

Climate changes and the nature of International Relations: notes on international security

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Nature is portrayed in the media as the leaf green, the water, sky blue, the woodiness, and the life that inhabits this, always excluding societies and cities and how every single sphere is intrinsically interconnected. With this depiction in mind, humanity has lived its best to explore nature as a different reality. The unbalanced scenario would not affect the path humanity thrills on nowadays. However, this unstable setup shows itself in its worst form: forcing migration, condemning life in various regions, and triggering political and economic processes. This unbalance is mainly expressed in the climate crisis humanity has been surviving from now on, having this necessity of transforming this current scenario as a theme of insecurity. This necessity seems to remain unknown to society.

When we talk about the relation between security and climate change, we must speak about the concerns of survival, whether individual and collective. International Relations has come with new research fields on the study of climate changes and our perceptions and receiving of this information, bringing some different approaches. It is analysed from the structural perspective, in which consider the states as the main protagonist, to post-structuralist and decolonial perspectives from the narrative and their impacts on contemporaneous society. This analysis is based on the security debates, having the state-to-human approach of this field created around the intersection between security and climate changes in International Relations (IR) on the centre. It will be finished with some forecast about international relations on this endangered future.

Security and climate change: not so far

Security is one of the beacons of the traditional perspectives on international relations in many countries in the world, mostly more implied on the great powers — such as the United States, United Kingdom, and France — and the hotspot of conflicts, such as the Middle East and the Chinese South Sea. Also, the IR field was also funded on this concept along with power and sovereignty on its formation. Since this fact, it is a matter of skimming on the reality to visualise the current situation when considering our primal resources, the petroleum and derivatives, and their shortage — which also includes water.

Since the advance of society and its demands through the past few decades, we could see the behaviour of great power in international politics positioning themselves according to their interests on these resources. Firstly, we have the oil embargoes of the 1970s — a response of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) on industrialised nations that supported Israel in the Yom Kippur War. Once the world has recovered from this shock, the economic system was not the same, which implied a strong wave of economic reforms and casualties on developing countries (see HERMANN, 2011). So as the United States relationship with the Middle East and their oil, since it was a statement on post World War II that petroleum was the commodity of the time. Given that, Middle Eastern oil is now linked directly with USA Security (JONES, 2012).

The current United-Statesian Vice President, Kamala Harris, recently spoke about the water crisis the world lives in and how we will possibly overcome the wars fought over oil to fight over water (VICE..., 2021). Standing on this possibility of water becoming the new hot commodity, we have a line tracing the variables to understand

the correlation: facing a short offer of water, the world is endangered to come back to the famous Hobbesian state of nature. Overmilitarized powers will not measure efforts on running after water whenever and wherever it is necessary.

Thereafter, society will face the return to the old aspects of the Security field on IR: an extreme necessity for survival. And how the globe has been dealing with the climate is only fasting this result up. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, Earth has registered the three hotter years on the records — 2016, 2019 and 2020 (2020..., 2021). It is necessary to take it as a red flag, considering that the main purpose of the sustainable agenda is not working. It is also essential to point out variation in the cycle of rains due to climate change since it is related to the lack of rain or its exorbitance to these changes. This is caused due to processes such as the desalination of the seas provoked by the rise of their levels — which is caused by the melting of the ice caps due to the high temperatures on Earth (ARCTIC..., 2020).

Since the ocean currents are now operating slower, extreme weather scenarios can be observable, e.g., colder winters seen on episodes such as the severe snowfall in Texas (NARVEKAR, 2021), the heatwaves that attack the European continent in the Summer and the unstable precipitation on the tropics (BERWYN, 2018). And once we have these extremes, the water cycle is broken, overflowing or completely drying rivers — and then forcing people to move and/or to look for an alternative for freshwater, provoking conflicts. There are registers on disputes over water in regions of the African Continent, the Middle East and the South and Southeast Asia — increased by issues such as overpopulation, governmental mistreatment, and historical heritage (DETGES; POHL; SCHALLER, 2017) —, bringing the individuals on the centre of these discussions to feel insecure.

The North has already noticed this problem coming along with climate changes and not only concerning water, but also other fields. The economic sphere as one of the most affected, considering the natural resources; also, the food security, acknowledging that food is intrinsically related to good weather conditions, and even on the migrations fluxes since the affected areas will incite a dislocation of people (academically labelled as “climate refugees” as an attempt to bring a highlight to this perspective [JASWAL; JOLLY, 2013]). These fields are a great source of threats to the state but mainly to human beings, provoking the area to propose new categories and analytical instruments.

Climate changes are strongly related to the emergence of new zoonoses, a recent illness with pandemic potential caused by the interaction of human beings with these conditions that we had not had before. Scientists believe that the Covid-19 pandemic was caused by approximating the great urban cities to the forest reserves, daily smaller (BRESSAN, 2021). Animals do not have more of their habits, obligating them to search in the concrete jungle. Since the following knowledge, we also have some worries considering some organic matter being exposed in Siberia and other parts of the extreme North due to the arctic ice melting. This matter is known as permafrost and it is composed of tons of organic material from millions of years, preserved by the ice, which is confirmed to be a problem due to the increase of temperatures. Since it is a bomb of carbon dioxide (CO₂) that can accelerate the process of global warming, the permafrost also has the possibility of spread of a new disease once it is hard to know if any of living bring had died with one which is preserved on the ice until nowadays (STRUZIK, 2020).

It is well known that security has military and bellicose aspects, and it mostly focuses on states as the main character. However, after this turning point on priorities, we now have all these schools of thought in which the human being is

the priority, bringing up the concept of Human Security. This concept is defined by Alkire (2003) as a scope for the protection of human rights in a multidimensional and institutionalised setting of international cooperation, being people-centred and going beyond the ideal of protecting based only on groups or nations' interests. This concept is also aligned with the idea of protecting human integrity from hostile environments, applying the ones changed by climate changes.

Considering the Declaration of Human Rights and its principles of protecting the humanity of each person whatsoever it is their origins, beliefs, or any other determinant, concepts of Human Security might not exist in a perfect world. Alkire (2003) herself points out the necessity of action and the necessity of even creating more institutions based on the concept of Human Security because one of its purposes is to prevail catastrophes prioritising certain problems in a long term — which could be any that already exists, even connected to the UN System. But the lack of action obligates this turning back to the structure to define the best approach and movement of action.

A bottom-up perspective of action

Starting from the point of the human being at the centre of the whole debate, humanity must project a new path to continue our existence as these enormous variants of societies forming countries and continents. Since the definitions of the absolute state, politics can be portrayed as that monster from Hobbes' writings: different forms, shapes, always working in various manners. In the contemporary world, it seems politics work along with capitalism — the one that maintains the state strong and allows them to finance their belligerent behaviour —, as the Marxist

approach explains (CALLINICOS, 2007). Pondering the forecasts to this century, we have no choice but to stop consuming and adapt this sort of life to a new reality of resource scarcity.

Since the times are changing, humanity would not have the necessary time to survive a structural change in a highly financialised society with excessive demand for consummation. Speaking on changing our manner of action on climate changes, we must signalise to those unable to speak while their survivor is their main goal. Suggesting a bottom-up approach is to consider North-South relations since once an action is proposed, it takes resources and funds of incentive. The research also identified this type of problem since the literature review made on the interconnection between security and climate reveals the lack of works from the level of analysis of individuals (UEXKULL; BUHAUG, 2021).

More than ever, it is necessary to act to avoid what science fiction films have warned us for years: we must be prepared to face extreme weather such as from “The Day After Tomorrow”.

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