



NAVIGATING THE DILEMMAS OF CLIMATE SECURITY: IS JUST SECURITIZATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE POSSIBLE?

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Executive Summary

This paper delves into the complexities and dilemmas surrounding climate security, a phenomenon that has transformed from a future concern to an immediate global challenge. The paper analyzes the diverse threats presented by climate change toward various referent objects and delves into the dilemma of securitizing climate change, exploring the associated risks and benefits of framing it as a security issue. It identifies three referent objects at stake: human beings, ecosystems, and nation-states, each facing distinct threats. The differential impact of climate change adds complexity, considering disparities among urban and rural populations, generational divides, and varying impacts on nation-states. In order to overcome the dilemmas and complexities of climate security, the paper advocates for a just securitization approach inspired by Rita Floyd, emphasizing a balanced and ethically informed integration of climate change within the security discourse. However, operationalizing this approach raises challenging questions about prioritizing referent objects and addressing diverse perspectives. The paper proposes a focus on human beings as a pragmatic approach, and a macro-level securitization strategy is suggested to build a shared understanding of common goals and values. The paper concludes by emphasizing the provisional nature of these proposals, calling for continuous exploration, and a re-politicization of the climate discourse to ensure inclusivity and relevance across diverse perspectives.

Navigating the Dilemmas of Climate Security: Is Just Securitization of Climate Change Possible?

The contemporary global landscape is irrevocably shaped by the ominous specter of climate change, evolving from a future concern to an immediate and ubiquitous issue. This policy paper delves into the intricate dimensions of the dilemma posed by the securitization of climate change. It explores the multifaceted threats this phenomenon presents, scrutinizes the potential risks and benefits associated with framing climate change as a security issue, and examines the merits of a just securitization approach inspired by Rita Floyd’s advocacy for a balanced and ethically informed integration of climate change within the security discourse.

Three Referent Objects at Stake

Climate change manifests as a threat to three distinct referent objects, encapsulating anthropocentric, eco-centric, and state-centric perspectives.¹ The first lens, anthropocentric, views climate change as a menace to human beings and their well-being. The second, eco-centric, perceives it

as a danger to the intricate balance of the planet Earth and its ecosystems. The third, state-centric, frames climate change as a challenge to nation-states. Within this discourse, there also exists a contingent of climate skeptics who dispute the very existence of climate change. There are even those who portray climate activists as a security threat. This diverse array of perspectives highlights the complexity of the climate change narrative and shows how different priorities lead to different perceptions and approaches in climate security.

Diverse Threat Landscape

The security implications of climate change also paint a diverse and intricate landscape, transcending simple categorization. These include many issues ranging from extreme climate events to the challenges posed by climate-induced migration, conflicts over depleting resources, the potential for water wars, and food and water insecurity.² Each of these phenomena can be perceived as a threat to different referent objects based on the priorities of the observers. Below, we outline in the table how these threats may endanger these three diverse referent objects.

	REFERENT OBJECTS		
Security Implications of Climate Change	Human Beings	State	Planet/Ecosystem
Extreme Climate Events (Wildfires, Floods, Heatwaves, Hurricanes, Landslides, etc.)	Loss of lives, loss of goods	Disaster management, infrastructure damage	Ecosystem transformations, habitat loss
Food Insecurity	Hunger, malnutrition, lack of regular access to enough safe and nutritious food	Ensuring food supplies, addressing shortages, economic security	Changes in crop patterns, impact on biodiversity
Water Insecurity	Water scarcity, lack of access to clean water, challenges related to sanitation and sanitary issues	Geopolitical tensions over freshwater resources, water wars	Impact on aquatic ecosystems
Economic Insecurity	Increased poverty, economic instability	Economic planning, managing supply chain disruptions	

	REFERENT OBJECTS		
Energy Insecurity	Inequalities and problems in secure energy supply	Energy efficiency, challenges, eco-friendly technology transformation requirements	
Human Health	Increased distribution of diseases and disease vectors (e.g., dengue fever)	Health planning, ensuring access to clean water	
Desertification	Displacement, loss of arable land, livelihoods	Implementing land management, combating desertification	Ecosystem changes, loss of productive land
Climate-Induced Migration	Suffering of people who migrate, cultural disruptions	Managing displaced populations, cultural impacts/societal insecurity, border security	Ecosystem shifts and disruptions based on population moves
Armed Conflict (Armed conflict over depleting resources, water wars)	Internal/international displacement, death of civilians, suffering from armed conflict	Geopolitical tensions over resources, armed conflict	Further ecosystem disruptions due to armed conflict

Note: This table is prepared by the authors to show the complexity of the climate security phenomenon. There may be many other aspects that can be added or stressed such as societal security, green defense framework, etc. It should also be stressed that the prioritization of these implications and referent objects is completely subjective.

The Dilemmas of Climate Security

Differential Impact of Climate Change: Unraveling the Complex Tapestry

Beyond the overarching classification of referent objects such as planet Earth, human beings, and nation-states, the impact of climate change is a complex tapestry that defies simplistic categorization. The notion of “humans” as a uniform referent object belies the stark reality that different segments of society experience and perceive climate change in vastly distinct ways. Urban and rural populations, for instance, confront disparate challenges; while rural regions face the threats of altered agricultural patterns and water scarcity, urban regions may prioritize other implications of climate change. Furthermore, the generational divide introduces another layer of complexity. Younger generations, acutely aware of the environmental consequences they are set to inherit, often view climate change as an urgent and existential crisis more so than older generations.

Expanding our lens to the referent object “nation-states” reveals another myriad of disparities. Climate change affects different countries in diverse ways, accentuating existing geopolitical and socioeconomic inequalities. Island nations, for instance, grapple with the imminent threat of rising sea levels, making them particularly vulnerable. Meanwhile, countries with robust economies may be better equipped to implement adaptive measures yet neglect to implement reform, creating divergence in their perceived urgency of and response to the climate crisis. This regional divergence in vulnerability introduces yet another layer to the dilemma of securitization. While some nations might be at the forefront of demanding urgent action, others may perceive climate change as a distant concern with less immediate impact. This divergence in perception and vulnerability poses a profound challenge when attempting to construct a cohesive and globally resonant security framework. As a novel threat that requires collective action despite its differing impacts, climate change challenges the fragmented nature of the international system and its established norms.

The Profound Dilemma of Securitization

At the core of the ongoing discourse lies another profound and nuanced dilemma when it comes to securitizing climate change. The act of framing climate change as a security issue unveils a complex paradox that necessitates careful consideration. On one side of this tension, there is a palpable risk of stifling open public political discussion, potentially limiting the exchange of ideas crucial for collaborative solutions. There is also the concern of invoking emergency measures that might infringe upon civil liberties, fostering pessimism and a friend-enemy dichotomy, and inadvertently encouraging a militarized response to an environmental challenge.

On the other side of this dilemma lies the promise of prioritizing the issue, garnering increased attention, resources, and concerted efforts to address the multifaceted dimensions of climate change. This optimistic outcome includes the efficient allocation of resources, agenda setting, and gaining support from the public and formal audiences such as members of parliament and businesspeople, including the establishment of a comprehensive strategy to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

In navigating this intricate labyrinth, Rita Floyd's Just Securitization Approach emerges not just as a solution but as an indispensable tool for policymakers. It urges them to confront the inherent tensions within the securitization dilemma with precision and foresight. By emphasizing the ethical dimensions of securitization, Floyd's approach compels policymakers to critically evaluate the potential consequences of their decisions. It places a spotlight on the delicate balancing act required to address the urgency of climate change while navigating the dangerous pitfalls inherent in framing it as a security issue.

Rita Floyd's Just Securitization Approach

Rita Floyd's Just Securitization Approach provides a thoughtful and principled response to the complexities and challenges associated with the securitization of climate change. In the face of in-

creasing environmental threats and the urgency to address climate-related risks, Floyd's approach offers a nuanced framework that emphasizes ethical considerations and responsible decision-making.

The core tenets of Floyd's just securitization approach revolve around three key criteria that collectively determine the moral rightness of securitization.³ Firstly, there must be an acknowledgment of an objective existential threat, emphasizing a danger that imperils the survival of an actor or an order. Secondly, the referent object of security must be morally legitimate, defined by its contribution to human well-being, encompassing the satisfaction of fundamental human needs. Lastly, the security response must be appropriately aligned with the identified threat and executed with sincerity by the securitizing actor.

This approach stands as a potential solution to the dilemmas inherent in securitizing climate change. Floyd's emphasis on justice and ethics injects a moral dimension into the securitization discourse, challenging decision-makers to consider the broader implications of their actions. By adopting Floyd's approach, governments are encouraged to navigate the intricate landscape of securitizing climate change with a meticulous and ethical mindset. The selection of a just referent object becomes a critical aspect of the securitization process, ensuring that the chosen entity aligns with ethical considerations and promotes societal well-being. Additionally, the means employed in response to the climate threat must not only be proportional to the identified risks but also reflect sincerity in the intentions of the securitizing actor.

“But How?”: Operationalizing the Just Securitization of Climate Change

While the “just securitization” approach shows promise in mitigating the risks associated with traditional securitization and its benefits, it remains abstract, and the “how” question is only partially answered. How can we operationalize this approach in real life? Which actors will facilitate this just securitization? Who are the legitimate secu-

ritizing actors? Which referent object should take precedence in this just securitization—should it be the state, the planet, or human beings? How can we overcome the initial dilemma of differentiating impacts on various people and states? Whose preferences will be prioritized in the securitization process? The answers to these questions are still contested.

Although open to criticism, a potentially effective approach for just securitization may involve focusing on human beings rather than the planet or the nation-state. Floyd emphasizes that centering on state security could be counterproductive, potentially leading to conflict.⁴ While the eco-centric approach, which focuses on the planet and the ecosystem, may seem ethically sound, it could be too abstract for many people, making it challenging to garner sufficient support. Prioritizing human beings appears to be the most pragmatic way forward, reducing the risk of counterproductive outcomes and ensuring practicality. Placing human beings at the center is also influential, as both the audience and the referent object will be part of the same unit, making this a more promising approach.

However, selecting human beings as the primary referent object does not address all the questions raised earlier. The question of “which people,” stemming from the initial dilemma, remains unresolved. Different individuals and groups possess varying priorities. To navigate this dilemma and prevent the emergence of further cleavages among different groups, macro-level securitization may be preferred. This macro-level securitization strategy aims to build a shared understanding of common goals and values, mitigating potential conflicts arising from divergent priorities and ensuring a more unified response to the complex issues at hand.

While these suggestions offer a tentative framework for addressing the challenges of just securitization, it is essential to underscore the provisional nature of these proposals. The complexity of the issues at hand demands continuous exploration and refinement. Further studies are imperative to delve into the nuances of implementing macro-level securitization and to scrutinize its potential

implications. In this research, an additional dilemma surfaces—the risk of over-technicalization in climate studies. While researchers with technical backgrounds can contribute valuable insights, there is a danger of limiting the discussion to a narrow group with specialized knowledge. This exclusivity runs the risk of alienating a broader audience and limiting public political discussion. As social scientists, it is imperative to re-politicize the climate discourse, ensuring that it remains accessible and relevant to a diverse range of perspectives. This calls for an interdisciplinary approach that bridges the technical and social aspects, fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of the climate security paradigm.

Notes

- 1 | Matt McDonald, "Discourses of climate security," *Political Geography* 33 (2013): 42-51; Başar Baysal and Uluç Karakaş, "Climate Change and Security: Different Perceptions, Different Approaches," *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 14, no. 54 (2017): 21-44; Matt McDonald, "Climate Change and Security: Towards Ecological Security?" *International Theory* 10, no. 2 (2018): 153-180; Senem Atvur and Çağla Vural, "Çevresel Güvenlik," in *Uluslararası İlişkilerde Güvenlik*, ed. Başar Baysal (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2022), 309-320.
- 2 | IPCC 2014, "Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change," eds. C. B. Field et al. (Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); IPCC 2022, "Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change," eds. H.-O. Pörtner et al. (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022).
- 3 | Rita Floyd, "Can securitization theory be used in normative analysis? Towards a just securitization theory," *Security Dialogue* 42 no. 4/5 (2011): 427-439; Rita Floyd, *The Morality of Security: A Theory of Just Securitization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
- 4 | Rita Floyd, *Security and the Environment: Securitisation Theory and US Environmental Security Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

About the Istanbul Policy Center-Sabancı University-Stiftung Mercator Initiative

The Istanbul Policy Center–Sabancı University–Stiftung Mercator Initiative aims to strengthen the academic, political, and social ties between Turkey and Germany as well as Turkey and Europe. The Initiative is based on the premise that the acquisition of knowledge and the exchange of people and ideas are preconditions for meeting the challenges of an increasingly globalized world in the 21st century. The Initiative focuses on two areas of cooperation, EU/ German-Turkish relations and climate change, which are of essential importance for the future of Turkey and Germany within a larger European and global context.

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