to security, and notably environmental threats. One of the most influential approaches regarding the environment-security nexus is one that concentrates on the causal links between environmental change and conflict. This approach owes a lot to the work developed by Thomas Homer-Dixon and his colleagues in the early 1990s. Working with selected case studies, they demonstrated that the degradation and depletion of environmental resources interacts with population growth and unequal resource distribution to cause violent conflict (Homer-Dixon, 1991, 1994; Homer-Dixon and Blitt, 1998).

Another significant approach focuses on environmental challenges to human security. Rather than focusing on violent conflict, this people-centred approach focuses on how the environment affects the needs, rights, and values of people and communities (Barnett *et al.*, 2010: 17). According to this approach, the goal of environmental security is to enable individuals and communities to respond to environmental stresses, whether by reducing their vulnerability or by challenging the drivers of environmental change (O'Brien, 2006: 1).

The divergences in approaches to the environment and security led Rita Floyd (2008) to argue that, rather than a concept, environmental security is a debate, with different approaches to environmental security at odds with one another. According to the author, “different traditions within security studies conceive very differently of environmental security; differing vastly in terms of who or what is to be secured, what is to be secured against and also the nature of the threat itself” (Floyd, 2008: 51).

There were, however, opponents to the establishment of any connection between the environment and security. Daniel Deudney, for example, classified such link as dangerous and self-defeating (1990: 474). Deudney challenged the idea that environmental degradation leads to interstate violent conflict because the features of the international system are not directly connected with environmental issues (Deudney, 1990: 474). Given the common association of security with nationalism and militarism, various scholars have argued that national security thinking is not appropriate when addressing environmental degradation (Matthew, 1995: 8).

More recently, climate change became the focus of the environment-security debate. Climate change increasingly dominates the international agenda as it is viewed as one of the most pressing issues facing the world, not only because it intensifies existing environmental problems, but because it also creates new ones. Climate change is seen as a cross-cutting issue, with predicted impact that range from the aggravation of resource scarcity to the disappearance of entire coastal areas. In this context, a language of security has pervaded the discourse on climate change, with a number



Another approach focuses on environmental challenges to human security.

of actors from the political, academic and public spheres now classify climate change as a threat to security.

A number of reports have drawn attention to the security implications of climate change. In 2003, in a report prepared for the United States (US) Department of Defence, Peter Schwartz and Doug Randall outlined the implications of an abrupt climate change scenario for US national security. According to the report, such a scenario could de-stabilise the geopolitical environment leading to violent conflicts due to resource constraints (Schwartz and Randall, 2003: 2). A military advisory board counselled the U.S. government to fully integrate the consequences of climate change in national security and national defence strategies (The CNA Corporation, 2007). Also in 2007, the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU) published a report where climate change is clearly identified as a threat that could overstretch the capacity of many societies to adapt, thereby jeopardising national and international security to an unprecedented degree (2007: 1).

In April 2007, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) held its first-ever meeting on the impact of climate change. In the full-day debate, called by the United Kingdom, the relationship between energy, security and climate was discussed. Although no statement or resolution was adopted, it was a symbolic first-step towards the acknowledgement of climate change as a security issue, since the UNSC has primary responsibility, under the UN Charter, for maintaining international peace and security (Brito, 2010: 44).

More recently, on July 2011, the UNSC held a second meeting on the impact of climate change. A statement was issued from the meeting entitled “Maintenance of international peace and security”, in which the Council expressed its “concern that possible adverse effects of climate change may, in the long run, aggravate certain existing threats to international peace and security” (United Nations Security Council, 2011: 1). Moreover, acknowledging the importance of contextual information on the possible security implications of climate change for matters related to maintaining international peace and security, the UNSC requested that the Secretary-General ensure that such information be contained in his report to the Council. (United Nations Security Council, 2011: 2).

The climate–security link was also acknowledged by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), where a resolution (A/RES/63/281) on the possible security implications of climate change was adopted. In this resolution, the UNGA declares its deep concern that the adverse impacts of climate change could have security implications and invites the relevant UN agencies to intensify their efforts in considering and addressing the security implications of climate change (United Nations General Assembly, 2009: 2).

Recognising the negative impacts that climate change can have on the security of mankind, the Norwegian Nobel Committee attributed the

2007 Nobel Peace Prize to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Al Gore, Jr. for their efforts to build up and disseminate knowledge about climate change and the measures needed to counteract such change (Nobelprize.org, 2011).

Individual states have also started to address the security implications of climate change. The United Kingdom, for instance, has included climate change in its 2008 national security strategy. The document states that climate change is potentially the greatest challenge to global stability and security, and therefore to national security (Government of the United Kingdom, 2008). Also the French White Paper on Defence and National Security portrays climate change as a new risk, whose security impacts need to be calculated rapidly. The document acknowledges climate change's potential contribution to violent conflict

« Individual states have also started to address the security implications of climate change.

(Government of the French Republic, 2008). Germany's 2006 National Security Strategy already referred to climate change's potential for exacerbating security problems. The most recent Defence Policy Guidelines from the German Ministry of Defence, identifies climate change as a risk that can have consequences for German security (German Ministry of Defence, 2011).

The Pacific small island states, have also extensively considered the threat climate change poses to their security and survival. These states, which are threatened to be entirely submerged by the rise in sea-level, have actively worked to raise the profile of climate at the international level, by introducing climate change in the United Nations Security Council agenda.

These developments generated a debate on the implications of converting climate change to a security issue. On the one hand, it is acknowledged that security attributes a sense of urgency to climate change that might be able to speed action to address the issue (Brown *et al.*, 2007: 14; Barnett, 2003). On the other hand, there is concern that securitising climate change will place the focus on violent conflict, generating military responses to address the impacts of climate change (Barnett, 2003: 14; Brown *et al.*, 2007: 1153).

Fears of militarisation are to a great extent connected to the link between climate change and violent conflict, which has been the focus of a large proportion of academic debate on climate and security. The effects of climate change, many argue, will add further pressure on scarce resources, exacerbating existing tensions and fuelling violent conflict

« The securitisation of climate change is transforming security practices.

(Klare, 2007; Mazo, 2010; Podesta and Ogden, 2007). However, such link has also been criticised for being largely unsubstantiated by evidence and for focusing excessively on the climate dimension, neglecting other

factors that contribute to conflict (Nordås and Gleditsch, 2007; Brown *et al.*, 2007; Salehyan, 2008).

Although the climate-conflict debate is a central part of the climate-security debate, this is not the only focus. A significant part of the debate focused on climate change as a threat to human security and well-being. These two distinct conceptions yield different policy recommendations (Detraz and Betsill, 2009: 308), with the latter privileging policy responses that focus on issues of vulnerability, justice and adaptation (Adger, 2010; Barnett, 2003; Buckland, 2007).

Analysing governmental discourses on climate change and security in Europe and the US, Maria Julia Trombetta (2008) argues that these emphasise the relevance of preventive, non-confrontational measures, rather than the reactive measures that the system tends to rely on. Consequently, she argues, the securitisation of climate change is transforming security practices, creating new roles for security actors and different means of providing security (Trombetta, 2008: 586).

Trombetta argues that the securitisation of climate change has succeeded in mobilising political action and in institutionalising the debate at the international level, being decisive for the development of a common energy policy in the EU (2008: 598). Denise Garcia also argues that the link between climate change and international security added a sense of crisis that gave impetus to the evolution of the climate regime, as shown by the re-engagement of the United States or the decision of a long-term goal for a post-Kyoto scenario (Garcia, 2010: 275).

To summarise, the connection between climate change and security has generated both concerns of militarisation of the management of its negative effects, as well as an expectation of effective change due to the fact that security constitutes a high politics matter *par excellence*. In order to assess the implications of securitising climate change, the next section will address the process of securitisation of climate change in the European Union (EU). The subsequent section will seek to identify some implications for Africa and the Sahel region in particular.

### **Climate as a security issue in the European Union**

The EU has extensively examined the implications of climate change for European security and claims to be taking the lead in shaping the international response to the security implications of climate change (Council of the European Union, 2009: 2).

The 2008 joint-report entitled *Climate Change and International Security*, by the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Commission (EC) initiated a process of securitisation of climate change in the EU. The report identifies potential security impacts of climate change, including resource conflicts, border disputes, risks to coastal cities and infrastructures, environmentally-induced migratory movements and tensions over energy supplies (High

Representative for CFSP and the European Commission, 2008). It concludes that climate change is a threat multiplier that compromises international, European and human security.

Following the joint-report, the High Representative presented a follow-up report in December 2008, which contained further recommendations. The document states that “the EU is well suited to taking forward the climate security agenda” (High Representative for CFSP, 2008: 2). It advocates that climate change should be mainstreamed in EU foreign and security policies and institutions. The three main recommendations in the report refer to more detailed analysis at a regional level; integration of these analyses into early warning mechanisms; and an intensified dialogue with third countries and organisations (High Representative for CFSP, 2008: 2).

« The EU confirmed climate change as a major security challenge.

The Climate Change and International Security report and the recommendations of the High Representative, initiated a process – often referred to as the CCIS process – by which EU institutions and Member States are attempting to translate the CCIS agenda into practical action. A Roadmap to implement the joint-report, covering the period from March 2008 to December 2009, was developed in close collaboration between representatives of European Commission, the Council Secretariat and representatives of the EU Presidency Troika and Member States (European Commission, 2009).

On November 2009, a joint progress report evaluated the progresses in the implementation of the Roadmap, which included activities such as the promotion of CCIS at the UN, the launching and promotion of dialogue with third parties, capacity building on CCIS within the EU and abroad, and the anchoring of CCIS in the EU.

To anchor CCIS, lines of communication and interaction between key stakeholders were established. Significantly, the EU confirmed climate change as a major security challenge by including it in the review of the European Security Strategy (European Commission, 2009: 6). Although the 2003 security strategy already identified global warming as an alarming element (European Union, 2003), the 2008 review added climate change to the list of key threats to European security (European Union, 2008: 5). Hence, the core document of European security and defence policy, which defines the Union’s strategic objectives, has since placed climate change alongside traditional security threats such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (Brito, 2010: 43).

***A securitisation of climate change?***

Overall, security has pervaded European debate on climate change, and the progressive inclusion of climate change in strategic thinking and security planning suggests that climate change is being re-framed as a security issue in the EU.

The securitisation framework has been used to explain the emergence of non-conventional security issues, including climate change.<sup>1</sup> Developed by Ole Wæver, Barry Buzan and others, the theory of securitisation provides a framework for a structured analysis in the process of constructing security.

According to this framework, securitisation occurs when an issue is successfully moved from the politicised level, where it is part of the public policy sphere, to the securitised level, where it is presented as an existential threat, thus calling for emergency measures. This elevation of issues to the security level occurs in a two-stage process, where in the first stage a securitising actor presents something as an existential threat to a referent object. For the issue to be securitised, it then needs to be accepted by the relevant audience as such (Buzan *et al.*, 1998: 23-25).

The analysis of the rhetoric used to address climate change by political actors in the EU, clearly shows that it follows the rules of securitisation. The CCIS process, mentioned earlier, demonstrates that, at least some, European institutions are attempting to securitise climate change. Reports, policy papers initiatives and speeches<sup>2</sup> present climate change as an existential threat to the standards of living in Europe and elsewhere, to international stability and the stability of the EU itself.

Although the “relevant audience” is not clearly defined in the securitisation framework,<sup>3</sup> given the nature of the EU one can say that there are multiple audiences regarding the securitisation of climate change. In the case of CCIS, the Member States, through the European Council, were the primary audience. The High Representative and the European Commission initiated the process of securitisation by producing the CCIS joint paper that was submitted to the European Council. The European Council welcomed the report and, shortly after, adopted the revision of the European Security Strategy, which added climate change to the list of key threats for the EU.

The Member States have also taken individual action to acknowledge the security implications of climate change, namely the inclusion of climate change in their respective national security strategies and the commissioning of studies on the links between climate change and security.

The EU civil society is also a relevant audience to consider. As European media extensively framed climate change as a cause for violent conflict and other sources of insecurity, the securitising move has reached a wide European audience.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, opinion indicators reveal that European public opinion is increasingly aware of the security implications of climate change, identifying it as a severe risk facing Europe and the World. It also indicates that European citizens are progressively more willing to accept the adoption of exceptional measures to address climate change, namely concerning resource allocation and policy prioritisation.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, EU discourse makes it clear that the EU is attempting to persuade the international community to recognise the security



implications of climate change. More specifically, the UN and key global players such as the USA, China, Brazil, and India are an intended audience for EU securitisation of climate change.

The EU believes it has achieved some success at the level of the UN, as consultations are taking place to share views and information on security implications of climate change with the aim of identifying synergies and linkages for co-operation on CCIS (European Commission, 2009: 4).

Regarding individual states, the EU considers that, despite the novelty of the issue and the reservations of some countries, a successful bilateral and regional dialogue on CCIS was initiated and platforms for interaction with stakeholders were created (European Commission, 2009: 5).

***The consequences of securitising climate change***

The securitisation of climate change in the EU has generated both concerns of a militarisation of the response to the issue, as well as an expectation of effective policy change due to the fact that security issues take priority. In light of this, it is necessary to address the implications of handling climate change through a security perspective, namely in terms of the policies to address the issue.

The EU identifies dialogue with third parties as one of the priorities in the implementation of the CCIS process. According to the joint progress report, the EU successfully initiated bilateral dialogue on CCIS with more than 40 countries. At the regional level, the EU has engaged in a dialogue on CCIS with North America, the Mediterranean and Middle East Region and Southeast Asia, through the ASEAN (European Commission, 2009: 5). The EU has also supported initiatives in the African continent and in Latin America (Council of the European Union, 2009: 6).

Regarding capacity building on CCIS, the report indicates that the EU is reviewing and strengthening its own capacities and tools. As regards external assistance, CCIS is now an integral part of the mainstreaming of climate change into development co-operation and disaster risk reduction (DRR). The European Commission has launched several projects on DRR and is planning to increase its efforts further (European Commission, 2009: 7). Additionally, a framework has been set in place to enable resources to European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)<sup>6</sup> tools in support of EU disaster response (Council of the European Union, 2009: 8).

« The EU measures emphasise dialogue, co-operation, development assistance and disaster response.

The analysis of the EU CCIS process shows that, although climate change is being securitised in the EU, the measures that are being defined to address its implications are not traditional security measures. Instead, they emphasise dialogue, co-operation, development assistance and disaster response. Contradicting predictions of militarisation, causes and consequences of climate change are, at the moment, being addressed

through mitigation and adaptation measures, which remain the overall goals of EU climate policy.

Nevertheless, framing climate change as a security threat added a sense of urgency to the issue, resulting in higher targets for emission reductions and in a higher priority for adaptation measures (Brito, 2010: 47). As the European Commission acknowledges, climate change challenges conventional thinking and approaches to development, security, disaster response and other areas (European Commission, 2009: 7). Hence, whereas mitigation and adaptation measures remain the basic policy instruments to address climate change, they are invested with a security feature, thus acquiring a level of urgency in their implementation.

### **Africa and the Sahel**

The African continent is identified as priority for EU action on CCIS. Africa is considered one of the continents most vulnerable to climate change given the multiple stresses that interact on the continent and the low adaptive capacity in most African regions. Furthermore, geographical proximity with Europe makes the region a main concern, since climate-induced migratory pressures are expected to affect the European Union's borders (High Representative for CFSP and the European Commission, 2008: 6).

The EU predicts that climate change will further aggravate existing tensions in various African regions. Land degradation, negative effects on health, in particular due to the spread of vector-borne diseases, among other negative effects of climate change, are expected to add further pressures. Climate change, it is believed, is already having a major impact on the conflict in Darfur (High Representative for CFSP and the European Commission, 2008: 6).

In the Sahel region, the report on CCIS predicts that "increasing drought, water scarcity and land overuse will degrade soils and could lead to a loss of 75% of arable, rain-fed land (High Representative for CFSP and the European Commission, 2008: 6). The High Representative warns that "further desertification in the Sahel could lead to more regional instability and migration northwards, to the Maghreb and Europe" (High Representative for CFSP, 2008: 3). He cautions this could happen within a very short timescale if current rainfall patterns continue.

The EU is already working with the African Union (AU) to establish a common position on climate change issues. Consultations are being held between the EU and African security and environmental specialists, and co-operation between the AU Situation Room and corresponding EU structures is being enhanced (High Representative for CFSP, 2008: 3).

With the goal of promoting dialogue on climate change and international security with Africa, the EU has supported the establishment of the African Climate Policy Centre, created in 2010 to serve as the policy

arm of the Climate for Development in Africa Programme (Council of the European Union, 2009: 6).<sup>7</sup>

In his follow-up report on CCIS the High Representative recommended that the EU should build on the EU/Africa Strategy, which also covers climate change and security, to develop further action (High Representative for CFSP, 2008). The EU/Africa partnership for peace and security already stipulates co-operation to address the transnational security threats posed by climate change in an integrated and comprehensive manner (African Union and European Union, 2011: 2).

The partnership for climate change and environment identifies the development of the Great Green Wall of the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative (GWSSI) as a priority. This enterprise aims to address land degradation and desertification in the margin of the Sahara. According to the pre-feasibility study commissioned by the European Commission and the African Union Commission, the GWSSI should help catalyse the EC and EU Member States financial support, which is critical for long term sustainability, peace and security. The study argues that, without such support, environmental migrants will be forced to abandon the degrading lands and move north towards Europe (HTPSE, 2009: 28).

In October 2010, the Madariaga – College of Europe Foundation and the Folke Bernadotte Academy, in co-operation with the Council of the European Union, initiated a Dialogue Process on “Africa, Climate Change, Environment and Security” (ACCES). The initiative aims to address the security implications of climate change in Africa from a development and security perspective.<sup>8</sup> According to Gyorgy Tatar of the Council, ACCES is a process where the EU “would like to bring together the various actors [...] in order to work out “fundable” projects which will have positive impact on the well-being and security of individuals in the context of climate change” (Tatar, 2010).

Overall, the documents and initiatives analysed indicate that EU policymakers are convinced that addressing the security implications of climate change on the African continent is necessarily interconnected with addressing development issues.

## Conclusions

The EU predicts that climate change will aggravate existing tensions in various African regions, including the Sahel. Such developments would threaten the EU by increasing regional instability, triggering violent conflicts and migration northwards. Given that migration is already a securitised issue in the EU,<sup>9</sup> a new type of migration – generated by the consequences of climate change – is seen as an element of additional pressure.



While the links between climate change, conflict and migration are highly uncertain, focusing on such links can have negative implications.

While the links between climate change, conflict and migration are highly uncertain (Adger, 2010: 279), focusing on such links can have negative implications. By evoking a traditional conception of security, it can generate a policy shift from mitigation and adaptation to military solutions, namely to secure resources and contain large-scale migration (Brown, *et al.*, 2007; Buckland, 2007). Such responses could undermine efforts to link climate change mitigation and adaptation to development (Hartmann, 2010: 239).

Although such an anticipated shift in policies cannot be fully dismissed by current evidence, until now EU policy for the region has emphasised the intersection between the security aspects of climate change and development. The EU fears that, by undermining human security, climate change will compromise years of development efforts (High Representative for CFSP and the European Commission, 2008: 5). Consequently, the mainstreaming of mitigation and adaptation to climate change in development programmes is seen as the main avenue to address the security implications of climate change.

Instead of resulting in the adoption of traditional security measures, the securitisation of climate change has so far reinforced the urgency of environmental measures. As these are invested with a security purpose, it can be argued that the securitisation of climate change – as the securitisation of other non-traditional threats – is contributing to a transformation in security practices.

In the longer term, an excessive focus on climate related conflict and migration can be a negative development, as it could lead the EU to divert its response towards traditional security measures. However, should the EU response remain focused on development issues, securitisation could be a positive path as it invests development assistance with further urgency. As Oli Brown, Anne Hammill and Robert McLeman so appropriately put it:

“A ‘securitised’ climate debate might be able to marshal sufficiently compelling arguments to encourage the politicians to do something about reducing emissions and investing (carefully) in adaptation. These are things the international community should be doing anyhow and, done well, are consistent with enhancing security and reducing the potential for conflict at all scales. So if securitisation speeds their implementation, it will serve a useful purpose” (Brown *et al.*, 2007: 1154).

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NOTES //////////////////////////////////////

- 1 For some examples see Brauch (2008), Brito (2010), Brzoska (2008) and Trombetta (2008).
- 2 President of the European Commission, José Manuel Durão Barroso, for example, stated that "the disruption of our climate (...) will severely compromise peace, stability and security in the world." (Barroso, 2009).
- 3 Matt McDonald suggests that the 'audience' is so under-theorised in the securitisation framework as to ultimately remain outside the framework itself (2008: 564).
- 4 Research based on media analysis that compounded relevant climate related news, extracted from nine newspapers with Europe-wide diffusion and distinct political backgrounds. The results were presented in the author's Masters Dissertation (Brito, 2009).
- 5 Research based mainly on Eurobarometer surveys. The results were presented in the author's Masters Dissertation (Brito, 2009).
- 6 Currently known as Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)
- 7 The Climate for Development in Africa (ClimDev-Africa) Programme is a joint initiative of the African Union Commission, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank. The programme, which is being developed since April 2006, aims to improve climate observations and services in Africa.
- 8 The initiative has been implemented in co-operation with the UN system, the World Bank Group, EU institutions and Member States, the European Investment Bank, the International Organization for Migration, the African Union, the African Development Bank, the Global Water Institute, the Institute for Environmental Security, and the Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention and Human Security.
- 9 For a discussion on the securitisation of migration in the EU see Munster (2009).

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