Why Not Climate Change? An Analysis of UNSC Action on Human Security Issues

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Research Question: How has the United Nations Security Council addressed human security issues in the past, and how has that set a precedent for their response to climate change?

Introduction and Methods
During the HIV/AIDS crisis, the UNSC passed a resolution that helped protect UN Peacekeepers from the virus. During the Ebola crisis, the UNSC passed a resolution asking member states to open up their borders to international travel and trade. These actions did little to resolve the actual crises, and mainly benefitted the UNSC and UN Peacekeeping troops. This practice is echoed in the UNSC's attempts to include environmental elements into their peacekeeping missions. These “solutions,” although a step in the right direction, fail to address the root cause of these issues. I analyzed UNSC resolutions, press releases, and official statements to aid in my research. I researched UN member states' positions on the three relevant issues and referenced many articles on the topics of human security, climate change, and the UNSC.

The HIV/AIDS and Ebola Crises
- Designated as human security issues and "threats to international peace and security"
- UNSC Resolution 1983 protected UN Peacekeepers from spreading HIV/AIDS to each other and the communities they served by mandating education on "awareness"
- UNSC Resolution 2177 asked states affected by Ebola to reopen their borders to trade and travel

Climate Change and the UNSC
- The UNSC has yet to designate climate change a threat to international peace and security
- The UNSC has addressed the effects of climate change in several resolutions but has not taken tangible action to mitigate the root cause
- "Greening the Blue" initiative to reduce environmental impacts of UN Peacekeeping missions is not systematically or consistently implemented

Number of Peacekeeping Missions that are "Greening the Blue"
- Only 3 out of the 12 active UN Peacekeeping missions have an accompanying UNSC resolution that mandates compliance with environmental guidelines

Why Not Climate Change?
- Human security issues such as climate change do not fit the standard definition of "a threat to international peace and security," which is usually characterized by interstate violence or conflict
- UNSC member states have contradicting positions on the issue, particularly, members of the P5 cannot agree on an approach
- There is debate about whether or not the UNSC is the correct forum to address this issue
- There is debate about whether climate change is a human security issue or if it is solely a sustainable development issue
- Until these barriers are resolved, the UNSC will be unable to designate climate change an international peace and security threat, nor will it be able to take the action necessary to mitigate the security implications of climate change

Conclusions
- Efforts by the UNSC to address human security issues in the past have been performative and essentially costless to implement. The organization has addressed the effects of human security issues, but not the root causes. This shows that the UNSC only takes action on human security issues when it is an issue that directly impacts their troops, or if it is essentially costless to the Council to implement.
- This projects an image of relevancy and legitimacy that the UNSC has struggled to maintain as the organization has not evolved in tandem with the continued development of the international system. Until the UNSC adapts to the evolving needs of the world, climate change cannot be adequately addressed as a human security issue.
- It is hypocritical for the UNSC to take action on certain human security issues while refusing to take effective action on the greatest threat to international peace and security that the world currently faces: climate change.

Acknowledgements: Many thanks to Professor Kendall of the Politics & Government Department for overseeing my research project, and to Simpson Kraft for providing the funding for my research.

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