

# The UNFCCC, the EU, and the UNSC: A research agenda proposal for the climate security question

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Received 13 May 2020; revised 4 August 2020; accepted 16 November 2020

Available online 21 November 2020

## Abstract

This study proposes climate security: a research agenda proposal with certain research significance. It acknowledges the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as current institutional case studies (and key actors) for international climate politics. It answers the question of the extent to which climate security scholars have mapped the field with respect to these three institutions. To do this, it reviews relevant literature of climate security and concisely summarizes the literature views. Although climate security scholars have studied how these specialist institutions have understood global climate governance, a comparative coverage of how the institutions have conceptualized climate security is missing in existing literature. The key finding shows the concepts of epistemic communities, climate securitization and climate-riskifications as appropriate analytical themes for interpreting the emerging norm of climate security. Arguing that conceptual development persists even though the institutions original mandates did not require such conceptualization, the study uses discourse analysis of relevant literature on climate security to orient future research on climate change and climate security given the knowledge that speech-acts on climate security (henceforth speech-acts) now seem like potential policy consideration in the foreseeable future.

**Keywords:** Climate security; Climate securitization; Climate-riskification; Epistemic communities; Climate risk management; Norm development

## 1. Introduction

When one talks about climate security in the context of a distinctly emerged field of research, two key concepts deserve close attention: securitization and norm development. Research have explored climate security within this context but there is no study comparing how the United Nations Framework on Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC), the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have conceptualized climate security (for instance, Trombetta, 2012; Hsiang and Burke, 2013; Ewing, 2014; Diez et al., 2016; Dellmuth et al., 2018; Dupont, 2019). In addition to correcting this imbalance soon, this

study suggests three analytical themes that researchers might effectively examine in comparing and interpreting the extent to which speech-acts by interstate institutions could indicate an emerging new norm around the concept of climate security. These themes are epistemic communities, climate securitization and climate-riskifications.

Securitization could be defined either as a sequence of events involving a securitizing actor, a securitizing move, audience and policy action or the outcome of a shared threat perception across states, followed by agreement on appropriate policy response (Sperling and Weber, 2017, 2019; Floyd, 2019a). Corry (2012) defines riskification based on a re-theorization of what distinguishes risks from threats; that is, risk politics is not a situation of securitization, but something distinct with its own advantages and dangers. According to Corry (2012), threat-based security deals with direct causes of harm, whereas risk-security is oriented

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Peer review under responsibility of National Climate Center (China Meteorological Administration).

towards the conditions of possibility or constitutive causes of harm a kind of second-order security politics that promotes long-term precautionary governance. With climate securitization, various commentators have warned that the successful securitization of climate change could become a harbinger of drastic, undemocratic and extraordinary measures in a high-politics setting (Oels, 2012). With climate-riskification, an epistemic community, a network of specialized experts who assist political figures on difficult policy issues, plays a crucial role by presenting the risks of climate change as a policy issue that is best pursued as a sustainable development agenda. With this knowledge, applying the themes to analysis of institutional responses or speech-acts on climate security should clarify the mystery surrounding the exact responses and actions undertaken at the interstate institutional level. Due to active involvement in the ongoing climate security debate, the UNFCCC, the EU, and the UNSC are perhaps the best-case studies. These institutions are enormously influential when it comes to where this debate may be heading next or, to be more precise, the normative trajectory of climate security.

The concept of climate security is largely unquestionable. It seeks to respond to the security implications of climate change in terms of a series of threats associated with climate change; disasters feature prominently among these threats, but other concerns identified included the destabilising effects of regional population movements and even future conflict over commons resources (McDonald, 2020). For McDonald, acknowledging these implications implies strategic preparedness and planning to manage the effects of a warmer world — including in the form of humanitarian assistance, disaster relief. Clearly, climate security envisions working with policy planners and decision-makers to design pragmatic responses to confront climate security risks and propel community level initiatives where it is perhaps most needed.

In recent times it is rapidly becoming a practice among climate security scholars to offer systematic review of the expansive literature on this topic. Such approach is welcomed, including constructive critiques. For instance, Nishimura (2017) argues that the UNFCCC provide little guidance to the meaning of some adaptation obligations. Nishimura's argument parallels both Conca's (2015) opinion regarding the UN's skewed approach to environmental action and Pettenger (2017) position about the UN's erratic efforts when it comes to collective reply to climate challenges. One reason for these scholars' arguments could be due to very different understandings and thus conceptualizations of the ways in which the effects of climate change affect human well-being. Despite their merits, however, these arguments are not helping much when it comes to moving the contentious climate security debate forward.

Climate security is indeed an emerging field of research (see, for example, Oels, 2012). Credible challenges and reconceptualizations of climate security foundations can be found in Ewing (2014). These could be due to several reasons. A case in point is Vivekananda (2018) on climate change, conflict and crisis in Lake Chad. While there is yet no analysis or

process which explicitly considers the role climate change plays in either risk or the shaping of appropriate responses, despite the significant role climate change plays in shaping the risk landscape (Vivekananda, 2018).

Key among those reasons is, on the one hand, the need for comparative-based understanding of climate security challenges, especially with respect to securitization. It is also crucial to understand how the UNFCCC, the EU, and the UNSC might best respond considering that the role of climate change as a threat multiplier is a clear basis for the climate security cause. A scan of speech-acts by these institutions revealed an interesting finding: the concepts of climate conflict and threat multiplier are unfolding as critical elements of institutional debates held by these institutions. To understand how the institutions have understood these two concepts and therefore climate security challenges, comparing speech-acts by the three institutions is vital if one is to capture how they have conceptualized climate security. The exercise should be complemented by responses from expert interviewees without forgetting to ask the experts for clarifications on key contexts that would assist proper contextualization of the main narrative with fresh evidence on and insights into, for instance, whether or not securitization has happened or is happening or may happen on the ground, including the extent of securitization — assuming this is the true picture. This approach would enhance understanding about the climate actions that have been undertaken and what has yet to be achieved (see Oels, 2012; Ewing, 2014; Dellmuth et al., 2018; Bremberg et al., 2019).

On the other, a comparative approach with respect to norm development will help to move beyond the bewildered situation over the climate security question. Goldstein (2016) seems useful in this regard. Covering a broad range of topics that push the traditional boundaries of international security studies, Goldstein (2016) presents some ideas on the linkages between international security and global warming partly because research on climate politics, as Keohane (2016) argues, is urgently needed although a focus on the normative dimensions of climate policy may distract attention from addressing critical climate challenges. While such ideas discursively constitute a discussion of the connections between norms research and climate politicization discourse, Klinsky et al. (2017) believe that, on the one hand, it is crucial to address Keohane's contention because it appeared to fit within an established line of contention that has been made by influential actors in both UN negotiations and the academic sphere. On the other, academics cannot leave the normative dimensions out of their analysis nor avoid it as an explicit research topic because it is yet to be fully understood what drives climate action and inaction.

Furthermore, Mitchell and Carpenter (2019) assert that climate change scholars could fruitfully focus greater attention on political efforts promoting strong global ethical norms for climate action because a norms-based discourse may spearhead faster, more effective climate action. In corollary, while managing climate change-related risks is a key task of national governments, the mismatch — arising partly from conflicts of interest between and within countries — between the severity

of climate risks and the political, diplomatic and policy and initiatives means that dealing effectively with these risks requires the mainstreaming of climate risks into foreign and security policy possible, including an in-depth understanding of associated dynamics (Frick and Schulz, 2014). Indeed, argues Carlane (2010):

Despite transatlantic convergence around questions of climate security, outstanding questions remain over the security dimensions of climate change in terms of what is being secured, what is being secured against, who is responsible for providing security, whose security is of most concern, when security-based measures are justified, and at what cost (Dabelko and Simmons, 1997). These questions could ultimately divide the transatlantic debate.

Considering the discussion so far, climate security scholars have examined how the UNFCCC, the EU, and the UNSC have understood global climate governance; however, a comparative coverage of how these institutions have conceptualized climate security is missing in existing literature. The present study therefore contributes by considering an important question: to what extent has climate security scholars mapped the field? This is an issue for how climate security has been understood, conceptualised and analysed. Not only is the question unalterably one of the ways forward but particularly a securitization as well as normative exercise. The study thus innovatively contributes to research on climate security by justifying a research agenda regarding the extent to which speech-acts by interstate institutions (the UNFCCC, the EU, and the UNSC — suggested case studies) could indicate an emerging new norm around the concept of climate security. It argues that conceptual development is ongoing when it comes to both the threat multiplier context of climate change and the possibility of climate conflict, although these institutions original mandates did not require such conceptualization.

This study is organized as follows in order to properly situate it within the existing body of climate security research. Having presented the overall goal as an unknown knowledge requiring clear answers, it discusses the inclusion/exclusion categories for conceptualization of extant literature. Next, it justifies the suitability of three institutional case studies and highlights the key gaps in climate security literature. By conceptualizing key concepts, it situates this justification within existing literature in order to further prove the relevance of these cases. The overall goal is then concisely rephrased into two open questions, followed by an outline of specific objectives and how these may be operationalized such that these questions will be clearly answered as contributions to knowledge. The study then suggests avenues for further research.

## 2. Method and data

### 2.1. Informing the study: inclusion and/or exclusion categories

This study is based on discourse analysis method. It specifically focuses on the literature strand that has examined

climate security, especially in terms of the UNFCCC, the EU, and the UNSC. In this light, each location in Table 1 is a representative snapshot of definitions of key concepts in the literature on climate security. At all these locations, framing functions in a similar manner for setting an agenda, defining the associated problems, diagnosing causes, suggesting ethical judgements, and promoting particular remedial actions in real-time context. These functions signify the conceptualization of key frames. Within this context, one assertion cannot be denied. It is possible to posit a major step forward in measurable conceptualizations of performance in addressing climate security challenges (Dellmuth et al., 2018) across three framings that stand out in Table 1 namely epistemic community, securitization and climate-riskification. What is striking about this assertion and these framings and, by extension, the rhetorical struggle of what gets included and excluded, is what could strip away the power of a frame. For instance, the concept of climate-riskification can imply what scientists say or a consensus among decision-makers, meaning either of these two concepts could be a frame shift to appropriate what can be deemed as frames or frameable as opposed to what is actually framed. To capture the three framings and thus analytical themes, a literature review of peer-reviewed definitions was collected. Whether based on a qualitative or quantitative study, the selected definition is underpinned by most commonly or oft-cited frames. Since scholarly definitions almost always feed into, directly or indirectly, the expansive social-security-political narratives or themes, the selection of frames is guided by studies with a distinctive bent towards this study's sense of climate security and climate securitization. The latter's processes can be categorised into three framings namely policy setting, securitizing actors and securitizing moves such as statements and image repertoires (Balzacq, 2011). These framings are well suited for structuring an analysis of climate change (Paglia, 2018) and climate security. Therefore, before being applied to specific case studies, researchers might want to reconceptualize the three framings as analytical themes from the literature, in addition to robust discussion of relevant contexts.

Researchers should note that the concept of epistemic communities is perhaps best reconceptualized as the epistemic community on climate security; securitization could be reconceptualized as climate securitization — the process in which statements successfully convinced relevant audience about the vulnerability of named referent objects and thus influenced the politics of climate security. The ongoing debate over whether climate change has been securitized heralded the threat-based climate securitization focussing on impacts, symptoms, imposition of rules, international order and self-directed protection like fortifying borders to keep climate migrants out. It is in this context that Corry (2012) introduced riskification to climate change research mainly because the politics of crafting something as a risk is clearly a social process that is different from securitization theory. The logic of security risk focuses on the conditions of possibility or constitutive causes of harm, whereas the logic of security threat focuses on direct causes of harm (Corry 2012). It then becomes reasonable that the risk-

Table 1  
Conceptualizations of key terminologies (CC = Climate Change).

Literature	Concept	Definition	Framing	Reference
This study	Security	Comprises the ability of individuals to thrive in an environment free from climate threats	Freedom to choose and act	Human well-being
IPCC (2014)	Human security	Condition that protects human lives		
O'Brien and Barnett (2013)		Focuses on individual, group, environment	Freedom to choose and act	CC/Complex challenges
Buzan et al. (1998); Balzacq (2011); Floyd (2019a, 2019b)	Securitization	Shifting from normal politics to emergency politics; naming an existential threat to a referent object	Securitizing actors, referent objects, and relevant audience	Extraordinary measure
Stritzel (2007) Harris (2019)	Security	A single security speech at a point in time Social commitment with a clear communicative intention (e.g. treaties, constitutive norms)	Securitization Epistemic community	Referent objects Climate security
Corry (2012); McDonald (2013); Krampe and Möbjörk (2018); Nevitt (2020)	Climate-related security risk	Potentials of CC to undermine the security of named entity	Climate-riskification	Referent object(s)
Solow (2013); Vivekananda et al. (2014); Christiansen (2016)	Environmental security	Risk/Threat-free habitable environment	Climate fragility and civil conflict	Environment/human well-being

based climate-riskification shares important attributes with securitization but differs in key respects with the focus on causes, side effects, reflexivity and influencing the way we operate — emission reduction for instance. Up to now there is a scarcity of literature separating climate securitization from climate-riskification and applying these in analysis of climate security. This is an opportunity for researchers to progress knowledge. Note that a distinction between securitization and riskification is particularly applicable when the relevant audience (e.g., epistemic communities) demonstrates acceptance through recursive application which in turn rests upon absence of barrier to such application.

Partly because the suggested themes have specific meanings and perform different functions in the climate security debate and because the debate is not happening in a vacuum, a key task for researchers is to determine how far the themes have emerged within the institutional cases. Integral elements such as institutional and other actors who are involved in and behind the debate ought to be foregrounded. Although these actors are spread across the globe, they collaborate on and coordinate the debate to the extent that the appropriate fitting label is an epistemic community. The problem is that the literature has tended to focus on the EU epistemic community at the expense of other influential actors whose voices cannot be discounted in the debate. An epistemic community denotes professional networks where topic experts with authoritative and policy-relevant expertise use their knowledge to influence policymakers' decisions on what constitutes a problem, such as framing policy issues as requiring management by extraordinary measures (Cross, 2013; Jerdén, 2017).

### 3. Case study and key gaps in research

In today's world affairs, there exists a perfect problematic trifecta: the natural environment, the socio-economic system and climatic security challenges are intertwined and displaying politically anomaly outlook, awing even the most seasoned political forecasters. While the environment has for a long time been a silent victim of civil conflict. Persistent disregard for both humanitarian principles and the Geneva Conventions' rules of warfare extends callously to internal displacement, human well-being and the environment, to name but a few (e.g., State of Kuwait, 2018). All these reasons, on the one hand, exist despite a resolution on observance of the international day for preventing the exploitation of the environment in war and armed conflict which the UN General Assembly adopted in 2001. On the other, the reasons began to signify the relevance of the three institutional case studies with respect to climate security.

Climate security is an important and current research agenda, especially in terms of the UNFCCC, the EU, and the UNSC. For instance, within the context of the examination of resilience discourses in terms of their basic discursive structure and extent of institutionalization to determine how dominant climate security narratives articulate understandings of security and insecurity in contemporary international environmental politics (Ferguson, 2019), several international organizations are now seeking to respond to climate-related security risks (Bremberg et al., 2019). In mid-2018 the EU organized a high-level diplomatic meeting, which not only underscored various ways that climate change was multiplying

the risks of instability and conflict but also clarified responsibility to prepare for security impacts and urged for elevating the climate-security nexus to the highest political level in (inter)national forums (Conca, 2019). Furthermore, Biedenkopf and Petri (2019) rely on interview data in order to provide the first expansive mapping of EU climate diplomacy practices of EU Delegations and interpret the surprising variance therein.

To continue justifying the case studies within the context of that trifecta, this study accepts not only the relevance of the climate and security topic in global climate debates (Meierding, 2013) but also rising concerns about climatic consequences — which could lead to climate conflict. This possibility parallels the growing climate-conflict literature (Pearson and Newman, 2019), which has been acknowledged by the IPCC. Several scholars have argued the questions of behavioral change induced by institutional responses to inherent challenges of climate security. In this regard, interstate institution performance may be best assessed through comparisons of accomplishments within and across institutions (Tallberg et al., 2016). Indeed, future studies might usefully explore the relative power of such factors in explaining effective interstate institution responses to climate security challenges and thereby contribute to both the emerging field and the broader literatures on climate security (Dellmuth et al., 2018). According to Dellmuth (2019), an interstate institution's legitimacy is consequential for its effectiveness in promoting climate security. For deeper understanding about how performance influences interstate institutions' legitimacy (Tallberg et al., 2016), more research is needed on the legitimacy — the beliefs among the subjects of a political institution that the institution's authority is appropriately exercised — of interstate institutions addressing climate risks (Dellmuth, 2019). To further demonstrate the relevance of institutional case studies, the EU and the UNSC have both recognized climate change as a significant factor in propelling conflict and security dynamics across the Sahel — for instance (Kalkavan, 2019) while a review of the research agenda on interstate institutions and climate security suggests how to meaningfully link this agenda to broader lines of theory on institutional change and effectiveness (Dellmuth et al., 2018).

By considering a question regarding the extent to which speech-acts by the UNFCCC could indicate an emerging new norm around climate security, future research should examine the Task Force on Displacement because it is the right thing to do for two important reasons. Firstly, this question allows the proposed research agenda to make original contribution to the unfolding institutional dialogue in the context of the Warsaw Mechanism — custodian of the Task Force on Displacement. And secondly, this question, bearing in mind the critical research challenging certain assumptions behind institutionalized relation occurring within the UNFCCC (Baldwin et al., 2019), is further attestation to engagement with the emerging reality of climate security. This phenomenon further attests to the timeliness of the proposed research agenda's goal. Achieving this goal rests on scrutinizing speech-acts on climate security which would be made possible by narrowing

the agenda's scope to the contributions of specialist institutions: the UNFCCC, the EU, and the UNSC.

Clearly, these specialist institutions, beyond their qualifications as suitable case studies, are endowed with evidence regarding how institutional actors have sought to understand and conceptualize climate security. This fact including the need for more systematic comparative analysis of speech-acts on climate security by these current cases is largely responsible for identification of these case studies. On the one hand, these cases remain central to setting rules and norms governing global climate change. On the other and just as important: i) there is opportunity to access online evidence on speech acts on climate security covering the 2001–2019 analytical time-frame, ii) there is adequate evidence of institutional level meetings and technical reports on these meetings with respect to securitizing moves on climate security, and iii) comparative analysis is possible because speech-acts can be evaluated using the three analytical themes (mentioned in previous pages) on a fairly equal basis.

It is worth mentioning that comparative analysis by Diez et al. (2016) stand out with respect to one major attempt to securitize climate change. This particular comparative analysis regarding the efforts of the British Embassy in Mexico City together with British think tank Royal United Services Institute, the world's oldest security policy-oriented think tank (von Lucke, 2015), stand out neither because of its focus on divergent climate security discourses. Nor because it shows the EU's influence — in the absence of an effective securitization — in enforcing climate policies in Turkey in comparison to unsuccessful securitization efforts in Mexico by the British actors. National level analysis by Diez et al. (2016) stand out mainly because it did not evade clarifying the susceptibility of comparative approach to risk of methodological nationalism given that climate negotiations and debates are propelled forward by transnational experts, actors who form part of an epistemic community. By pinpointing this potential pitfall as well as analysing whether these actors are successful or not, Diez et al. (2016) protect their key arguments from criticisms.

Although the present study focuses on the international level, it still benefited from the comparative national level analysis by Diez et al. (2016). This is not to say that using the national level as analytical unit is unproblematic. For instance, analysing climate securitization at the national level is problematic because climatological conditions can vary widely within a country as one region may experience normal conditions while another suffers from a severe drought. In this regard, many researchers have been responsive. They have changed the scale of their analyses into small grids to reduce collection of erroneous data (Meierding, 2016), and not because policymakers seem convinced that, at the very least, climate change will exacerbate groups' tendencies toward violence (Meierding, 2013).

As shown in Table 2, interstate institutions play significant roles when it comes to climate and security dynamics, suggesting the worthiness of institutional case studies for comparative examination of speech-acts on climate security.

Taking a major step forward in measurable conceptualizations of performance in addressing climate security challenges (Dellmuth et al., 2018), Table 2 also shows that three analytical themes namely epistemic communities climate securitization, and climate-riskification are implicitly, explicitly aligned (as applicable) to the institutional case studies.

Furthermore, Dellmuth et al. (2018) seek to advance the research agenda on interstate institutions and climate security through a systematic review of the literature. They suggest how to meaningfully link this agenda to broader lines of theory on institutional change and effectiveness in international politics. Reason been that scholars investigating related topics are usually unmotivated by shared conceptualizations though they offer in-depth knowledge about particular cases of individual interstate institutions in specific policy areas (Dellmuth et al., 2017). Agreeing with these scholars, this state of the art reflects the fragmented nature of global climate governance where climate security challenges typically fit uncomfortably within interstate institutions' mandates. Agreeing with these authors, a better understanding of climate security challenges would facilitate crafting effective global solutions to society's most intractable climate security challenges. Perhaps more importantly, future research should, methodologically, think conditionally about both institutional change and advancing existing inductive case study research with theory-driven comparative research (Dellmuth et al., 2018). Furthermore, what remains to be made available to the climate security research community includes more systematic comparative analysis of effectiveness within and between organs of interstate institutions (Dellmuth et al., 2017; Hardt, 2017).

The present study embraces these empirical findings because we cannot and should not deny a number of facts. Firstly, several scholars only conducted a systematic review of existing literature. Secondly, Table 2 shows that scholars, as part of efforts to progress the ongoing climate security debate, have overwhelmingly focused on the EU and the UNSC, and rightly so. And thirdly, less are those who compared the EU and the UNSC with respect to a focus on speech-acts on climate security; and even at that, however such comparison is articulated, it may not be so right due to the unacceptable level of engagement with the UNFCCC considering the widespread recognition of the UNFCCC as the legitimate platform to air and progress matters of climate and security. This meant nobody has systematically compared the UNFCCC, the EU, and the UNSC in terms of speech-acts on climate security.

It is therefore unsurprising that Boston et al. (2009) recount why an edited collection challenged scholars for convincing analysis on the relationship between climatic consequences and instability as well as policy responses to these consequences. van der Geest and Warner (2015) have in/directly responded to that challenge. These authors present a collection of manuscripts from an international conference held in February 2013 at the UN University Institute for Environment and Human Security in Bonn. Whereas the conference focused on decision-making on loss and damage, other scholars adopted a slightly different approach by considering the extent to which there is an academic discourse aiming at analysing the relationship between climate change and maritime security (see Germond and Mazari, 2019; Germond and Wa Ha, 2019). Baldwin et al. (2019) also belong to that group of

Table 2  
Sample of research on climate security and institutional case studies, 2007–2019 timeframe.

Literature	Institution	Key context	Key word
Sindico (2007)	UNSC	Climate change at the UNSC	Climate and security
Evans (2008)	IPCC, UNSC, EU	Climate change gained renewed prominence	Speech-acts by these actors
Detraz and Betsill (2009)	UNSC	2007 UNSC debate	Security dimensions of climate change
Conway (2010)	UNSC	UNSC's role	Climate and security
Zwolski and Kaunert (2011)	EU	Epistemic communities	Climate security agenda
Depledge and Feakin (2012)	UN, NATO, EU	International security managers	Climate politicization; resources/capacity; climate challenges
Kurtz (2012)	UN	Securitization	Climate change
Cousins (2013)	UNSC	UNSC's role	
Sonnsjö and Bremberg (2016)	EU	Policymaking	Climate and security
Hardt (2017)	Institutional actors	Need for more analysis	Environmental security
Dellmuth et al. (2017)	E.g. UNSC, NATO, EU	Summary of the key findings of the first systematic review of research on interstate institutions	Climate security
Dellmuth et al. (2017)	UNSC, NATO, EU	Most evidence points to these cases	Trends of climate security discourse
Bremberg (2018)	OSCE, NATO, EU	Actors with a security mandate	Climate-related security risks
Dellmuth et al. (2018)	UNSC, NATO, EU, UN agencies	Empirical evidence comes mostly from these cases	Climate security research community
Biedenkopf and Petri (2019)	EU	Climate diplomacy	International actor
Bremberg et al. (2019)		Theory-practice gap	Climate security policy
Dupont (2019)		Collective securitization	Climate security
Chin-Yee (2019)	UNFCCC	Heart of global climate governance	Setting of rules/standards
Calliari et al. (2019)		Politics of loss/damage mechanism	Loss/Damage
Baldwin et al. (2019)		Institutionalized climate-human mobility relationship	Emerging research agenda
Conca (2019)	UNSC	UNSC's role	Climate security

scholars who have in/directly responded to the above-mentioned challenge. Baldwin et al. (2019) label policy responses to climate consequences as a matter of priority requiring rigorous explanations mainly because this priority is an unfolding research agenda. Without alluding to neither climate security nor climate securitization, Baldwin et al. (2019) contend that the unfolding agenda challenges certain assumptions underpinning the growing institutionalised response occurring within the UNFCCC.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Conceptualizing key concepts

Conceptual and definitional challenges should be addressed early because this exercise not only prevents a presumption that readers would be familiar with key concepts and the study's understanding thereof (see Table 1). Rather, the basic premise for conceptualizations also enables important contexts for the study's overall analytical thrust and interpretations. Just as global environmental security and politics research has established its own concepts, now seen as more useful for interpreting the shifting world affairs (Zurn, 1998), one meaningful way climate security scholars have sought to unpack and better comprehend the climate dilemma is to set up working conceptualizations. Whilst it would be redundant to explain why existing conceptualizations are constructed the way they are, and not another, as such exercise will take this study beyond its intended purposes, the study, beyond complementing the utility of some existing conceptualizations through contextualization in ways that have not been explicitly presented before such that meaningful conversation with practitioners is enabled, offers new conceptualizations for certain key concepts upon first mention and used consistently thereafter.

Set against the construct in Table 1, the conceptualization of security is specifically articulated to help with conceptualization of analytical themes which in turn should facilitate deeper analysis in terms of the case studies, but that of climate conflict needs a repair. This study redefines climate conflict as the conflict dimension of climate-related displacement whereby climate change is perceived as a threat multiplier that exacerbates already existing challenges with respect to climate-related displacement. As for climate security, the conceptual contest is unsettled (Youngs, 2015). Prominent among existing articulations is the European EU (2016) construct: climate change and environmental degradation exacerbate potential conflict. In parallel, the UN defined climate security as a minimizer of climate-related risks to human security. Also, climate security refers to either the absence of climate threats to individuals, communities, countries and the international system or the condition where these referent objects have the ability to manage stressors and prevent climate-related risks (Thomas, 2017; Dellmuth et al., 2017). Compared to the latter two conceptualizations that broadly named the threats and clearly identified the referent

objects, the EU's conceptualization also broadly identified the threat (climate change, environmental degradation and conflict) but without specific referent objects.

As none of the conceptualizations for climate security is inclusive enough, this study offers a new version that is narrow and more inclusive: climate security is the recognition of several ways in which climate change is implicated as a threat multiplier to international security, human security, climate induced displacement and conflict prevention strategies. This conceptualization may not be absolutely-inclusive but narrow enough for retrieval and interpretation of statements invoking security framings — perhaps the most singularly salient factor underpinning whether specific framings will be strongly contested or not. This is vital for deciphering the extent to which statements by the three institutional case studies have framed climate change as a security problem and thus the indication of an emerging norm on climate security.

Table 1 outlines the definitions for key concepts that have been mentioned so far: climate security, security, human security, climate change and environmental security. The definitions of either risk or security presupposed the corresponding framing in such a way that facilitates theme emergence with direct relevance for the research questions and thus credible analysis of case studies. Framing is quite insightful because it can be used on the one hand as a theory to systematically unpack new perspectives and angles, to more clearly understand the relationships between events, to make informed interventions and on the other as a technique for interpreting textual statements. Framing, as a technique, is of more significance in this study because it anticipates normative efforts underpinning the three analytical themes. Set against the construct in Table 1, a frame obviously reduces the number of possible or endless interpretations but framing which oftentimes capture categories of themes can be simultaneously undermined by the discourse of the context or theme of conversation.

### 4.2. Open questions for future research

A review of the literature revealed a useful detail. The well-established climate-security link (Diez et al., 2016) remains hotly, emotively and deeply contested. That was when several questions began to emerge, underpinned by this study's intention to understand climate security discourses in the pursuit of suggesting a research agenda for future studies as well as progressing the climate security debate. When this is taken together with analytical themes that must be conceptualized from existing climate security literature, scholars might want to consider two crucial questions: to what extent could climate security-related speech-acts by institutional case studies indicate an emerging new norm around climate security? Is climate change changing the perceptions and conceptions of security within the institutional case studies and, if so, to what extent? On the one hand, these questions are sensitive markers for indicating knowledge gaps and should be aligned with von Lucke's (2014) concise articulation:

Further research will no doubt do more to evaluate the various climate security discourses in terms of their policy consequences and to strengthen the empirically based comparative agenda. We also need to pay more attention to how some discourses have come to prevail over others in the struggle for the representation of climate change, in whose name they are invoked, and how they reconfigure the political debate on climate change and beyond.

On the other, answers to the questions should enable a deeper understanding of the numerous contextualizations and conceptualizations of climate security in extant discourses. Beyond helping to fill a missing coverage by providing vital insights into where the climate security debate may be heading, such answers should also clarify the mystery surrounding the normative trajectory of climate security.

### 4.3. *Specific objectives*

There are at least five specific steps that should be undertaken for future research to meaningfully achieve the goal started here. These objectives include i) conceptualization of key terminologies, ii) conceptualization of climate security discourses and construction of distinct analytical themes, iii) interviews with climate/security policy experts, iv) meticulous application of analytical themes to each case study in order to capture climate security framings and operation at the level of norm entrepreneurs, and v) comparison and interpretation of findings that were uncovered during examination of each case study.

The first objective is conceptualization. Given that certain critical concepts will so prominently be mentioned at one point or the other, it is important to define, in more detail, the ways these concepts will be utilized. The second objective is conceptualization of climate security discourses. This is required for constructing distinct analytical themes at the same level of abstraction such that these themes will not only advance climate security discourses with solid evidence but also facilitate clearer interpretations of the relevance of speech-acts for the climate security debate and therefore climate policy-making. More robust conceptualization of climate security discourses will also enhance our understandings of what we are being told by these discourses and, in effect, the ways in which they have evolved over time. In this study, the climate security debate refers to high-level political deliberations on climate and security. It also refers to how scholars have discussed possible relationship between the negative impacts of climate change and international security — which includes human security. There is high likelihood that construction of analytical themes will uncover a need for certain category of data which should lead to the third objective: informal interviews with climate/security policy experts. To perform the fourth objective, researchers should apply that set of analytical themes to each case study. Tying all these objectives together, the fifth and final objective should compare and interpret findings that were uncovered during application of analytical themes to each institutional case study.

To do so, researchers should ponder the following details. Climate change may become an indirect driver of social instability in developing countries (Schilling et al., 2020), struggling to compete in a world that has reached an inter-dependent interactive level to such extent it has been acknowledged to great effect, making it all too clear how climate hazards have become globalized (Femia et al., 2014). Territories with societal problems such as high levels of militarization, insurgencies, and increased displacement of human population convey a broad array of main conditions that shape the climate conflict dimensions of vulnerability (Verhoeven, 2014). In the contemporary world in which power is concentrated at the international level, dominated by rich industrialised countries, another name for such territories is peripheral countries where climatic impacts like extreme drought may bring consequences for the economies of industrialised countries thousands of kilometres away. While with this knowledge we must not ignore the role of political power which remains an influential factor of political stability globally, some impacts of climate change may indirectly lead to violence. Since the likelihood of political and civil violence is greater in peripheral countries than industrialised countries, the same can be said about political instability which may result from, among others, the onset of climate conflict.

However, the favourable conditions for climate conflict onset, if it happens, are more likely to be found at the national level especially in peripheral countries. Furthermore, with resource conflict being increasingly acknowledged as a key substantive outcome of climate variability and change, understanding the underlying drivers that shape the framework of differential vulnerabilities in areas that are double exposed to climate and conflict has great significance (Okpara et al., 2017). Researchers might want to consider this framework for two key reasons. First, the framework is rarely applied in climate conflict studies at household and community levels (Okpara et al., 2017). Second, despite that policymakers seem convinced that climate change will exacerbate groups' tendencies toward violence, climate-conflict researchers have failed to discover consistent linkages between environmental shifts and intrastate contention (Meierding, 2013). However, it is worth mentioning that analysing climate conflicts at the national level is problematic because climatological conditions can vary widely within a country as a region may experience normal conditions while another suffers from a severe drought. Researchers have been responsive in this regard. They have changed the scale of analyses into small grids because such spatial degradation reduces the possibility of collecting erroneous data on climate conflict (Meierding, 2016).

With respect to climate conflict, climate change is altering the geopolitical resource landscape as manifested by increased competition over disputes over maritime boundaries and Arctic resources. Indeed, preventing catastrophic climate change is actually a resource challenge that will lead to dramatic know-how competition in energy, water, and maritime resources — such as in the South China Sea and the Arctic region. As the impacts on the societal security of Indigenous peoples is gaining attention (for instance, Hossain, 2016;

Herrmann, 2017), the Arctic climate-geostrategic environment has been primarily explored in terms of economic and national interests. Interests in the geostrategic dynamics of the Arctic region range from potential disputes to international collaboration. Some researchers warn about impending conflicts while others emphasise the region's unique cooperative environment (Østhagen, 2017). For those concerned about the adverse security consequences of climate change, collective actions and regimes designed to limit carbon emissions are at the core of global warming concerns which may not be separated from the geostrategic dynamics. In this regard, climate change, on the one hand, alters how interaction occurs between socio-ecological units whereby existing modes of interaction morph, for instance, the opening of new sea routes in the Arctic reconfigures Arctic states and others (Corry 2020). On the other, it also influences socio-economic change, which is a key dynamic driving the interest in Arctic resources.

Since 2007 when the UNSC held its first official debate on the possible security implications of climate change in terms of international security, various representatives of countries (especially from Russia, China and India) have reemphasized the UNFCCC as the appropriate institution with a legitimate mandate for progressing the climate security debate. Representatives from other countries disagreed. They (for example, Germany, Sweden and Britain) argued that the UNSC has the legitimacy to continue the debate. The basic text of these competing postures is whether it is appropriate to consider climate change a threat to international peace and security and whether the UNSC is an appropriate forum in which to consider climate change (Bo 2016). Since the UNSC has even nodded to the suitability of the UNFCCC (Scott 2015) in a move that may not be separated from the competing postures, all this formed a case in which the nuanced explanation regarding how it may eventuate is worth more exploration in future research. This would only reveal the developments on the surface. By engaging with these developments at a deeper level, a comparative examination of the UNFCCC, the EU, and the UNSC will likely uncover relevant interchanges.

## 5. Conclusions

Having proposed and discussed climate security: a research agenda proposal with certain research significance primarily because most existing research on this topic has been somewhat quiet when it comes to comparative analysis regarding how the UNFCCC, the EU, and the UNSC have understood and conceptualized climate security, this study urges researchers to prioritize this agenda. Set against this background, it is argued that conceptual development persists even though these institutions original mandates did not require such conceptualization. Speech-acts on climate security, taken together, now seem like a potential policy consideration in the foreseeable future. As the academia and policy spheres grapple with these challenges, disagreement continues over whether climate change has been securitized. Speech-acts by

the three institutional case studies provide opportunity to acquire knowledge about norm development and climate securitization. This is especially so given distinctive but different conceptualizations of climate security by these influential institutions.

As much remains to be learned about climate security challenges, the proposed research agenda also directs our attention to two important features of international politics namely norm entrepreneurship and securitization. These two cross-cutting features require attention if we are to progress the climate security debate. Dedicated attention to norm entrepreneurship and securitization will reveal several aspects of these features as conspicuously related such that specific aspects implies or complements the other. For instance, full securitization of climate change is attainable when norm entrepreneurs are able to convince relevant audience to fully accept either the framing of climate change as a security issue or that climate change is a real threat to human well-being. More pointedly, as climate security is still in the first stage of norm's life cycle, opportunities exist to make real contributions to research on securitization. Whether or not climate security will mature into an international norm rests on successful norm entrepreneurship or full securitization of climate change.

For researchers who might be interested in advancing the research agenda introduced in this study, it is important to highlight here the key element of a set of fundamental divergences between norm entrepreneurship and securitization. This particular element arises from the type of analytical unit adopted for conceptualising the literature and thereafter its application to each case study. Asking the right questions is essential to detecting security framings in speech-acts. Therefore, taking varied analytical units into consideration, the research question might then become why, considering the emergence of epistemic communities on climate security, are actors conversing in certain tones and not another. Conclusively, researchers are encouraged to reflect on the reasons for uneven responses to climate security challenges.

## Declaration of competing interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

## Acknowledgement

This study contains some information from the author's ongoing PhD project. The author would like to thank his supervisors Prof. James Goodman and Dr. Lai-Ha Chan for their guidance. This work was supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship. The author would like to thank the editors and anonymous peer reviewers for their helpful comments.

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