



How might the V4 countries combat climate deadlock in the UN Security Council?

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Climate change worsens the security situation in regions of the world such as the Lake Chad Basin, Pacific atolls, and the Sahel. The UN Security Council, the key international security authority, has fallen into a deadlock when discussing its attitude towards threats posed by climate change. Small Pacific island states are calling for swift Security Council action against climate change. Rapidly developing countries including Brazil, Russia, India, and China object that the Council lacks the mandate, expertise, and efficiency for such action. Many fully developed countries emphasize that the Council should cooperate with other expert fora such as the UNFCCC. As a result, the Council has been unable to decide, whether it will deal with climate change as a general threat or not. Interestingly, the four Visegrad Group states (the V4) could contribute to overcoming this deadlock and finding compromise.

In 2007, the UK organized the first open debate of the Council on the security implications of climate change. Many small Pacific island states argued that they were on the front line of the struggle against climate change. The sea level dangerously rose due to the melting of Arctic; thus, high tides, storms and floods endangered their territories. The populations began concentrating in the capitals, where overcrowding caused sanitation and security issues. The Pacific island states requested the Council to shift its attention from the previous “Cold War” to a new “Warming War” and to “ensure that all countries contribute to solving the climate change problem and that

their efforts are commensurate with their resources and capacities.” Developed countries, including EU members and Japan, supported Council involvement, but often argued that the Council must carefully coordinate its steps with other relevant institutions.

Nonetheless, rapidly developing countries objected against any involvement of the Council. The Group of 77 claimed that the Council was not authorized to deal with climate change as it was prevalently a developmental and environmental issue, which should be seen through the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Russia and China, permanent and veto-wielding Council members, as well as Brazil and India, argued the insufficient expertise and efficiency of the Council in such matters.

The Council was unable to decide whether to leave climate security to other international institutions or remain focused on the matter. Similar fruitless debates were repeated in 2011, 2015, 2018, 2019 and twice in 2020. The Council published only a very vague presidential

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statement on climate change in 2011. It also admitted that climate change might be an underlying cause of the conflict in the Lake Chad Basin (2017) and Somalia (2018). Nonetheless, the Council has reached no consensus on whether and how to respond to climate change generally. Surprisingly, the V4 countries could help to overcome the current stalemate.

Established in 1991, the Visegrad Group consists of four Central European countries with similar histories and economies: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. This association was intended to strengthen the security, cultural, and economic ties among its members and contribute to their full integration into the European community. The Visegrad Declaration signed on February 15, 1991, listed ecology as one of the areas for cooperation. Recently, on [September 4, 2020](#), the V4 Finance Ministers acknowledged that “climate change” is “one of the biggest global challenges that determine the prosperity of future generations.” Furthermore on [February 17, 2021](#), the V4 prime ministers pledged to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. In spite of this, the V4 unfortunately do not seem to be pursuing a coordinated approach to the Council when it comes to climate security.

Poland has been the most active in Council discussions on climate change, participating in 2011, 2015, 2018, 2019 and in July 2020. Poland advocated Council involvement and usually fully aligned with the EU, emphasizing that climate change destabilizes fragile governments, multiplies threats, and fuels conflicts over resources. The Council’s work should complement the UN FCCC at least in raising awareness about climate change. According to Poland, the Council plays an indispensable role in conflict anticipation and prevention, and therefore it needs better assessment and management strategies for climate risks. The Secretary General of the UN should regularly brief the Council

about environmental threats so that it can fulfil its early-warning function and pursue climate-sensitive peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

Slovakia saw a similar role for the Council when participating in the debates in 2007, 2019 and twice in 2020. Slovakia also fully associated with the EU standpoints and advocated a moderate Council response to climate change as necessary for conflict prevention. Climate change causes humanitarian crises which in turn destabilize governments. The Council should identify appropriate policy responses to such threats, for example, fostering preventive diplomacy and resilience, ensuring protection of the environment during armed conflict, managing conflicts over resources, and inserting environmental management into peacekeeping. Slovakia supported preparation of a comprehensive database on climate-related security risks and the related reporting of the Secretary General to the Council. In July 2020, Slovakia also linked climate change with gender issues.

Other V4 countries have been more hesitant to share their opinion about Council engagement. **Hungary** did so in 2011 when it fully aligned with the EU, warning that climate change may cause migration waves and called for broadening the security concept beyond military terms. Hungary entered the debate again in 2019 to call for strengthened border protection and criticize international migration policies: “The United Nations and all international organizations should not adopt decisions or documents that encourage further migratory waves or portray migration as a human right or as having only a positive impact.”

Finally, **the Czech Republic** has remained almost silent. Only in July 2020, did the Czech Republic inform the Council about joining “the United Nations Group of Friends of Climate and Security,” an association which should develop global “tools for the systematic management of climate-related security risks.” The Czech

Republic also supported periodic presentations of security risks based on scientific data provided by the Secretary General to the Council.

The V4 countries aligned themselves with the EU, but otherwise their approaches rather differed. Poland and Slovakia regularly advocated Council involvement and proposed concrete actions. Hungary used the Council as a platform to criticize migration policies (incidentally migration prevention is an important political topic for the V4). And the Czech Republic only lately briefly announced its support for the UN Groups of Friends of Climate and Security. Yet, if they coordinated, the V4 states have the potential to help the Council in overcoming the current stalemate. The specific position of the V4 allows them to understand the concerns of many stakeholders and become trustworthy partners guaranteeing that the Council's decision will not be formulated for the apparent benefit of some countries and detriment of others.

The rapidly developing countries have been blocking any generic action of the Council on climate change.

These countries fear that such action could interfere with their sovereignty. In the worst-case scenario, the Council could adopt caps on carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions without wider participation. This would curtail the economic development of rapidly developing states. Highly developed economies could benefit from this by preserving their position. Climate change could even become a political tool in the economic struggle between the highly developed and the rapidly developing economies, or between the US and China, as both rivals could attempt to formulate international climate policies to constrain the other's economy. This would deepen the deadlock. The V4 may play a specific role here. Due to their Communist past, the economies of the V4 importantly still depend on fossil fuels (see table 1). Thus, the V4 could guarantee that the Council does not interfere with purely economic issues which indeed require wider participation. It is also in the interests of the V4 that the Council's responses remain moderate and limited to the prevention of specific armed conflict and the management of specific local environmental-security risks.

Table 1: Share of fossil fuels as sources of energy in V4 in 1990 and in 2018	Solid fossil fuels:		Oil and petroleum:		Natural gas:		Total:	
	1990	2018	1990	2018	1990	2018	1990	2018
Czechia	63%	35%	18%	22%	12%	12%	93%	69%
Hungary	22%	8%	31%	31%	31%	31%	84%	70%
Poland	76%	47%	13%	28%	9%	15%	98%	90%
Slovakia	38%	22%	24%	22%	21%	22%	83%	66%
EU:	27%	14%	37%	33%	18%	24%	82%	71%

Source: Rokicki, T. Perkowska, A. 2020. *Changes in Energy Supplies in the Countries of the Visegrad Group*. doi:10.3390/su12197916

The rapidly developing countries have already accepted that the Security Council may respond with resolutions to non-military issues such as HIV, Ebola, and COVID-19. They have also accepted the security framing of climate change in the Council resolutions on the Lake Chad Basin and Somalia. Thus, they might accept moderate general climate-security policies, as supported by the V4, if the V4 expresses more empathy for their concerns and assures them that climate-security action will not interfere with their sovereignty. The V4 countries, as EU and NATO members may also better explain these concerns to the highly developed countries.

The V4 could be an important partner also for the Pacific island states and other countries severely affected by climate change. Such countries put significant pressure on the Security Council to act. Although they hold relatively low economic or military power, their position draws the attention of the international public and that public support may help them to shame the Council into action. For example, the Council could be pressed to set up an “institutional harbor” for climate security through a resolution in a similar way as it established ad hoc criminal tribunals in the past. Paradoxically, this could become a dubious victory for the Pacific island states. In 2019, Radoslav Dimitrov published a study about empty institutions in global environmental politics. If governments face public pressure to act, they may create such “empty institutions.” These institutions conduct

no real action, but only pretend to push for progress, and hide failures instead: “Contrary to conventional academic wisdom, institutions can be raised as obstacles that preempt governance rather than facilitate it.” The Council could create or turn into just such an empty “climate-security institution”, just because it faces strong public pressure, yet at the same time lacks political will to act. In this regard, the V4 should ensure that climate-security proponents have realistic expectations of the Council and that the Council takes small efficient steps rather than getting dragged into supposedly extreme action. The V4 consists of rather small countries (with the exception of Poland). Unlike many rapidly developing states, the V4 could hardly be accused by any Pacific island state that by these activities they are intentionally slowing down the negotiations.

In conclusion, the V4 could play an important role in bringing empathy into the Security Council debates, identifying space for compromises, and warning against too ambitious or intrusive solutions. In this way, the V4 would use their specific position to become handy interlocutors and trustworthy partners. The past activities of Poland and Slovakia demonstrate that the countries can enter the debate with valid arguments and concrete reasonable proposals and thus are able to play such a role. The support of the Czech Republic and Hungary coordinated at the V4 level could add the necessary political clout that would bring the Security Council closer to long-awaited decisions.