Rising seas, sinking futures

A discourse analysis of the construction of climate change as a security threat
in the UN Security Council's debates of 2007 and 2023

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Abstract

The issue of climate change initially emerged on the UN Security Council's agenda in 2007 during an open debate on climate change, energy and security. Since then, there have been several debates held on the topic, which have attracted significant academic attention. In 2023, a debate was held in the UN Security Council on sea-level rise and its implication for international peace and security. The aim of this study is to investigate how the construction of climate change as a security threat has evolved in the UN Security Council debates between 2007 and 2023. The study will apply the securitization theory and conduct a discourse analysis using the WPR approach to analyze meeting records from the 2007 and 2023 debates. The analysis demonstrates two identified thematic findings. Firstly, there are ongoing divergent views on whether climate change falls within the mandate of the UN Security Council and secondly whether the issue of climate change should be seen as a future, present or existential threat. The results demonstrate that the construction of climate change as a security threat has undergone a process of securitization, thus confirming the established pattern in the previous research. This thesis further emphasizes that a wide range of member states now recognize climate change as an existential threat in the 2023 debate, aligning with the framing of the issue made by SIDS in the 2007 debate.

Key words: Climate change, security, existential threats, UN Security Council (UNSC), Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

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Table of content

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Climate change is a global phenomenon that is continually debated and discussed in various contexts and forums, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), national parliaments, intergovernmental organizations and the UN Security Council (UNSC). The first time climate change, its consequences and the need for action was on the UNSC's agenda was in 2007 during a debate on "climate, energy, and security" (UN 2007; Kurtz 2012). In the course of the debate, some participants advocated against the UNSC's involvement in matters related to climate change, while others, particularly smaller island states, expressed appreciation for the recognition of the gravity of the issue (UN 2007). During the debate, a representative from Papua New Guinea claimed that "the dangers that small islands and their populations face are no less serious than those faced by nations and peoples threatened by guns and bombs" (Security Council 2007a, p. 28). Even though a resolution solely on the threats of climate change have not been adopted since the first debate in 2007, the problems associated with climate change have continued to be on the UNSC's agenda, both in official debates and in informal meetings (Maertens 2021). Most recently in February this year, a debate was held on rising sea levels and its consequences for international peace and security (Security Council Report 2023).

Several scholars direct focus towards the first debate in the UNSC in 2007 and observe a significant discursive change (see for example Kurtz 2012; Rasheed 2023; Maertens 2021). Kurtz (2012) emphasizes that the debate in the UNSC on climate change in 2007 had a notable impact on the following General Assembly (GA) negotiations in 2008-2009 and highlights that "the emphasis of the small island developing states on climate change as a threat to livelihoods and human security was apparently much more acceptable than the environmental conflict storyline employed by many European countries in the Security Council" (p. 669). Furthermore, the discussions held in the UNSC and the subsequent report issued by the UN Secretary General

in 2009 provided clear indications that as the topic of climate change gains more prominence within the United Nations, it becomes progressively challenging to contest it, both procedurally and substantively (Kurtz 2012).

Climate change has also been the subject of several studies based on different scientific disciplines and perspectives. One approach in political science is to consider climate change as a threat to national and international security. This approach can be traced to the Copenhagen School, in which Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde (1998) developed the securitization theory. The theory suggests that threats and security are not solely determined by objective factors. Rather they are shaped by an active process of linguistic construction influencing perceptions of reality. Furthermore, the theory emphasizes the importance of analyzing the discursive aspect of the issue, in order to understand how threats and security are constructed and perceived (Buzan et al. 1998).

1.2 Purpose and research question

To further investigate the discourse regarding climate change as a security threat, this study will use the theoretical framework of the securitization theory to analyze the first (2007) and the latest (2023) open debates on climate change in the UNSC through the WPR discourse analysis. There have previously been several studies concluding that the issue of climate change has been securitized in different ways, in different contexts and with different results (see for example Peters & Mayhew 2016, Oels 2012 and Warner & Boas 2019). The theory of securitization has further gained a prominent position within academia. However, some criticism has also been directed towards the theory's limited empirical support (Baele & Jalea 2022). This thesis seeks to study how the construction of climate change as a security threat has evolved in the UNSC, thus contributing with a study based on empirical material. To achieve this, the thesis will be guided by the following research question:

How has the construction of climate change as a security threat evolved in the UN Security Council debates between 2007 and 2023?

2. Setting the stage

When examining the debates in the UNSC, it is crucial to grasp the contextual framework within which these debates occur. This involves understanding the specific mandate of the UNSC and other relevant factors. Additionally, it is essential to examine the existing academic research.

2.1 Rationale

As previously stated, the issue of climate change initially entered the agenda of the UNSC in 2007. The debate was initiated by the UK and can be seen as a response to the thorough attempt by Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) to raise climate change as an issue of security and survival (Kurtz 2012). Climate change poses a significant threat to the survival of SIDS, as increasing sea levels specifically put them at risk. Several scholars raise this as an issue of justice as SIDS are among the countries which generate the least amount of carbon emissions while they are most affected by climate change (Robinson 2020). Even if SIDS individually cannot exert much power, their collective efforts through, for example, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), can result in influence on the international arena (Betzold 2010). For example, AOSIS presented a resolution to the General Assembly on the topic of "Climate change and its possible security implications", which was later adopted (Kurtz 2012; A/Res/63/281). The resolution invites UN organs to "intensify their efforts in considering and addressing climate change, including its possible security implications" (A/Res/63/281).

Climate change and its implications in terms of security has been the subject of several debates in the UNSC, spanning from the first debate held in 2007 to the most recent in 2023. Some intermediate examples include open debates in 2011, 2018, 2019 and 2020 and several "arria formula debates" which are more informal (Climate Diplomacy 2022). As one of the six main organs of the UN established under the UN charter, the UNSC's primary responsibility is to maintain international peace and security (UN Charter Chapter V, Article 24:1). The UNSC

consists of five permanent states with veto-status (China, France, Russia, the UK and the USA) as well as ten rotating states on a two year mandate with each member state having one vote. The power dynamics and structure of the UNSC has been criticized in various ways, both within and outside academia. For example, Farrall et al. (2019) highlights that "these elected members must struggle to have their voice heard – and to make it count – in an institution controlled by powerful members who not only dominate the game, but wrote the rules" (p. 101).

Traditionally, the UNSC has been involved in issues related to geopolitics, war and peace. However, as climate change affects human's security, through flooding, droughts, other natural disasters and increased sea levels, it becomes an issue for the UNSC (Maertens 2021). This can also be seen in light of the increased focus on human security within the UNSC during the last 20 to 25 years. One such example was a resolution in 2011 which urged nations to contemplate offering voluntary HIV/AIDS testing to troops who were assigned in peacekeeping missions (S/RES/1983). Furthermore, security does not solely pertain to states, borders, and the protection of resources. It also encompasses the safety and security of individuals and their well-being (Dedring 2008). Member states have agreed to comply with the UNSC's agenda, but concerns are raised that expanding the UNSC's agenda to encompass matters like climate change could potentially dilute its broader mandate (Dedring 2008).

The UNSC is not the primary forum for negotiating climate change within the UN.
The main body for climate change negotiations is the UNFCCC which annually hosts the Conferences of the Parties (COP) as well as intermediate subsidiary bodies sessions (SB). The UNSC and UNFCCC differ on many levels, but one important aspect is that there are no veto states in the UNFCCC process and that all member states, in theory, have equal opportunity to impact the outcome of the conferences (Kemp 2016).

2.2 Previous research

Climate change and its security implications is a well recognized and researched topic within academia. Already in 1991, Homer-Dixon argued that scarcity of environmental resources had become a contributing factor to the occurrence of violent conflicts in numerous regions of the developing world. He further predicted that future generations would witness significant climate

change leading to severe environmental scarcities through, among other things, droughts and degradations of water resources. Homer-Dixon emphasizes that environmental problems should not be viewed solely as ecological or economic issues, but also as political and security issues that could have serious consequences for global stability and security (Homer-Dixon 1991).

Sindico (2007) highlights that a crucial aspect of climate change being on the UNSC's agenda was the fact that the IPCC released their 4th assessment report earlier in 2007 in which they warned of violent conflicts as a result of the negative impacts of climate change. The author additionally attributed the emergence of the issue on the agenda to three observable factors: the UK's leading role in international climate policy, a new focus on human security in international security studies and the linking of conflict prevention and sustainable development which was done in resolution 1625 by the UNSC in 2005 (Sindico 2007). Maertens (2021) further investigates the reasons behind the continued presence of climate change on the UNSC's agenda since 2007 and whether the debates reflect a continuous process of climatization (Maertens 2021). Climatization refers to identifying a particular issue as belonging to a broader climate policy discourse, and using Meartens's words "climatization highlights a powerful yet uneven process in which climate change increasingly becomes the dominant frame through which other issues and forms of global governance are mediated and hierarchized" (Maertens 2021, p. 643). Maertens concludes that the debates in the UNSC can be viewed as failures since they have not culminated in any official statements from the UNSC or any resolution on climate change as a security threat. The recurrent debates can, however, be seen "as an example of a broader process of climatization of world politics" (Maertens 2021, p. 656).

The open debates have been examined further by Söderbäck (2021) who uses the securitization theory to analyze the discursive strategies employed by SIDS in their efforts to frame climate change as a security issue in the UNSC. Söderbäck analyzes the four open debates between 2007 and 2019 with a sole focus on SIDS. She observes that SIDS emphasizes climate change as a conventional threat, a moral issue and as a current threat to states such as SIDS while its impact on the rest of the world is projected to be more apparent in the future.

SIDS as a securitizing actor has been the conclusion of much academic work on climate change as a security issue. SIDS have been instrumental in advancing the political agenda on climate change since the 1980s, which has heightened their visibility on the global stage (Ourbak & Magnan 2017). Furthermore, they have played a crucial role in the securitization of climate change across various UN bodies (Kurtz 2012). With their vulnerable position in relation to climate change, AOSIS has become a vocal participant in the UNFCCC and is acknowledged as a pivotal actor in the development of climate change regimes (Betzold 2010). Their position as a central actor in climate change negotiations is noteworthy considering its relatively unstructured nature compared to larger and more established coalitions and states. This is referred to as the structural paradox by Betzold who describes it as "the question of how the weak bargain successfully with the strong" (p. 132). Betzold further highlights that AOSIS has been successful in framing climate change as an existential threat for those who contribute the least to the problem, which has helped to garner international support for their cause. Another factor is that the alliance often is active early in the negotiation process (Betzold 2010). Given their status as securitizing actors, SIDS are highly credible, as their focus is solely on the threat to their survival and statehood posed by the severe ramifications of climate change, leaving minor room for any ulterior motives (Kurtz 2012).

As it has become apparent, extensive research has been conducted on climate change as a security threat and the corresponding debates within the UNSC. However, due to the recent nature of the latest debate, there is a lack of academic research on this specific instance. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to the previous research and its findings by examining if the 2023 debate aligns with established patterns.

3. Theory

3.1 Securitization theory

The securitization theory does not regard security as an objective phenomenon, but a socially constructed process, which involves identifying, framing and prioritizing issues as existential threats requiring extraordinary counter measures. The theory initially emerged as a development in the field of security studies, representing a shift from conventional approaches that predominantly concentrated on military and state-centric matters to a more comprehensive understanding of security that encompasses a diverse array of actors and issues (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 2).

3.1.1 From non-politicized issues to securitized issues

Securitization is the creation of beliefs about security. Buzan et al. (1998) draw attention to concerns about securitization in relation to political and non-political issues. Non-politicized issues refer to matters that states do not consider significant and hence are not debated as a public policy issue. In contrast, politized matters are those that necessitate government action and the allocation of resources, as they are integral to the formulation of public policy. To elevate an issue from a political concern to a matter of security, it is necessary to present it as posing an existential threat (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 23-24). The authors further claims that "If one can argue that something overflows the normal political logic of weighing issues against each other, this must be the case because it can upset the entire process of weighing as such: 'If we do not tackle this problem, everything else will be irrelevant (because we will not be here or will not be free to deal with it in our own way)'" (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 24). As a result, the actors assert their entitlement to address the matter using unconventional methods and disregard the usual political protocols (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 24).

3.1.2 Securitizing actors and referent objects

The focus on securitization in relation to political issues is a reason why securitization tends to be regarded as an act of political leaders. There are, however, various actors who can securitize issues. The authors discuss the notion of securitizing actors as "actors who securitize issues by declaring something – a referent object – existentially threatened" (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 36). Furthermore, the referent object, which traditionally has been the state, is the entity that is perceived to be under significant threat and is deemed worthy of survival. Essentially, actors involved in securitization can choose to make anything a referent object (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 36).

The authors emphasize that the size of the object is an important factor. Smaller groups are less likely to gain attention in the broader discourse, while attempting to construct all of humanity as a referent object may be too ambitious. In practice, securitization is most feasible when focusing on limited collectives at the middle scale (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 36). A reason for this is that a limited collective can create a "we" that needs to be protected against an external "them" or "it", being the existential threat (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 36-37). It can also be emphasized that the power to securitize is not vested in any single entity or individual. The focus of analysis should be on the practice of securitization itself rather than the actors who engage in it, as securitization is a dynamic process that involves multiple actors and factors (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 31-32).

3.1.3 Speech acts

The creation of an issue as a security threat, referred to as the act of securitization, is made up of speech acts. Speech acts involve constructing a persuasive argument in which the speaker, the securitizer, claims that a specific object or entity is under an imminent existential threat. By doing so, the securitizer seeks to acquire the authority to take exceptional measures that would normally be considered unconventional or rule-breaking, but which are necessary to effectively address the threat. The securitizer aims to convince their audience that such actions are justified and necessary (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 26). It is, however, important to note that presenting something as an existential threat to a referent object doesn't necessarily mean it is securitized. Its securitization is contingent upon the acceptance of the audience (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 25). Furthermore, the mere use of the term security does not automatically qualify a speech act as

such. It is the act of designating something as an existential threat that demands immediate action or extraordinary measures, and the subsequent acceptance of that designation by a substantial audience that truly characterizes a speech act as securitization (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 27; 31).

3.1.4 The environmental sector

Buzan et al. discuss the concept of sectors as a way to identify particular modes of interaction. For instance, the military sector applies to interactions based on the use of force, the political sector deals with the interactions based on authority, and the environmental sector focuses on the interactions between humans and the natural environment (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 7-8). Within the environmental sector, two different agendas can be identified, a scientific and a political agenda. These are interconnected in several ways and the political agenda frequently depends on scientific evidence to support its claims. However, what matters most for the political agenda is not necessarily conforming to particular environmental risks, but whether the perceived urgency of those risks is a matter of political concern (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 71-73).

The environmental sector frequently utilizes the language of securitization and frame problems as existential threats. The authors cite AOSIS as an example and argue that "Especially intergovernmental organizations such as the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) have manifest reasons to view environmental issues in terms of existential threats, although overall they have achieved little more than politicization" (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 83). The authors further elaborate that the conversation surrounding environmental concerns can shift from a focus on the causes to one centered on the effects. For example, "Once the AOSIS states have actually been swallowed by a sea-level rise, it is no longer useful to try to securitize the environmental dimension of their problems: The issue becomes one of political and societal disintegration, of migration, of finding or conquering new land on which to live. These are not environmental security issues" (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 83).

4. Method and material

The securitization is, to use the authors' words, "radically constructivist regarding security" (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 204). A constructivist approach puts emphasis on the framing of an issue through discursive practices. It contends that actors' perceptions and interpretations of the world influence their actions and that understanding these factors is crucial for comprehending political dynamics and change (Balzacp 2009). The authors propose that understanding securitization involves examining the diverse ways in which discourse is employed, as it serves as the primary mechanism driving the process of securitization (Buzan et al. 1998 p. 25). Furthermore, discourse analysis is a suitable method since it links to the basic idea that securitization is a construction where language has a decisive impact. Both the securitization theory and discourse analysis place a strong focus on the socially constructed nature of issues and the role of language in shaping perceptions and actions. Applied together, securitization theory and discourse analysis provide a comprehensive approach to understanding how security issues are socially constructed and how discursive practices contribute to this construction.

4.1 Discourse analysis: The WPR approach

Within discourse analysis, language is not regarded as a neutral tool for communication and it is asserted that a given reality cannot fully be encapsulated by language. Instead, discourse analysis emphasizes that language offers a lens through which the world is viewed and understood. Focus is directed towards power structures and how these are constructed and elevated through language (Bergström & Ekström 2018, p. 255). The discourse analysis that will be applied to analyze the question of how the construction of climate change as a security threat has evolved in the UNSC debates between 2007 and 2023 is "What's the Problem Represented to Be" approach (WPR approach) by Carol Bacchi (2009).

Different traditions within the field of discourse analysis define discourse in different ways. Bacchi describes it as "socially produced forms of knowledge that sets limits upon what it is possible to think, write or speak about a given social object or practice" (Bacchi 2009, p. 35).

Furthermore, Bacchi emphasizes that the construction of problems has varying effects, depending on how they are constructed and framed. Hence, the focus is not solely on analyzing the actual problems but rather examining the problematizations and how problems are represented (Bergström & Ekström 2018 p. 272). The WPR approach is based on the premise that any proposal for change or policy reform is based on the assumption that there is an underlying issue or problem that requires action. Bacchi further emphasizes the significance of how the 'problem' is represented and constructed since it holds importance because it affects the perception of the issue (Bacchi 2009, p. 3). This can be linked to the securitization theory, which highlights the importance of constructing issues through linguistic practices.

The WPR approach is a useful analytical tool to systematically study the overlooked assumptions within political documents and their representations of particular problems. Initially designed for policy analysis, the WPR approach has expanded its application beyond policies to encompass other types of materials. The type of material is not central to the analysis, but rather how problem representations and their effects can be made visible (Bacchi 2009, p. 20). While the WPR approach often is associated with using governments as the units of analysis, Bacchi highlights that the analysis can extend to other governing bodies, such as the UNSC in this study.

4.1.1 Questions of analysis

Bacchi has formulated a set of six interconnected analytical inquiries that researchers are encouraged to pose when examining material. Because of the scope of the thesis, it is not possible to use all six questions as a basis for the analysis. Instead, three of the questions, suitable for the purpose of this study, have been selected. The questions that are not included will be briefly discussed under limitations. The selection process was completed by examining all of Bacchi's questions in relation to the research question whereupon the conclusion was drawn that the three selected were best suited as they deal with constructed beliefs and their effects. The selected questions, which are one, two and five of Bacchi's six analytical questions, will be presented below. In the analysis, the questions will be addressed individually, incorporating references to the securitization theory. However, the main theoretical linkages will be consolidated in the main findings (section six).

Question one of the analytical questions reads "what is the 'problem' represented to be?" and serves as the foundation of the approach, hence providing the basis for the subsequent questions with regard to clarifying the implicit depiction of the problem (Bacchi 2009, p. 2-4).

Question two, "what presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?", has the purpose of exploring the underlying assumptions that form the basis of a given problem representation. The aim is further not to identify biases but "the assumption and/or presuppositions that lodge within problem representations" (Bacchi 2009, p. 5). The author recognizes some tools which can be used to answer the second question. Binaries serve as a tool to simplify otherwise complex relationships, and categories play an important role in organizing the material through, for example, centering the categorization around people and entities, such as vulnerable countries, SIDS and similar (Bacchi 2009, p. 4-9).

Question five, "what effects are produced by this representation of the problem?", is asked to expose the effects that problem representations generate. The question is a crucial element of the approach and the overall goal is "to be able to say which aspects of a problem representation have deleterious effects for which groups, and hence may need to be rethought" (Bacchi 2009, p. 18). In order to answer question five, three different effects are identified. First, discursive effects refer to how the construction of problems influences the understanding of a particular issue. Second, subjectification effects highlight how discourses create social relationships which impact our perception of ourselves and others. Thirdly, lived effects encompass the tangible consequences of problem representations, directly impacting people's lives and reflecting the material implications of the issue being represented (Bacchi 2009, p. 16-18).

4.2 Methodological reflection

The role of the analyst is important to reflect upon both in securitization studies as well as discourse analysis. Buzan et al. (1998) underscore this point and assert that "it is the analyst who judges whether the actor is effective in mobilizing support around this security reference" (p. 34). Further, examining security through the lens of securitization and speech act raises questions about the analysts' role in defining and understanding the security agenda (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 33). This is consistent with the criticisms raised against discourse analysis which emphasizes the

role of the analyst in interpretive methods and how discourse analysis can be perceived as relativistic, meaning that there is no absolute truth and that different analysts might interpret different findings in the same material (Bergström & Ekström 2018 p. 291-292; Winther-Jörgensen & Phillips 2000, p. 15). In order to minimize the influence of subjective tendencies from the analyst, and thus maintain validity, it is necessary to apply both the theoretical and the methodological frameworks and explicitly articulate the findings from the material.

Feindt and Oels (2005) explore the significance of discourse analysis in the context of environmental policy making, raising the question of the impact of discourse. They emphasize that the way environmental problems are expressed and communicated significantly impacts how they are addressed. As a result, if other issues are presented as more urgent or critical, they will receive priority over environmental concerns. It is further highlighted that environmental issues are shaped and influenced by other factors such as politics and that "environmental discourse is part of a broader discursive landscape. On the one hand, environmental discourse competes with other discourses, for example economic or development discourse; on the other, environmental discourse is internally interwoven with other discourses" (Feindt & Oels 2005, p. 162). Hence, the authors conclude that discourse does matter. Taking these considerations into account, the methodological choice of the thesis is further strengthened.

4.3 Material

The analysis will build upon meeting records from the UNSC's open debates. Specifically, the selected debates under consideration are the first debate on climate change as a security concern in the UNSC held in 2007, as well as the most recent debate on the subject in 2023. The meeting records contain the written transcripts of speeches given in English, as well as the translated versions of speeches delivered in other languages. It is hence the speeches in written form that will be used as the units of analysis. The material was found through the UN Digital Library.

There are several different means of approaching issues in the UNSC, for example, through resolutions, joint statements, reports, and private as well as public debates. In open debates,

which have been the format of the debates on climate change, other countries than those currently in the council are allowed to participate. The official records of these meetings are published and open for the public. The purpose of the open debates is to foster dialogue on issues as well as share information and raise awareness of the issue at hand, without necessarily seeking a resolution or similar outcome (UN n.d.).

The 2007 debate took place under the UK presidency with the topic of climate change, energy and security. 53 member states participated in the debate as well as the Secretary-General at the time, Ban Ki-Moon. During the 2023 debate, which was held on the topic of sea-level rise and its implications for international peace and security under the presidency of Malta, experts in the field were also present, providing additional insights as briefers. Apart from the three briefers and the secretary general Anthonio Guterres, 67 member states participated in the debate. In summary, 125 statements were analyzed. With regard to the scope of this thesis, it will not be possible to consider every statement by itself in the analysis, but instead themes will be identified which will be exemplified by quotes from member states and other actors participating in the debates.

4.4 Limitations

A constraint that had to be done was limiting the analysis to only two of the open debates. While these two debates provide valuable insight and highlight the evolution of the topic from its initiation on the UNSC's agenda until now, incorporating additional debates would provide a more holistic perspective on the subject. Further, a more extensive analysis of the UNSC's position on the issue of climate change could also include other types of documents, such as resolutions, statements or reports. However, focusing on a limited set of material presents an opportunity to conduct a more in-depth analysis and draw valid conclusions by the use of the theory and method.

Prior to the debates in the UNSC, the country of presidency issues a letter that functions as the debate's agenda item, essentially serving as a concept note (Security Council 2007c, Security Council 2023c). These letters encompass background information, objectives, and guiding questions, making them crucial for shaping the discussion. Consequently, they play a vital role in

the agenda-setting process and subsequent discourse, as they help shape and guide the conversation. While the letters themselves will not be included in the analysis, their significant influence on shaping the discourse will be acknowledged and recognized. Furthermore, it is worth considering that the countries holding the presidency, being the UK and Malta in these cases, potentially exert influence over the discourse.

As has been evident, SIDS and AOSIS have been recognized as securitizing actors connected to climate change. Hence, the initial thought of the thesis was to proceed from AOSIS as a securitizing actor and compare official documents from AOSIS with documents from the UNSC. The aim was further to examine how AOSIS has securitized the issue in the UNSC and to what extent the construction is found in the UNSC's position on climate change. After reviewing the material, it became clear that it was too comprehensive for the limited scope of the thesis to consider all factors that could impact the result. The initial plan was to employ qualitative content analysis as the chosen method. However, when getting acquainted with the theory, it became evident that a discourse analysis would be better suited for the material. With these factors in mind, the research question was tailored to solely investigate the UNSC and limit the material to only two debates as well as using discourse analysis as it is an appropriate method when applying the securitization theory.

In order to effectively utilize the questions of analysis, three out of the six questions were selected. It was concluded that the remaining three questions did not offer substantial relevance in addressing the research objective. In short, they focus on the background of the topic (question three), what is not said and thus left problematic (question four), and how problem representations are produced and defended (question six, which builds on the third question that is also outside of the scope of the thesis). Leaving these questions outside the scope of the thesis is justified by the fact that the background and conceptualization of the research question is done through the previous research and rationale. Furthermore, since the material is limited, it is not possible to also analyze what has not been said.

5. Empirical analysis

As previously stated, the first debate on climate change in the UNSC was held in 2007 and represented a shift within international climate policy where climate change was recognized as a security issue. The debate was initiated by the UK and the agenda item was on climate change, energy and security. The surrounding context of the debate can be understood from the reports and initiatives such as the Stern Review, the IPCC 4th assessment report, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were extensively referenced to by several member states. In the 2023 debate, which was held on the topic of sea-level rise as a threat to international security initiated by Malta, references were instead made to the Paris Agreement, the latest IPCC report, Our Common Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Glasgow Climate Pact and the Sharm El-Sheik Implementation Plan as well as concrete actions stemming from the UNFCCC process such as the loss and damage fund and nationally determined contributions (NDCs).

5.1 What's the problem represented to be?

The problem represented to be, with reference to Bacchi's first analytical questions, is not categorically evident. On the surface, the problem represented is the obvious issue of climate change as a security threat. However, there is a difference of opinions as to whether it is a matter of a current threat or rather something that will affect the future. This can be exemplified by the following statements from two different member states in the 2007 debate:

> "Our livelihood is already threatened by sea-level rise, and the implications for
> our long-term security are very disturbing" (Security council, 2007b, p. 8).

> "Delayed action could increase costs and could even make global warming
> irreversible, with all the related disastrous effects would derive therefrom
> in terms of failure to prevent conflicts" (Security council, 2007a, p. 5).

Consequently, there are contradictory problem representations with one emphasizing climate change as an immediate and pressing threat that demands immediate action, while another portrays climate change as a future threat, requiring proactive measures to mitigate and avoid future consequences. It is, however, important to acknowledge that the core concern of climate change posing a threat to security is not a matter of contention but that the divergence lies in how the issue is framed and represented. Further, a third problem representation arises, focusing on the question of whether climate change should be included on the agenda, thereby questioning the very existence of representing the issue as a problem in the first place:

> "It is obvious that the subject of today's debate lies clearly and squarely within the mandate of other bodies in the United Nations system" (Security council 2007b, p. 4).

The way problems are represented in the 2023 debate has noticeably changed. While there are still continuing disagreements of whether the issue should be included in the UNSC's agenda, the focus has shifted towards advocating for alternative forums as the primary framework for addressing climate change. Another distinction from the latest debate is that there is a greater focus on climate change as a present-day threat as well as an existential threat to the future. Consequently, in contrast to the 2007 debate, the 2023 debate raises the predicament faced by states when it undergoes territorial loss, leading to a distinct set of challenges. This is exemplified by the President of the Secretary General who asks the following (rhetorical) question:

> "What happens to a nation's sovereignty, United Nations membership and its citizen's voting rights if it sinks beneath the sea? There are rules about the creation of States, but none about their physical disappearance" (Security Council 2023a, p. 4).

5.2 What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?

The 2007 debate, especially when examining Bacchi's second analytical question, demonstrates a presence of binary patterns regarding the decision of whether the issue should be addressed by the UNSC or approached as a developmental concern in alternative UN bodies and forums. These patterns are present also in the 2023 debate, although not as significant. This focus on procedural matters may redirect attention from the substantive agenda item of climate change as a security issue. Aligned with the securitization theory and the notion of issues evolving from politicized matters to securitized concerns, this can be perceived as a way to prevent the securitization of the issue, suggesting that it should instead be addressed within other political forums, such as the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Shifting the focus to the categorization, the 2007 debate reveals the classification of SIDS and other vulnerable countries as a group of nations in need of support and aid. Drawing on the securitization theory, this category of nations can be considered the referent object, meaning the entities that require securitization, which is illustrated by the following quote:

> "There is an important role for other nations in providing assistance to Pacific and other small island developing countries States, as well as other vulnerable countries, in evaluating the impacts of and adapting to climate change" (Security council 2007b, p. 7).

This categorization can be compared with the debate from 2023, where the category of SIDS and vulnerable countries is still distinct, but has been expanded to encompass a broader range of countries that will be affected in the future, exemplified by Denmark:

> "Today's plight of communities in low-lying coastal areas is tomorrow's plight of the global community" (Security council 2023b, p. 4).

The process of categorization carries substantial implications for both the approach taken to address the issue and the shaping of individuals' perception of themselves and others. Seen through the lens of securitization theory, these categories can be interpreted in terms of the dichotomy between "us" and "them", or in this specific case, "it". In 2007, "us" are the SIDS supported by several of the member states, while in 2023, "us" are a bigger collective of states that are already affected by climate change as well as states that will be affected in the future. What is significant about climate change as a security threat, however, is that climate change is a threat without a face, rendering it a compelling force referred to as "it".

The use of binaries and categorisations provides means to comprehend the underlying presuppositions and assumptions that underlie the problem representation. Furthermore, the recurring perspective on climate change as an issue requiring action to protect people and territories provides the foundation for framing it as a threat of security. On the other hand, framing climate change as something that does not belong on the UNSC's agenda diminishes its significance as a security concern. These assumptions further underpin how the problem is represented. By examining these assumptions, it is possible to analyze the effects generated by the problem representations.

5.3 What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

Buzan et al. (1998) highlights the construction of issues as crucial for how they are addressed and handled. The discursive effects of the problem representations, which are addressed based on Bacchi's fifth analytical question, affect not only how the issue is described and viewed but also how consequences and solutions are presented. By presenting the issue of climate change as a future threat, the inaction of immediate measures is legitimized. Furthermore, claiming that the issue should not be raised in the UNSC legitimizes an inaction in addressing the issue. This inaction further leads to lived effects for states that already experience the security implications of climate change who, in turn, highlight their dependence on other countries:

> "Small island developing states rely on global actions to combat the problems of
> climate change and sea-level rise. Developed countries, because of their capacity

to act first, must take the lead in the fight against climate change" (Security council 2007b, p. 34).

As evident from the previous questions, the 2023 debate put a greater emphasis on the immediacy of climate change, portraying it as a matter of survival for numerous nations, thereby calling for more concrete actions. The subjectification effects, which highlight how discourse shapes social dynamics that influence the perception of ourselves and others, thus become apparent in the 2023 debate as the issue is framed as a collective problem. This can also be connected to the discursive effects in the 2023 debate of describing resources as shared and how scarcity of resources can affect a greater collective:

> Besides sea level rise, all the cumulative disruptive effects caused by climate change are potential sources of instability and conflict (...) We must anticipate and respond to the state of emergency that the ocean, our shared resource, is facing."
> (Security council 2023a, p. 17).

This formulation also establishes how climate change, typically regarded as a matter of human security, can be interpreted as an issue of peace and conflict. Presenting the issue as one that impacts a larger collective of people can be viewed as a strategy to foster increased international cooperation and lay the foundation for concrete actions. However, many of the proposed actions align with those already discussed in other forums, such as the UNFCCC. This further raises the question about the consequences of the discursive effects. What is the difference between discussing proposed measures stemming from another UN body without having the means to come to any agreements in the UNSC, and not having the topic on the agenda at all? Subsequently, it can be questioned whether the lived effects differ between discussing measures without implementing them and not having the issue on the agenda at all. This can be exemplified with the following statement from the 2023 debate:

> "Developed countries do not seem to be as keen on fulfilling their climate finance commitments under the UNFCCC as they are on insisting on addressing those issues within the Security Council" (Security council 2023a, p. 19).

In accordance with the securitization theory, however, it is important to recognize that securitization is a dynamic process entailing the involvement of multiple actors and factors. Raising otherwise political measures in UNSC, as a high-level international forum for peace and security, could hence be seen as one factor in the process of securitizing the issue of climate change while it could also be seen as a strategy to take away focus from the core issue.

As noted above, some countries, such as SIDS and other vulnerable countries, raised climate change as an existential threat in the 2007 debate. Raising an issue as an existential threat is, within the theory of securitization, necessary in the process of securitizing an issue. As an example, one island nation stated that:

> "As the climate change debate takes place in this Council for the first time, members of the United Nations have the luxury of a mixed political, scientific and intellectual debate over its implications and even on the appropriateness of its being raised by this Council. But from the viewpoint of an islander living on island atolls merely a few meters above sea level, global climate change is a security threat that must be confronted urgently by the Council" (Security Council 2007b, p. 25)

The discourse of presenting climate change as an issue that might affect the survival of states was subsequently adopted by numerous states in the 2023 debate.

> "A nation can be at war and its people still have hope and determination to survive. The war against climate change is quite different. The opponent is much larger and amorphous, and the ability to stop it is outside of our direct control." (Security council 2023a, p. 9).

The securitization theory further emphasizes that merely presenting something as an existential threat does not inherently make it a security issue but it necessitates acceptance by the audience and the implementation of extraordinary measures. In this case, the UNSC can be perceived as

the audience that has, to some degree, embraced the portrayal of the issue as an existential threat. However, solely framing climate change as an existential threat is not sufficient for a completely successful securitization, although it can be perceived as a trend towards securitization.

6. Main findings

Based on the empirical analysis, it is possible to identify two main thematic findings. First, there is no consensus regarding whether the issue of climate change should be on the UNSC's agenda or not. In 2007, some member states expressed the view that the issue is more connected to sustainable development and hence should be an issue of development rather than of security. The argument surrounding climate change as an agenda item for the UNSC continues in 2023, with a greater emphasis on whether it primarily pertains to social impacts or security implications. In both 2007 and 2023, it is stressed by some countries that the issue falls within the competence of other UN bodies, such as the General Assembly, the ECOSOC or the UNFCCC. On the other hand, there are several countries, particularly SIDS and other vulnerable nations, that support and stress the importance of having climate change on the UNSC's agenda. Moreover, it is emphasized by several member states that there is an interconnectedness between the issue and the notion that development cannot be achieved without security, and vice versa.

The second theme identified is the issue of climate change being presented as a future, current or existential threat. In 2007, the prevailing perception was that climate change primarily was a future threat, requiring preemptive action to mitigate potentially severe consequences further ahead. However, several states recognized it as a current threat and SIDS and other vulnerable countries framed it as a matter of survival. A notable change in the 2023 debate is that climate change is widely portrayed by a significant number of member states as an existential threat. What is significant in the 2023 debate is a heightened focus on the consequences of nations which face losing territory and the implications of climate migrants and similar.

The findings from the empirical analysis reveals that climate change, when viewed as a security concern, has demonstrated a persistent trajectory of advancement since its initial inclusion on the agenda of the UNSC in 2007. The findings indicate that the issue of climate change has undergone significant evolution and continues to garner increasing attention within the realm of international security. These findings can be seen in the light of previous studies on climate

change as a security issue, its existence in the UNSC and SIDS as securitizing actors. In the same way that SIDS and AOSIS raised the issue of climate change as a threat to their existential survival in the UNFCCC, as highlighted by Kurtz (2012) and Betzold (2010), the same indications can be identified in the UNSC. This can further be put in the context of climatization, which is discussed by Maetens (2021). The debates in the UNSC can hence be placed in a wider perspective of climate policy discourse and be regarded as verifying those notions. Sindico (2007) emphasizes the influential role of the contextual factors surrounding the debates, including the IPCC 4th assessment report, as well as the crucial involvement of the UK in placing the issue on the agenda. Hence, it is worth noting that the country holding the presidency in the UNSC, which in the analyzed debates are the UK and Malta, exerts power in shaping the discourse and ultimately influencing the outcomes of the debate. Additionally, the surrounding contexts contribute to shaping the frameworks for the debates.

One of the reasons that SIDS and AOSIS have been able to frame climate change as a security issue in the UNFCCC is, according to Betzold (2010), that they were active in the construction of the issue early in the negotiations. This thesis has shown that the same tendencies can be seen in the debates in UNSC where SIDS and other vulnerable countries emphasized climate change as a threat to their existence and survival directly in the first debate, a way of framing the issue which has been adopted by several of the member states in the latest debate. What is particular with SIDS, and other vulnerable nations, is that they become both a securitizing actor and a referent object, using the terminology of the securitization theory. Both in the 2007 and the 2023 debate, they continue to advocate for stronger measures and are persistent in their way of framing climate change as a threat to their survival and existence, which, in the lens of the securitization theory, are seen as speech acts.

However, as demonstrated, the mere use of terms such as security and existential threats do not necessarily define the securitization of an issue. What is needed is for the UNSC, considered to be the intended audience, to endorse this framing and consequently adopt extraordinary measures to address the issue. Based on the analysis, it appears as if the UNSC has, to some extent, embraced the discourse of framing climate change as an existential threat. However, the actions taken so far do not fully align with the requirements of successful securitization according to the

theory. The proposed actions mostly correspond with the existing agenda set by the UNFCCC process, thus they are not unconventional or otherwise illegitimate. This suggests that the issue of climate change may be in the process of securitization. The lack of proposed action, however, indicates that the issue is not fully securitized.

If unconventional methods are necessary for addressing problems, as part of the securitization process, it becomes evident that the debates held in the UNSC may not serve as the appropriate forum. As mentioned previously, the primary task of the UNSC debates is not to reach a resolution or a similar outcome. In light of this, it is possible to question the actual securitization impact of placing the issue on the UNSC's agenda. Both Farrell (2019), Dedrin (2008), and member states have further raised concerns about the unequal nature of the UNSC as an institution, where five countries hold power due to their veto status, while other member states have shorter rotating mandates. Furthermore, the fairness of the UNSC process can be questioned, as has been raised by numerous scholars in the past. It can be seen as peculiar that an issue primarily impacting countries without veto power is being discussed within the UNSC rather than solely being addressed in a forum where all countries have equal conditions, such as the UNFCCC.

Nevertheless, the spread of the discourse regarding climate change as a security concern, independent of forum or institution, could potentially influence the broader climate policy discourse, in line with the notion of climatization. However, in the wider context of the climate policy discourse, there also exists a narrative that challenges the elevated status accorded to the issue. These contradictions within the broader climate policy discourse hence reference to Bacchi's analytical questions and how different problem representations are substantiated by diverse assumptions and presuppositions which lead to different discursive, subjectification and lived effects. The problem representation further shapes the discourse and thus influences the approaches taken to address the issue. Maertens (2021) highlights that the absence of resolution or other actions stemming from these debates signifies a failure. However, the sustained presence of the matter on the agenda suggests, in line with the concept of climatization, that it is part of the phenomenon and thus contributes to the broader discourse of climate policy.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to study how the construction of climate change as a security threat has evolved in the UNSC debates between 2007 and 2023. The findings indicate a notable shift in the perception of the issue, initially framed by SIDS and other vulnerable states, attempting to present climate change as a security threat during the first debate on the topic of climate change in 2007. In the most recent debate, a broader spectrum of member states in the UNSC has embraced the notion of climate change as an existential threat, aligning with how the debates was framed by SIDS in the 2007 debate. Therefore, it can be argued that the issue has undergone a process of securitization, aligning with the theoretical framework by Buzan et al. (1998).

In order to analyze the construction of climate change and draw comparisons between the discussions held in 2007 and 2023, the material consisted of meeting records from the respective debates. Within the material, two thematic findings were identified. First, contrasting viewpoints persist regarding whether climate change falls under the UNSC's mandate and thus if it should be included on its agenda or not. Secondly, there is a notable deliberation on the temporal dimension of the issue, with differing perspectives on whether climate change should be regarded as a future, present or existential threat.

These findings were then analyzed using the WPR approach by Bacchi within the field of discourse analysis which concluded that there has been a shift in discourse. The analysis revealed a notable transformation in the discourse surrounding climate change, wherein it increasingly was portrayed as a threat endangering the survival of nations and territory loss. Consequently, climate change was in the general discourse framed as an existential threat. Within the discourse, however, there were conflicting perspectives on whether the issue should be on the agenda of the UNSC. These conflicting views align with the broader climate policy discourse, where some member states exhibit reservations about allocating excessive attention to climate change, not only within the forum of UNSC..

In section two (previous research), it was highlighted that there is a lack of published research regarding the latest debate within climate change in the UNSC. Consequently, this thesis has sought to make a contribution to the existing research and its finding, especially examining whether the 2023 debate aligns with the established patterns of SIDS as a securitizing actor and the notion of climatization. The evidence presented in this thesis supports these patterns, indicating that the thesis's result is in accordance with prior research. The findings not only align with prior research but also reveal a notable insight: A heightened emphasis on the framing of climate change as an existential threat.

After concluding that the issue of climate change to some extent has been securitized, it becomes justifiable to inquire about the subsequent implications. Specifically, what does it mean that an issue is securitized? The securitization of an issue does not automatically equal solutions. The theory of securitization primarily revolves around the legitimization of actions that would otherwise be considered illegitimate. In this context, the mandate of the UNSC falls short, as the analyzed debates are not geared towards implementing measures to mitigate the effects of climate change. However, what these debates accomplish is the promotion of discussions and awareness. Given the observed evolution of the issue, with a heightened emphasis regarding climate change as an existential threat compared to the discourse of 2007, it is plausible to consider that the subsequent stage in the process of securitizing climate change would involve resorting to unconventional measures. Another possibility entails future discussion centering on the consequences of climate change, addressing issues such as lost territory or managing climate migration. The future remains uncertain. However, it appears that there is an urgency to make decisions without delay, echoing the Secretary General's remarks in the previous debate: "Rising seas are sinking futures".

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