

Saint Peter's University High School Model United Nations

Security Council

Topic A: Avoiding Conflicts Over the Impacts of Climate Change.

Introduction

Global climate change has the potential to create new security conflicts and exacerbate existing ones. Increased resource scarcity in some areas, economic shocks, increased frequency of weather disaster events, and the involuntary migration of “climate refugees” are some of the impacts of climate change that can lead to conflict.¹ The same research has found that conflict risk is enhanced in regions with low socioeconomic development, recent history of violent conflict, low state capability, and low intergroup equality.² As one report put it:

“Intensifying physical effects will exacerbate geopolitical flashpoints, particularly after 2030, and key countries and regions will face increasing risks of instability and need for humanitarian assistance.”³

Given that much of the conflict prevention work overseen by the Security Council is in areas that seem more prone to climate-related conflicts, some have begun to push for the Council to take a more active role in accommodating climate risks into its strategic and operational work.

The history of the Security Council and climate change is one of relative inaction on the issue. The Council first began discussing climate change in 2007, but no action was taken.⁴ The Council again took up the issue in 2011, at which time it adopted a “Presidential Statement” (to date its only official action on climate change.)⁵ The statement noted that climate change was a potential cause of conflict and asked the Secretary-General to include climate-related impacts on conflicts in reporting to the Council.⁶ Since 2018 the Council has debated the issue an additional five times with no further action.⁷ Some opposition within the Council stems from concerns the Council would be infringing on the work of other UN bodies (e.g., the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) or that climate risks are only tangentially related to conflicts.⁸

¹ Mach, K.J., Kraan, C.M., Adger, W.N. et al. Climate as a risk factor for armed conflict. *Nature* 571, 193–197 12 June 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1300-6>

² Ibid.

³ De Luce, Dan, “Climate change threatens to spark instability, conflict around the world, U.S. intelligence agencies warn” 21 October 2021. *NBC News*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/climate-change-threatens-spark-instability-conflict-around-world-u-s-n1282078> Accessed 15 January 2022.

⁴ The UN Security Council and Climate Change. Security Council Report. 21 June 2021. New York, p. 5

⁵ United Nations. “Security Council, in Statement, Says ‘Contextual Information’ on Possible Security Implications of Climate Change Important When Climate Impacts Drive Conflict” UN Meetings Coverage 20 July 2011. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2011/sc10332.doc.htm> Accessed 15 January 2022.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The UN Security Council and Climate Change, p. 6.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 4-5

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Current Situation

Calls for the Security Council to address issue of climate change and conflict have only increased. In his July 2020 report to the Security Council, Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča asserted that “The failure to consider the growing impacts of climate change will undermine our efforts at conflict prevention, peacemaking and sustaining peace, and risk trapping vulnerable countries in a vicious cycle of climate disaster and conflict.”⁹ In December 2021, Secretary-general António Guterres told the Security Council that “Climate change is not the source of all ills, but it has a multiplier effect and is an aggravating factor for instability, conflict and terrorism” and urged the Council to address climate change in an integrated manner.¹⁰

Council President Nigeria took up the Secretary-General’s call and put climate change on the agenda for December 2021. After a contentious debate, the Security Council considered and rejected a resolution that would have integrated climate change considerations into conflict-prevention strategies.¹¹ The resolution linked climate change in some regions to increased risk of terrorism, political instability and mass migration that could lead to greater conflict. It would have made climate change impacts a component of conflict-prevention strategies including peacekeeping operations and special political missions.¹² The resolution did not garner the support of the Russian Federation (among others) and thus failed.¹³ Reasons for opposition to the measure were diverse, including disagreement among member states on how to address climate change and the potential to dilute the Security Council’s focus from its more traditional roles.¹⁴

Questions to Address

- Does the Security Council mandate allow it to consider issues of climate change?
- What ways can the Council integrate climate change concerns into its conflict-prevention efforts?
- How can the Council reach a consensus that allays concerns of the permanent members?

⁹ United Nations. “Climate Change Exacerbates Existing Conflict Risks, Likely to Create New Ones, Assistant Secretary-General Warns Security Council” UN Press Release. 24 July 2020. https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14260.doc.htm#_ftn1 Accessed 15 January 2022.

¹⁰ United Nations. “Climate change ‘aggravating factor for terrorism’: UN chief” UN News. 9 December 2021. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/12/1107592> Accessed 15 January 2022.

¹¹ United Nations. “Security Council Fails to Adopt Resolution Integrating Climate-Related Security Risk into Conflict-Prevention Strategies” UN News 13 December 2021 <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14732.doc.htm> Accessed 12 January 2022.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ United Nations. “People, Countries Impacted by Climate Change Also Vulnerable to Terrorist Recruitment, Violence, Speakers Tell Security Council in Open Debate” 9 December 2021 <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14728.doc.htm> Accessed 12 January 2022

Topic B: Increasing Violence and Instability in West African Frontier Areas

Introduction

The past decade has been one of political instability, violence, and humanitarian crises for many regions of West Africa. Violent extremist groups have targeted both civilians and security forces, drought and climate change have brought hunger and displacement, and four countries (Chad, Guinea, Mali – and most recently Burkina Faso) have experienced coup d'états within the past two years.¹⁵ ¹⁶ Recent instability is concentrated in two regions – the Lake Chad Basin (consisting of parts of the countries of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria) and the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger).¹⁷ Both of these are part of the broader geographic and

ecological region known as the Sahel. The Sahel is characterized by arid climates, low population densities, and relatively porous national borders.

Conflicts in the Sahel stem from violent extremist groups Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Al-Qaida affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) in Liptako-Gourma.¹⁸ These conflicts have recently

been fueled by the illicit transfer of weapons as a result of the conflict in Libya, and the increased flow of armed groups and mercenaries across borders.¹⁹ The situation is further exacerbated by drought and climate change, which has pitted agricultural and nomadic herding cultural groups against each other.²⁰ In addition, under-resourced regional governments have



¹⁵ UN Security Council. *Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel*. 15 December 2021 S/2021/1091

¹⁶ Walsh, Declan. "After Coup in Burkina Faso, Protestors Turn to Russia for help." *New York Times*. 25 January 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/25/world/africa/burkina-faso-coup-russians.html> Accessed 26 January 2022.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ January 2022 Monthly Forecast: West Africa and the Sahel. Security Council Report. 28 December 2021. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2022-01/west-africa-and-the-sahel-7.php> Accessed 16 January 2022.

¹⁹ UN Security Council. *Statement by the President of the Security Council*. 17 August 2021 S/PRST/2021/16

²⁰ "Mali-Niger: Climate change and conflict make an explosive mix in the Sahel" *International Committee of the Red Cross*. 22 January 2019. <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/mali-niger-climate-change-and-conflict-make-explosive-mix-sahel> Accessed 16 January 2022.

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difficulty policing and protecting such a wide, sparsely populated area.²¹ All of this has also made the region home to a burgeoning trade in illegal drugs.²²

Current Situation

In 2013, a consortium of armed extremist groups in the north of Mali began an insurgency which came close to toppling the government in Bamako. France (and other European countries) sent military forces in the Sahel to assist Mali in defeating the insurgents. That same year, the Security Council created the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) – a peacekeeping mission.²³ In 2017, security and threat neutralization work began to be carried out more broadly in the region under the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (FC-G5S), established in 2017 by Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.²⁴ Although FC-G5S has enjoyed support from the Council for its efforts, the exact nature and appropriate level of such support is still debated. In the past few years, Russia has become increasingly involved in the Sahel through military aid, technical assistance, and mercenary groups.²⁵

In 2016, two special political missions were combined to create the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) to further enhance the UN's preventive diplomacy and political mediation in the region. UNOWAS reports to the Security Council regularly. As a result of a UNOWAS briefing in July 2021, the Council adopted a Presidential Statement the following month. In the statement the Security Council “strongly condemns the continued attacks in the region against civilians, representatives from local, regional and State institutions, as well as national, international and UN security forces” and calls on the governments in the region to better protect civilians and to work with UNOWAS to address the underlying political, social, and economic issues that have contributed to the instability.²⁶ As the situation in West Africa deteriorates, the Council may need to increase its attention on this region.

Questions to Address

- Are MINUSMA and FC-G5S capable of maintaining security in the region or is there cause for an expansion of peacekeeping forces?
- How can the Security Council better support and assist UNOWAS in its diplomatic efforts and in strengthening local political institutions?

²¹ United Nations. “‘Unprecedented terrorist violence’ in West Africa, Sahel region” UN News. 8 January 2020. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/01/1054981> Accessed 16 January 2022.

²² “UN Security Council focuses on West Africa’s drug trade” Africa Times. 20 December 2018. <https://africatimes.com/2018/12/20/un-security-council-focuses-on-west-africas-drug-trade/> Accessed 16 January 2022.

²³ “France to pull more than 2,000 troops from Africa’s Sahel region” *Al Jazeera* 9 July 2021 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/9/france-to-pull-more-than-2000-troops-from-africas-sahel> Accessed 16 January 2022.

²⁴ “November 2021 Monthly Forecast. Group Five for the Sahel Joint Force” Security Council Report. 29 October 2021. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2021-11/group-of-five-for-the-sahel-joint-force-5.php> Accessed 15 January 2022.

²⁵ Walsh.

²⁶ UN Security Council. *Statement by the President of the Security Council*