

# The Securitization of Climate Change in World Politics: How Close have We Come and would Full Securitization Enhance the Efficacy of Global Climate Change Policy?

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*There has been a growing awareness of the implications of climate change for national, international and human security. The Copenhagen School of Security Studies analyzes the process by which an issue comes to be represented as an existential threat in terms of a process of 'securitization'. This article considers what the full securitization of climate change would look like in world politics, including what role the United Nations Security Council might assume in climate change governance, how close we have come to that state of affairs, how likely we are to reach the stage of full securitization and why, and whether reaching that point would in any case be beneficial for the global policy response to climate change.*

## INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Security Council has conducted two debates on climate change. These debates, in 2007 and 2011, took place in the context of a growing awareness of the security implications of climate change and the subject is now on the agenda of a number of national, regional and international security institutions. The framing of climate change as a threat to security, as opposed to solely an environmental or political challenge, is one example of the recent broadening of the concept of security beyond the traditional realm of external military threats to a State. This article draws on securitization theory as developed by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies to assess the political significance of this turn to security in discourse on climate change. The article will consider what the full securitization of climate change would look like at a global level, how close we have come to that state of affairs, how likely we are to reach the stage of full securitization, and whether reaching that point would in any case be beneficial for the global policy response to climate change.

## SECURITIZATION THEORY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is in the first instance an environmental issue, albeit one with far-reaching economic, societal

and political ramifications. The issue entered the stage of global politics with the World Conference on the Changing Atmosphere: Implications for Climate Change, which took place in Toronto, Canada, 27–30 June 1988. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was established in the same year and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted in 1992,<sup>1</sup> followed by the Kyoto Protocol in 1997.<sup>2</sup> The emission reduction targets set out in the Protocol expire in 2012, and the struggle to develop a replacement resulted in an agreement in late 2011 to adopt a new legal accord on climate change as soon as possible and no later than 2015.<sup>3</sup> While a far better outcome of the Durban conference than no agreement at all, when measured against the far-reaching measures needed to avert environmental, economic, human and societal disaster, the global legal and governance response to climate change has been disappointingly inadequate.

The primary stumbling block to taking more effective action to mitigate climate change has been agreement as to who is responsible for bearing the burden of taking the far-reaching action necessary. A basic divide separates the United States, which believes that all countries should do their bit towards the solution, particularly since the greenhouse gas emissions of the leading developing countries are increasing at a rapid rate, and the developing world. China has led the calls of the Group of 77 to adhere to the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities',<sup>4</sup> under which those with most responsibility for the problem and with the greatest capacity to do something about it are expected to take the lead and shoulder greater responsibility for addressing the problem than the newly industrializing

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (New York, 9 May 1992; in force 21 March 1994) ('UNFCCC').

<sup>2</sup> Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Kyoto, 11 December 1997; in force 16 February 2005) ('Kyoto Protocol').

<sup>3</sup> Decision 1/CP.17, Establishment of an Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (UN Doc. FCCC/CP/2011/9/Add.1, 15 March 2012).

<sup>4</sup> UNFCCC, n. 1 above, Article 3.1.

countries. Although the annual emissions of China have now surpassed those of the United States, on a per capita basis those of China lag far behind. Furthermore, the United States and other developed countries have contributed a great deal more historically than developing countries. From this perspective, the root of the problem lies in the extravagant and materialistic lifestyle of the West and they should be the ones suffering any pain involved in meeting the overwhelming challenge with which the world is confronted.

More recent than the politicization of climate change has been its framing as a threat to national, international and human security. Wæver is credited with coining the term 'securitization' to refer to the process by which an issue comes to be represented as not only a political problem, but as an existential threat to a valued referent object. Wæver and other members of the 'Copenhagen School' emphasize that it is 'by labeling something as a security issue that it becomes one',<sup>5</sup> thereby paving the way for exceptional measures to deal with the threat.<sup>6</sup> In the most basic sense, then, securitization involves referring to an issue that has hitherto been conceptualized 'only' in political, economic, environmental or other terms as a security threat so as to heighten awareness of the issue and the urgency of taking effective action. In Wæver's formulation of the term, however, a referent object has not been fully securitized until it has been moved out of 'ordinary', 'democratic' politics to be dealt with as a matter of urgency in emergency mode. This can only happen if certain facilitating conditions have been met, including that the relevant 'audience' has accepted the 'securitizing move'.<sup>7</sup>

Over the last decade and a half, securitization theory has evolved into a 'remarkably broad and vibrant area of research',<sup>8</sup> but beyond this initial formulation there is no single unified theory that could be systematically applied to climate change at the international level. Views differ as to the political ramifications, benefits and disadvantages of securitizing a referent object as well as on more fundamental questions concerning the process by which securitization takes place and the extent to which audience reception of the proposed

securitization determines the outcome.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps of most concern when applying the theory in the international arena is the fact that securitization theory has an inherent 'democratic bias',<sup>10</sup> whereas the international political system is clearly not a liberal democracy. This article nevertheless draws on securitization theory to help make better sense of the 'turn to security' in the international politics of climate change and its potential or otherwise for moving forward the global response to climate change mitigation and adaptation. In turn, it seeks to make a modest contribution to theoretical understanding of securitization at an international level by focusing on two aspects of the theory ripe for more nuanced development: what factors impact acceptance by an audience of a securitization move, and what full securitization would look like on the international plane.

## THE 'SECURITIZING MOVE' IN RESPECT OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN WORLD POLITICS

The first step in the process of securitization is referred to as a 'securitizing move'. In the case of climate change, this means climate security being introduced into the discourse of international policy making and the framing of climate change as a threat to human, national and international security. This move can be dated from 2006 when British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett assumed a leadership role in promoting the association of climate change with international security in global policy discourse. During the United Kingdom Presidency, the G8 in 2006 accepted the fundamental links between energy, security, climate change and sustainable development, and in October 2006 Beckett emphasized the importance of 'climate security' in a major foreign policy speech in Berlin.<sup>11</sup> After considerable lobbying, the United Kingdom chaired the first UN Security Council debate on climate change on 17 April 2007. A common theme in the debate was that of climate change as a 'threat multiplier'.<sup>12</sup> It is not that increasing temperatures as such threaten human security, although they may well do so in certain situations, but rather that the physical effects

<sup>5</sup> O. Wæver, 'Aberystwyth, Paris, Copenhagen: New Schools in Security Theory and the Origins between Core and Periphery'. Paper presented at the International Studies Association Conference, Montreal, March 2004, cited in R. Taureck, 'Securitization Theory and Securitization Studies', 9:1 *Journal of International Relations and Development* (2006), 53, at 54.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., B. Buzan, O. Wæver and J. de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Lynne Rienner, 2008); and O. Wæver, 'Securitization and Desecuritization', in: R.D. Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security* (Columbia University Press, 1995), 46.

<sup>7</sup> See B. Buzan, O. Wæver and J. de Wilde, n. 6 above, at 31–33.

<sup>8</sup> M.C. Williams, 'The Continuing Evolution of Securitization Theory', in: T. Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (Routledge, 2011), 212, at 212.

<sup>9</sup> For a useful survey of the literature, see T. Balzacq, 'A Theory of Securitization: Origins, Core Assumptions and Variants', in: T. Balzacq, n. 8 above, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Meaning that it was developed primarily with democratic political orders in mind. J.A. Vuori, 'Illocutionary Logic and Strands of Securitization: Applying the Theory of Securitization to the Study of Non-democratic Political Orders', 14:1 *European Journal of International Relations* (2008), 65, at 66.

<sup>11</sup> M. Beckett, 'Berlin Speech on Climate and Security'. Speech Given at the British Embassy, Berlin (24 October 2006), found at: <<http://www.britishembassy.de/en/news/items/061024.htm#up>>.

<sup>12</sup> 'Security Council Holds First-ever Debate on Impact of Climate Change' (SC/9000, 17 April 2007), found at: <<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/sc9000.doc.htm>> ('SC/9000').

triggered by the increased temperatures could be expected in many instances to exacerbate existing tensions.

A considerable literature emerged at about this time through scholarly writing and reports of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Writing in the *Washington Quarterly* in 2007, for example, Podesta and Ogden emphasized the extent to which all the threats and risks are interrelated, and hence, from a policy perspective, why it is important to prevent any one from manifesting. Their fear is that the onset of one problem may lead to a downward spiral in which it is increasingly difficult to prevent the next problem and the result may be instability, a failed State and/or new safe havens for terrorists.<sup>13</sup> Riedel argued in 2007 that Bangladesh is one of the places most likely to become a haven for al Qaeda because of the combination of deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, radical Islamic political groups and environmental insecurity brought on by climate change. Although initially an issue of intra-State insecurity, the ramifications could potentially be global.<sup>14</sup> A few analysts had, for at least a decade, drawn links between climate change and security,<sup>15</sup> but this had typically been in relation to worst case scenarios and security organizations would at that stage have regarded the implications of climate change 'as an issue lurking somewhere over the horizon'.<sup>16</sup> Numerous studies and reports by think tanks, NGOs and governments were to follow.<sup>17</sup>

The European Council released a paper on climate change and international security in May 2008, which provided a useful summary of seven threats deemed likely to emanate from climate change.<sup>18</sup> The first of the

threats listed for consideration by the Council was the potential for conflict over resources. At a global level there is increasing competition for resources including water, food, arable land and oil. Climate change is likely to increase these stresses because of changed rainfall patterns and desertification. While climate change is unlikely to be the direct cause of conflict, it functions to make existing problems worse. Second, climate change threatens security through causing economic damage and risk to coastal cities and critical infrastructure. Sea-level rise and increased storms pose a particular threat to the east coasts of China and India, as well as the Caribbean region and Central America. Third, climate change is leading to loss of territory – for example, by island States – and increases the risk of border disputes and political instability. Fourth is the issue of environmentally induced migration, both within and between countries, which is not only an issue for those leaving their home as it will also place pressure on receiving States and regions. Fifth, although all countries will struggle to adapt to the changes brought about through climate change, the challenge will be felt most strongly in situations that are already socially, economically and politically fragile, including where there are ethnic and religious tensions. Sixth are potential tensions over energy supplies, and seventh, pressures on international governance. As the Council's paper puts it: 'The already burdened international security architecture will be put under increasing pressure.'<sup>19</sup>

## WHAT WOULD THE FULL SECURITIZATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE AT A GLOBAL LEVEL LOOK LIKE?

If the securitization move in respect of climate change on an international level can be understood to have taken place c.2006–2008, this raises the question of whether the securitization process has now been completed. One of the questions being addressed by the growing literature on securitization is that of how we are to know when an issue has been fully securitized.<sup>20</sup> According to the Copenhagen School, once an issue is successfully securitized it moves out of the sphere of normal politics to be dealt with as an emergency issue without the normal democratic processes being brought to bear, and the securitizing actor can, through this process, infuse the concept of 'security' with any meaning desired.<sup>21</sup> Translated into the international arena, full securitization would seem to be represented by the issue moving outside of the normal multilateral treaty framework used to manage political issues of

<sup>13</sup> J. Podesta and P. Ogden, 'The Security Implications of Climate Change', 31:1 *Washington Quarterly* (Winter 2007–2008), 115.

<sup>14</sup> B. Riedel, 'Al Qaeda Strikes Back', 86:3 *Foreign Affairs* (2007), 24.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., B. Rodal, *The Environment and Changing Concepts of Security*, Canadian Security Intelligence Service Commentary 47 (Canadian Security Intelligence Service, 1994), found at: <<http://www.csis-scrcs.gc.ca/pblctns/cmmntr/cm47-eng.asp>>, at 2; and P. Schwartz and D. Randall, *An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and Its Implications for United States National Security* (Environmental Defense, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> O. Brown, A. Hammill and R. McLeman, 'Climate Change as the "New" Security Threat: Implications for Africa', 83:6 *International Affairs* (2007), 1141.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., CNA Military Advisory Board, *National Security and the Threat of Climate Change* (CNA Corporation, 2007); C. Abbott, *An Uncertain Future: Law Enforcement, National Security and Climate Change* (Oxford Research Group, 2008); J.W. Busby, *Climate Change and National Security: An Agenda for Action* (Council on Foreign Relations, 2008); C. Paskal, *How Climate Change is Pushing the Boundaries of Security and Foreign Policy* (Chatham House, 2007); and D. Smith and J. Vivekananda, *A Climate of Conflict: The Links between Climate Change, Peace and War* (International Alert, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the European Commission on Climate Change and International Security, *Climate Change and International Security* (S113/08, 14 March 2008), found at: <[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/reports/99387.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/reports/99387.pdf)>.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, at 5.

<sup>20</sup> M. McDonald, 'Constructivisms', in: P.D. Williams (ed.), *Security Studies: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2012), 63, at 74.

<sup>21</sup> See R. Taureck, n. 5 above, at 55.

mutual concern to the body with 'primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security': the United Nations Security Council.<sup>22</sup> The multilateral treaty-making process is not democratic *per se*, but it is still more democratic than decision making by the Security Council. All States can theoretically contribute to the negotiation of large-scale multilateral treaties and a treaty text is adopted at an international conference by a vote of two-thirds of the States present and voting, unless the same majority decides to apply a different rule.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, observers have pointed to the limitations imposed on the multilateral treaty approach to climate change by its inclusivity – in particular its 'lowest common denominator' feature by which the resulting treaty represents a compromise limited by the position of those least prepared to commit to far-reaching measures.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, the Security Council has only 15 members – five of which are permanent and ten of which are members for two-year terms. Decisions on all but procedural matters are taken by an affirmative vote of nine members, including the concurring votes of the five permanent members.<sup>25</sup>

It is proffered that moving decision making on climate change to the UN Security Council would constitute extraordinary measures beyond normal politics not only because of the less democratic process of decision making by the Council in comparison with that of multilateral treaty regimes, but also because of the enforcement powers accorded the Council under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. Under Article 25, member States 'agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council'.<sup>26</sup> Article 39 stipulates that the Security Council can identify a 'threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression' and 'make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security'.<sup>27</sup> Article 41 provides for the Council to decide on appropriate measures not involving the use of armed force,<sup>28</sup> and Article 42 provides that if the Security Council considers that such measures 'would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security'.<sup>29</sup> The Security Council can thus enforce its decisions made in response

to a perceived 'threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression' by use of force if it deems it necessary to do so. It is generally accepted among the international law community that it is at the Council's political discretion to define what constitutes a threat to the peace for the purposes of Chapter VII.<sup>30</sup>

It is possible that the Security Council has already passed a Chapter VII Resolution in response to a conflict caused, or at least exacerbated by, climate change. 'Operation Restore Hope' was a response to the crisis in Somalia caused at least in part by drought.<sup>31</sup> The physical and social consequences of climate change do not necessarily come with a label attached and so it may not even be apparent when the Council is addressing a climate change consequence. It may simply seem to be responding to a cross-border conflict or other event that threatens the peace. Action by the Council to mitigate hostilities resulting directly or indirectly from the consequences of climate change would not necessarily be controversial, particularly if the link between that specific scenario and climate change were not universally recognized or accepted.

'An Agenda for Peace', the 1992 report by the UN Secretary-General, defined preventive diplomacy as 'action to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur'.<sup>32</sup> Acceptance of the security risks posed by climate change is leading to recognition of the need for enhanced efforts at preventive diplomacy where there is perceived potential for increasing tensions – in respect of, for example, the situation of water sharing in the Middle East where many countries rely on external sources of water, or the Arctic, where the retreat of ice paves the way for competition over resources. This is in keeping with UN Security Council Resolution 1625 (2005),<sup>33</sup> which emphasized the importance of working in conjunction with regional bodies in order to identify potential armed conflicts and to adopt strategies by which to then prevent conflict from occurring. In doing so, the Council could use any of the tools at its disposal, including fact-finding, information gathering and preventive deployment.

<sup>22</sup> Charter of the United Nations (26 June 1945; in force 24 October 1945), Article 24.1 ('UN Charter').

<sup>23</sup> Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (23 May 1969; in force 27 January 1980), Article 9.2.

<sup>24</sup> A. Kellow, 'A New Process for Negotiating Multilateral Environmental Agreements? The Asia-Pacific Partnership beyond Kyoto', 60:2 *Australian Journal of International Affairs* (2006), 287, at 290.

<sup>25</sup> UN Charter, n. 22 above, Article 27.3. Although not explicitly stated in the Charter, it has become accepted that this vote may include abstentions by permanent members.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 25.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 39.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 41.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 42.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., M. Wood, 'The UN Security Council and International Law'. Hersch Lauterpacht Memorial Lecture, Cambridge (8 November 2006), found at: <[http://www.lcil.cam.ac.uk/Media/lectures/pdf/2006\\_hersch\\_lecture\\_1.pdf](http://www.lcil.cam.ac.uk/Media/lectures/pdf/2006_hersch_lecture_1.pdf)>.

<sup>31</sup> M.K. Murphy, 'Achieving Economic Security with Swords and Ploughshares: The Modern Use of Force to Combat Environmental Degradation', 39:4 *Virginia Journal of International Law* (1999), 1181, at 1184.

<sup>32</sup> An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping, Report of the Secretary-General (UN Doc. A/47/277-S/24111, 17 June 1992), at paragraph 20.

<sup>33</sup> Adoption of the Declaration on Strengthening the Effectiveness of the Security Council's Role in Conflict Prevention, particularly in Africa (UNSC Resolution S/RES/1625, 14 September 2005).

If those predicting increased conflict are correct, then the Security Council could be expected to have an increased peacekeeping load in the future. During 2011, there was considerable discussion of the idea of a 'green helmets' environmental peacekeeping force.<sup>34</sup> The difficulty with this idea in practice is, of course, that the relationship between climate change and specific events is generally going to be complex and indirect. Of the peacekeeping operations that have already been mandated by the UN Security Council, ten have been established in response to conflicts in which resource depletion had played a key role.<sup>35</sup> If resource conflicts are set to increase, then the need for such operations is also likely to increase. This is significant both for the United Nations itself, and for those countries that contribute most to peacekeeping operations. Such recognition is important for planning purposes, including financial forecasting, and the ordering of priorities, particularly in terms of preventing as opposed to responding, to the human impacts of climate change. The US\$3 billion spent on peacekeeping operations in Darfur might have been better spent on addressing desertification and drought and the basic causes of conflict.<sup>36</sup>

Of far greater controversy than decisions oriented towards reducing the symptoms of climate change would be action by the Council under Chapter VII of the Charter to mitigate climate change itself, rather than its consequences. In this scenario, the Council could potentially identify climate change as a threat to the peace and impose legally binding obligations on any or all States in order to meet that threat. There is relevant precedent on which action could be modeled. Beginning with Resolution 1373 of 28 September 2001,<sup>37</sup> relating to international terrorism, and continuing with Resolutions 1422,<sup>38</sup> 1487<sup>39</sup> and 1540,<sup>40</sup> the Council has used its Chapter VII powers to require all States to take or not take specific actions. Resolutions 1373 and 1540 established committees to monitor compliance.

The Council would thus arguably be acting within its legal powers if, for example, it passed resolutions requiring extreme lifestyle changes on the part of the

rich and/or changed expectations for developing countries. National governments could be required to place limits on the consumption of goods or of energy resources, much akin to the rationing that is sometimes required of citizens during wartime. States could be required to place bans on long-distance recreational travel or impose penalties on those who did not use their available arable land for growing food or who wasted potable water. Governments at all levels could be required to prioritize adaptation strategies in their planning and national governments to contribute military or other resources to a global disaster mitigation unit. The only real limit to the measures that could potentially be legislated for by the Council would be the need for agreement, or at least acquiescence, on the part of the number of Council members needed to pass the resolution, together with a degree of acceptance by the international community more broadly that such measures were necessary and legitimate. It would be unrealistic to think that the Council could enforce far-reaching measures on a global scale in the face of wholesale opposition from governments and their peoples.

The Council could potentially 'legislate' in this sort of way to enforce emission reduction commitments agreed within the UNFCCC, functioning as the lead institution in global climate change mitigation policy.<sup>41</sup> There have been calls for the establishment of an international court or tribunal to hear cases involving breaches of international environmental law. During the 2011 Security Council debate on climate change, Bolivian representative Rafael Archondo argued that a body should be set up to judge and sanction those guilty of not complying with their emission reduction commitments. According to Archondo, the Council should adopt a resolution by which defence and security spending by developed countries is cut by 20% and the money instead used to address the impact of climate change. In reference presumably to international criminal tribunals, he said that an international tribunal for climate and environmental justice should consider crimes of 'ecocide' against Mother Earth.<sup>42</sup>

The UNSC thus has a legal basis on which to act not only on the consequences of climate change, but on climate change itself, and for this very reason it is worth considering a variety of potential roles from which the Council could select. The principal hurdle to climate change action by the Council would be political, as opposed to legal, in terms both of the will to step into this policy arena, and the acceptance, or at least acquiescence, on the part of others to its doing so.

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., S. Goldenberg, 'UN Security Council to Consider Climate Change Peacekeeping', *The Guardian* (20 July 2011).

<sup>35</sup> See the statement by A. Steiner (UNEP), in 'Security Council, in Statement, says "Contextual Information" on Possible Implications of Climate Change Important When Climate Impacts Drive Conflict' (SC/10332, 20 July 2011), found at: <<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10332.doc.htm>> ('SC/10332').

<sup>36</sup> See the statement by D.-A. Elhag Ali Osman (Sudan), in *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Threats to International Peace and Security Caused by Terrorist Acts (UNSC Resolution S/RES/1373, 28 September 2001).

<sup>38</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping (UNSC Resolution S/RES/1422, 12 July 2002).

<sup>39</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping (UNSC Resolution S/RES/1487, 12 June 2003).

<sup>40</sup> Non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (UNSC Resolution S/RES/1540, 28 April 2004).

<sup>41</sup> D. Conway, 'The United Nations Security Council and Climate Change: Challenges and Opportunities', 1:3 *Climate Law* (2010), 375.

<sup>42</sup> See the statement by R. Archondo, in SC/10332, n. 35 above.

## HOW CLOSE ARE WE TO THE FULL SECURITIZATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE?

Let us now assess some of the key steps that have been taken since the initial securitizing move to see how close we have come to the full securitization of climate change in world politics.

### 2007: THE FIRST SECURITY COUNCIL DEBATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE SECURITY

The first Security Council debate in 2007 revealed divergent views on the question of whether it is appropriate to consider climate change a threat to international peace and security. China acknowledged that climate change could have certain security implications, but maintained that it was 'generally speaking . . . an issue of sustainable development'.<sup>43</sup> A second and related issue that permeated the 2007 Council debate concerned the appropriateness for the Council to be considering climate change at all. South Africa, for example, did not believe that the debate fitted within the mandate of the Security Council and argued that it would be better addressed in other forums.<sup>44</sup> The question as to the validity of conceptualizing climate change as a security issue and the question as to whether the Security Council is an appropriate forum in which to consider climate change are necessarily interrelated. Those opposed to a role for the Security Council tended to be reluctant to accept that climate change constitutes a security issue in the first place because of the potential for the Council to oversee the implementation of mandatory measures to address the causes and consequences of climate change.<sup>45</sup>

Ultimately, then, although the 2007 debate saw substantive discussion of the ways in which climate change threatens international security, the debate can be understood to have been at least as much on the appropriate international forum within which to address the problem. The varied response on the part of what securitization theorists refer to as the 'audience' to the proposed securitization of climate change can best be understood in terms of the institutional implications for them if the securitization were to be successful. The divisions within the 2007 debate largely echoed the broader political divide on climate change policy between North and South. The Non-aligned Movement<sup>46</sup> and the Group of 77 did not consider the Council

to be the appropriate forum in which to address climate change and tended to downplay climate change-as-security-threat in favour of an emphasis on sustainable development and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. China expressed the view that the Security Council lacked the appropriate expertise to address the subject and that discussions should be conducted within a framework that permitted participation by all parties.<sup>47</sup> The exception amongst developing countries was the group of small Pacific island States whose very existence was under threat; as discussed below, they had no hesitation in accepting that climate change was a security threat and sought to place some moral pressure on the dissenters to move forward with an effective response on this (or any other) basis.

### 2009: THE FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE SECURITY

Following a year-long campaign by a coalition of the small Pacific island developing States,<sup>48</sup> the General Assembly on 3 June 2009 passed Resolution 63/281 in which it acknowledged that the impacts of climate change could have possible security implications while at the same time reaffirming the UNFCCC as the key instrument for addressing climate change.<sup>49</sup> Resolution 63/281 invited the relevant organs of the United Nations, 'as appropriate and within their respective mandates, to intensify their efforts in considering and addressing climate change, including its possible security implications'.<sup>50</sup> It also requested the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report to the General Assembly on the possible security implications of climate change.<sup>51</sup>

The subsequent report repeated the language of 'threat multipliers', but also identified several threat 'minimizers', which referred to conditions or actions that are desirable in their own right and which help lower the risk of climate-related insecurity.<sup>52</sup> These include:

climate mitigation and adaptation, economic development, democratic governance and strong local and national institutions, international cooperation, preventive diplomacy

interests of developing countries, particularly in terms of their steering an independent path in world politics and promoting positions favourable to developing countries on economic issues.

<sup>47</sup> See SC/9000, n. 12 above.

<sup>48</sup> Islands First, 'Pacific Islands Pass UN Resolution on Climate Change and Security' (3 June 2009), found at: <[http://www.islandsfirst.org/updates/ga\\_resolution.html](http://www.islandsfirst.org/updates/ga_resolution.html)>.

<sup>49</sup> Climate Change and Its Possible Security Implications (UNGA Resolution A/RES/63/281, 3 June 2009).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, at paragraph 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, at paragraph 2.

<sup>52</sup> Climate Change and Its Possible Security Implications, Report of the Secretary-General (UN Doc. A/64/350, 11 September 2009), at 6.

<sup>43</sup> SC/9000, n. 12 above.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> F. Sindico, 'Climate Change: A Security (Council) Issue?', 1:1 *Carbon and Climate Law Review* (2007), 29.

<sup>46</sup> The Non-Aligned Movement is a group of 115 States, dating from a conference held in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955. It represents the

and mediation, timely availability of information and increased support for research and analysis to improve the understanding of linkages between climate change and security.<sup>53</sup>

## 2011: THE SECOND SECURITY COUNCIL DEBATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The Security Council held its second debate on climate change in July 2011, under German leadership. Europeans took a lead role in advocating both that climate change is appropriately referred to in terms of security and that the Security Council should be part of the global response. As in 2007, the Security Council did not take a decision on climate change. This time, however, it did agree on a Presidential statement, a non-legally binding document adopted by consensus. This statement expressed concern that possible adverse effects of climate change may, in the long run, aggravate certain existing threats to international peace and security. The Council expressed concern at the possible security implications of loss of territory of some States caused by sea-level rise – particularly in small low-lying island States.<sup>54</sup>

One notable feature of the 2011 debate was the shift in the stance adopted by the United States, which had made little substantive contribution to the 2007 debate. In 2011, however, Ambassador Susan Rice was highly supportive, both in terms of acceptance of climate change as a threat to international peace and security and of the appropriateness of the issue being addressed by the Security Council. ‘Our goal is clear,’ she stressed. ‘This Council needs to be prepared for the full range of crises that may be deepened or widened by climate change. It must be much better prepared to tackle one of the central threats of our age.’<sup>55</sup>

It was, nevertheless, the President of Nauru, speaking on behalf of the Pacific small island developing States, the Maldives, Seychelles and Timor Leste, who most strikingly implored the Council to ‘seize the opportunity to lead’. Marcus Stephen called on the Council to demonstrate its solidarity with the Pacific ‘by formally recognizing that climate change is a threat to international peace and security’.<sup>56</sup> The impact of coastal inundation and more severe storm surges is forecast to render uninhabitable as much as 80% of the Marshall Islands’ Majuro Atoll by the end of the century. Already, however, the entire population of the Carteret Islands in Papua New Guinea – some 1,500 people – have had

to leave their island homes because unprecedented high tides have destroyed the soil used for food production.<sup>57</sup>

The Group of 77 and the Non-aligned Movement remained reluctant to accept that climate change is usefully seen as a security threat and did not accept a role for the Security Council on the matter. Developing countries continued to maintain that climate change needs to be discussed in terms of sustainable development. They regarded the move to discuss it in terms of international security as an attempt by developed countries to shirk their international development commitments and to avoid ambitious emissions reductions. According to the Cuban representative in the debate, the main cause of climate change is the ‘unsustainable production and consumption patterns in developed countries’.<sup>58</sup> Venezuela was one of the most outspoken along these lines, refusing to consider any climate change initiative presented outside the scope of the UNFCCC.

Interestingly, neither the European Union nor Nauru suggested that the Security Council replace the UNFCCC process. Indeed, Marcus Stephen clearly set out that the UNFCCC must remain the primary forum for developing a strategy to mitigate climate change, but argued that the Council had a clear role in coordinating the response to the security implications. Members of the Non-Aligned Movement objected to what they regarded as evidence of the ‘continued encroachment by the Security Council on the functions and powers of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the relevant subsidiary organs’.<sup>59</sup>

So far as securitization theory is concerned, these country positions suggest that the receptivity of various members of the climate security audience has been determined not only by how convincing they found the case to be that climate change threatens security, but also by consideration of what the international legal and institutional ramifications of accepting that would be. This is particularly true in respect of the question of who will decide how the globe will respond to the demands of mitigation and who will fund that response. The notion that the Security Council could dictate the global response to climate change itself is not acceptable to any other than to those really desperate for action of any kind. This is largely because they would likely have less influence over decisions taken by the Security Council and could theoretically be subjected to the enforcement of those decisions, even through military intervention premised on inadequate compliance with Council resolutions.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, at 2.

<sup>54</sup> Statement by the President of the Security Council (UN Doc. S/PRST/2011/15, 20 July 2011).

<sup>55</sup> See Ambassador S. Rice (US), in SC/10332, n. 35 above.

<sup>56</sup> See M. Stephen (Nauru), in *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> See A. Webster (Ireland), in *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> See R.E. Benítez Versón (Cuba), in *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> See M.A. Abdelaziz (Egypt), in *ibid.*

## DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN NATIONAL AND REGIONAL SECURITY INSTITUTIONS

The United States Quadrennial Defense Review Report of 2010 identified two broad ways in which the Department of Defense (DoD) will be affected by climate change:

First, climate change will shape the operating environment, roles, and missions that we undertake. . . . Second, DoD will need to adjust to the impacts of climate change on our facilities and military capabilities.<sup>60</sup>

This offers a basis on which to integrate climate change into national security and defence strategies and, indeed, to adopt a strategic approach to the issue. Despite the comment of Peter Wittig, German representative to the Security Council, that ‘most national security establishments considered global warming as among the biggest security challenges of the century’,<sup>61</sup> this would not appear to be true of the military in Russia and China. A recent study found that, at least as expressed in publicly available documents, the Russian and Chinese military had paid only scant attention to the subject. Although the Chinese military appeared cognizant of the many challenges with which they would likely be faced, public pronouncements to date have been limited to tree planting and disaster relief, presumably in line with the official position of China that climate change is a question of development rather than security.<sup>62</sup> In general, the military have been reluctant to engage in the climate change debate, largely because of the level of political contention surrounding the issue.<sup>63</sup>

European governments and civil society have maintained momentum towards the full securitization of climate change. In March 2012, the Centre for European Studies and the Institute for Environmental Security brought together over 100 European parliamentarians, military officers, climate change experts and civil society at the European Parliament in Brussels. The objectives were to ‘reframe the international discourse on climate change, listen to the concerns and ideas of the security sector and to discuss the need to reform international and European institutions for responding efficiently to climate change threats’, and the focus was on dialogue

between the military and civilian sector.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, a ‘high-level briefing’ at the headquarters of the British Medical Association on 17 October 2011, attended by over 300 people from health care, the military, climate science, industry, business and politics considered the impact of climate change on health and security, and concluded that ‘we must give politicians the ammunition they need if we are to create radically different ways of living, and we must develop better narratives to articulate the health and economic benefits of tackling climate change’.<sup>65</sup>

In Europe and North America, the ongoing generation of reports and debate is increasingly being accompanied by more detailed analyses and scenario planning; national security organizations in the United States and the United Kingdom have clearly begun planning for the era of climate change effects.<sup>66</sup> Spain’s security strategy of 28 June 2011 treated climate change as a risk multiplier, for example.<sup>67</sup> The EU and the UN are also promoting the more widespread securitization of climate change in what is sometimes referred to as a process of ‘norm diffusion’.<sup>68</sup> For example, the Africa, Climate Change, Environment and Security Initiative was launched in October 2010 to address the security implications of climate change in Africa; the launch took place as a side event to the High Level 7th African Development Forum, organized by the UN Economic Commission for Africa.<sup>69</sup> An Inter-parliamentary Dialogue on Climate Change and Peace and Security with participants from 14 countries held in Ethiopia in March 2012 issued a statement calling for climate change to be considered a security threat, and for issues affecting the environment to be included in national security policies.<sup>70</sup> The aim of the conference was to encourage legislators to recognize climate change as both an environmental and security challenge, thus

<sup>64</sup> Centre for European Studies and Institute for Environmental Security, *Building Climate Change Institutions: The Case of Environment and Security, Summary Report* (European Parliament, 21 March 2012), found at: <[http://www.envirosecurity.org/ccis/climateinstitutions/BCCL\\_Summary\\_Report.pdf](http://www.envirosecurity.org/ccis/climateinstitutions/BCCL_Summary_Report.pdf)>.

<sup>65</sup> British Medical Association, Conference on ‘The Health and Security Perspectives of Climate Change: How to Secure Our Future Wellbeing’ (17 October 2011), found at: <<http://climatechange.bmj.com/>>.

<sup>66</sup> See M. Brzoska, n. 62 above.

<sup>67</sup> Government of Spain, *Spanish Security Strategy: Everyone’s Responsibility* (2011), found at: <<http://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/NR/rdonlyres/EF784340-AB29-4DFC-8A4B-206339A29BED/0/SpanishSecurityStrategy.pdf>>, at 35.

<sup>68</sup> K. Zwolski and C. Kaunert, ‘The EU and Climate Security: A Case of Successful Norm Entrepreneurship?’, 20:1 *European Security* (2011), 21.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Launch of a Dialogue Process on Climate Change and Security in Africa’ (13 October 2010), found at: <<http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/focus/launch-dialogue-process-climate-change-and-security-africa>>.

<sup>70</sup> Responding to Climate Change, ‘Climate Change Should be Considered as Security Threat Says African Union’ (7 March 2012), found at: <<http://www.rtcc.org/living/climate-change-should-be-considered-as-security-threat-says-african-union/>>.

<sup>60</sup> United States Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (February 2010), found at: <[http://www.defense.gov/qdr/images/QDR\\_as\\_of\\_12Feb10\\_1000.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/qdr/images/QDR_as_of_12Feb10_1000.pdf)>, at 84–85.

<sup>61</sup> See Council President P. Wittig (Germany), in SC/10332, n. 35 above.

<sup>62</sup> M. Brzoska, ‘Climate Change and the Military in China, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States’, 68:2 *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (2012), 43, at 52.

<sup>63</sup> N. Mabey, *Facing the Climate Security Threat: Why the Security Community Needs a ‘Whole of Government’ Response to Global Climate Change* (German Marshall Fund of the United States, November 2010), at 5.

enhancing the prospects for the further securitization of climate change.

## IS CLIMATE CHANGE LIKELY TO BE FULLY SECURITIZED AND WOULD IT BE A GOOD THING IF IT WERE?

Widespread association of climate change with security means that in the most general, colloquial, sense climate change has already been 'securitized' – certainly in Europe and among many in the policy community. Early reports linking security and climate change were received with considerable scepticism as doomsday scenarios dealing with a remote future, but in a relatively short space of time the link has come much closer to being accepted as part of mainstream thinking. Key proponents have been the United Kingdom and the EU, as well as small island developing States in the Pacific. If, however, one applies to climate change the theoretical postulate of the Copenhagen School that securitization has not occurred until extraordinary measures have been adopted, this would suggest that climate change will not have been fully securitized until international security institutions, led by the UN Security Council, assume a lead role in the global policy response. The Council may have nudged closer to adopting a Chapter VII decision overtly on climate change by adopting a Presidential statement on the subject at its 2011 debate on climate change, and by the enthusiasm with which the United States appeared to participate in the debate.

If climate change were to be fully securitized and the Security Council to take a lead role in the global response to climate change mitigation and adaptation, we may well witness a far more streamlined and efficient response. We already know what needs to be done in terms of minimizing the rupture in the carbon cycle and adapting to the changes already in train. The governance problem with which the world is struggling is that of how to bring it about, particularly when the action required of wealthy countries is politically unpalatable to domestic constituencies, certainly within the timeframe needed to avert catastrophic environmental change. The problem would be if action by the Security Council were perceived as favouring some to the disadvantage of others; the potential for increasing political divides and tensions is very real.

Indications are at present that in respect of climate change we may reach a position somewhat short of full securitization in which governments and international institutions regularly and routinely take action premised on climate change being a threat to national and/or human security, but do so in response to the conse-

quences of climate change rather than addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation itself. Far-reaching action on the part of the Security Council would, for a start, require China and the United States to reconcile their positions, let alone the many other more nuanced political divides that would rise to the surface. Indeed, scholars and think tanks continue to have strong dissenters from the securitization of climate change, including those who base their case on factual grounds. In a report for the German Marshall Fund of the United States, Busby *et al.* found, *inter alia*, that the academic literature on climate-related violence is 'thus far, inconclusive', that there will be few additional migrants from Africa to Europe as a result of climate change, and that there was 'no compelling argument that identifies climate change as a cause of terrorism'.<sup>71</sup> To the extent that climate change has been securitized, there has been a need to emphasize that the framing of climate change as a security issue need not replace its conceptualization as an environmental and political issue but can serve to complement responses pitted in those terms.

There have been few calls as yet for the UNFCCC regime to be supplanted; the emphasis has instead been on its retaining its status as the primary vehicle for the coordination of mitigation and adaptation efforts at a global level. When introducing the climate change-security nexus to the Security Council, the United Kingdom was adamant that the objective was not for the Council to usurp power from elsewhere in the UN but simply to send a message to other UN organs that they needed to act.<sup>72</sup> The Pacific island States were able to bring about a General Assembly resolution on the topic only by emphasizing the compatibility of perceiving climate change in security terms with the UNFCCC and its principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Whether at the national or the international level of governance, those opposed to the securitization of climate change have tended to believe that it could lead to the involvement of the military in responding to issues for which a military response is unnecessary and potentially even detrimental.<sup>73</sup> The Non-aligned Movement and the Group of 77 have resisted the securitization of climate change in part because of the perceived potential for it to be abused by Council members as an excuse for military intervention cloaked as the 'enforcement' of legal obligations in respect of climate change.

According to the Copenhagen School, securitization requires audience acceptance of a 'legitimate need to go

<sup>71</sup> J. Busby, K. White and T. Smith, *Mapping Climate Change and Security in North Africa* (German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2010).

<sup>72</sup> E.M. Lederer, 'Security Council Tackles Climate Change', *Washington Post* (18 April 2007).

<sup>73</sup> See, e.g., B. Buckland, *A Climate of War? Stopping the Securitization of Global Climate Change* (International Peace Bureau, 2007), found at: <[http://ipb.org/ipb/files/A\\_Climate\\_of\\_War\\_Stopping\\_the\\_Securitisation\\_of\\_Climate\\_Change.pdf](http://ipb.org/ipb/files/A_Climate_of_War_Stopping_the_Securitisation_of_Climate_Change.pdf)>.

beyond otherwise binding rules and regulations' – that is, to move policy and law making out of ordinary processes into the realm used to respond to emergencies.<sup>74</sup> If the international community is taken to be the 'audience', then this could be translated to mean a central role for the Council in place of the multilateral treaty process. Acceptance of such a role is currently far from universal. There has been considerable disquiet with what is dubbed the 'legislative' programme of the Security Council, which has been criticized for using its powers in a way that had never been intended by its creators and usurping the role of the General Assembly.<sup>75</sup> This is not to say that the Council could not (continue to) consider climate-induced threats to the peace that fall within its traditional parameters. At a domestic level, reference is increasingly being made to the need for a 'whole of government' response to climate change.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, at the international level, the involvement of a number of international institutions need not be mutually exclusive.

What, then, would a situation of less-than-complete securitization of climate change be likely to contribute to the global policy response? Securitization theory would suggest that in political terms the primary way in which the securitization of climate change could be expected to enhance global mitigation and adaptation efforts would be by heightening the sense of urgency surrounding the issue and thereby giving impetus to greater commitment and prioritization. This is in large part because of the very word 'security', which denotes a risk to survival; it is difficult to find a policy category that warrants higher priority. The representative of Ghana in the first Security Council debate on climate change articulated this idea clearly when he referred to his expectation that debate by the Council would 'sound an alarm bell'.<sup>77</sup>

More specifically, framing climate change as a security issue could serve to enhance and broaden the policy response at various governance levels by facilitating policy makers and their publics recognizing the common origins of what may otherwise appear as unconnected phenomena. Debate about climate change is often couched in terms of a hypothetical future: by how much the temperature will rise, by how much countries should reduce their emissions, and the nightmare scenarios that may come into play if they fail to do so. We hear, for example, that by 2050 fifty million people may have been displaced from the coastal belts of Bangladesh.<sup>78</sup> This focus on what may appear a hypothetical future renders climate change a particularly

daunting and difficult policy arena for governments because, as NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen explained:

The science is not yet perfect. The effects are just starting to be visible, but it's difficult to pin down what's actually changing because of climate change. The timelines are not clear either. And as a politician, I know exactly what that means. When we have to choose between spending money now on schools or health care, or diverting funds to try to prevent something that will likely only hurt long after they have left office, the choice for most leaders is pretty clear. And, let me say, not hard to understand.<sup>79</sup>

Once, however, various issues of contemporary security are all seen as interrelated via climate change, the need to respond as expeditiously as possible should appear even more obvious. Consider, for example, the violence between Sudan and South Sudan. South Sudan broke away from Sudan in July 2011 following a decades-long civil war. The boundary was not fully demarcated at the time, however; nor was there agreement as to how to share the oil wealth found in the border region. This led to violence around the border region, and in April 2012 Sudan claimed to have killed hundreds of South Sudanese during a day-long battle for Heglig, Sudan's most important oil field.<sup>80</sup>

At first glance, this situation might seem unrelated to the jockeying for positions that is taking place in relation to increasingly accessible resources of the Arctic or to recent extreme weather events elsewhere in the world. Although the extent to which the Sudan conflict has been caused by climate change is not universally agreed, it is clear that climatic changes are impacting on the availability of water, exacerbating tensions stemming from the distribution of wealth from oil and the increasing difficulty of maintaining a pastoralist lifestyle.<sup>81</sup> Such topics may already have been addressed by the relevant institutions but not explicitly recognized as being underpinned by climate change *per se*. Once all are perceived in a climate change frame, the political will to undertake far-reaching mitigation and adaptation efforts may well increase markedly.

## CONCLUSIONS

Climate change is an interesting case study for theorists of securitization because, despite plenty of climate

<sup>74</sup> See R. Taureck, n. 5 above, at 55.

<sup>75</sup> I. Johnstone, 'The Security Council as Legislature', in: B. Cronin and I. Hurd (eds.), *The UN Security Council and the Politics of International Authority* (Routledge, 2008), 80, at 84.

<sup>76</sup> See N. Mabey, n. 63 above.

<sup>77</sup> See SC/9000, n. 12 above.

<sup>78</sup> See A.A. Momen (Bangladesh), in SC/10332, n. 35 above.

<sup>79</sup> Speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen on emerging security risks, Lloyd's of London (1 October 2009), found at: <[http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions\\_57785.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_57785.htm)>.

<sup>80</sup> 'Sudan Claims to Have Killed 400', AAP (23 April 2012), found at: <<http://www.news.com.au/breaking-news/sudan-claims-to-have-killed-400/story-e6frku0-1226335905808>>.

<sup>81</sup> J. Vidal, 'Sudan: Battling the Twin Forces of Civil War and Climate Change', *The Guardian Environment Blog* (21 November 2011), found at: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/nov/21/sudan-civil-war-climate-change>>.

security rhetoric, the effectiveness of the global policy response continues to lag well behind the alleged seriousness of the issue with which the world is confronted. This begs the question as to whether the theorists overestimated the potential power of security discourse or whether in this case the process is simply slower than its protagonists might have hoped. All in all, the jury is still out on the ultimate effectiveness of securitizing climate change. What the debates in the Security Council in particular have made clear is that, at least so far as climate change is concerned, if we are to understand why some audiences remain unconvinced by securitizing moves, we need to ask what the political and legal implications of full securitization would be for each actor in terms of the key questions in dispute. For most members of the climate securitization 'audience', their degree of acceptance of climate security has to date been determined primarily by the implications in respect of institutional powers and associated scope for those audience members contributing to law making as well as bearing the costs of the necessary action.

If the full securitization of climate change at an international level is understood as meaning that the Security Council becomes the 'peak body' leading mitigation and adaptation, then the debate to date has in fact moved little closer to widespread acceptance of that proposition. If, however, institutional developments as a result of the securitizing moves are restricted to a concerted response to the outcomes of climate change that fall more squarely within a traditional security

framework – in particular tensions and possible armed conflict as a result of those consequences – then we may already have reached that stage. Climate change is a multifaceted issue, which, if disaggregated, leaves scope for a wide range of institutional actors to integrate relevant considerations into the formulation and implementation of policy in their respective areas of responsibility. On current projections, it is here that we can realistically expect to see most happening.

No governance approaches should at this stage be ruled out as beyond the realm of possibility, however, for, as the impacts of a warming climate make the world increasingly desperate to find more effective policy responses, so might the international community accept developments that in times of 'normal' politics would be deemed totally unacceptable. This is, after all, the message of securitization theorists. In the final analysis, climate change rhetoric matters, but what matters most, is action.

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