



# International Seminar on The Security Implications of Emerging Climate Altering Technologies

Royal Military Academy  
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## Opening Remarks by Didier Reynders, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs and Defence, Kingdom of Belgium



Ladies and gentlemen,

Earlier this year I spoke at the United Nations Security Council's open debate on "Climate and Security". With 82 interventions - of which at least 16 on a Ministerial level - one can hardly say that the international community is ignorant of the changing climate's consequences for international security.

Indeed, the scientific research on the topic is getting vast. Links made between the war in Syria and its preceding drought and social unrest are probably known to us all. In the Sahel, climate change is putting a major stress on the livelihoods of nomadic pastoralists thereby provoking tensions.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear speakers,

Weather patterns that influence civilizations is not a new phenomenon. A lot of historians agree that a reduction in temperatures - caused by the outbreak of the Icelandic volcano Laki in 1783 - and the consequent harvest losses all over Europe, had a stake in the outbreak of the French revolution.

Today's rapidly evolving man-made and other global warming causes ever more unpredictable and erratic weather events.

While changing climate conditions are never the sole, nor direct causes of unrest, a recent study by a multidisciplinary research team, published in Nature, found that Climate Change has contributed to organized armed conflict within countries. Changing weather patterns frequently aggravate existing problems of resource scarcity and governance. Given the complexity of the issue, more dedicated research is necessary. Such research can guide policy making & action in order to prevent future conflict and tensions.

Belgium currently has the honour of serving as an elected member of the Security Council. We actively seek to improve the Council's preventive role and to strengthen its work to address climate related security risks.

I unfortunately have to admit that this poses somewhat of a challenge. Some of the Council's members – among them very powerful ones – are not willing to accept climate related security issues being integrated into the Council's proceedings.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This has not stopped us from pressing ahead. Belgium advocates the creation of a "clearing house". Such a mechanism would gather all relevant climate information in the UN system and provide tailor-made advice on climate-related security risks to the UN Security Council.

An encouraging first step has been the establishment of a “Climate and Security mechanism”, which should be further expanded. In addition, we have integrated language on climate risks into the relevant UNSC mandates in Mali, Somalia, Central Africa, and others.

Our country also encourages the UN to strive for greater coherence. We feel a climate sensitive approach should be a part and parcel of the entire system’s conflict prevention efforts. For that reason we signed the joint statement of the Group of Friends on Climate and Security last month. The statement calls for a biennial country- or region-specific and forward-looking report of the Secretary General on climate related security risks. Such a report should include concrete recommendations for action by UN organs.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear participants

Besides this engagement, we also want to initiate further debate and reflection. This is why we welcome several acclaimed specialists today for an in-depth discussion on the security impacts of climate altering technologies or geoengineering.

As the need for robust action on mitigation is becoming ever more pressing, some scientific research has turned to technological intervention in the climate system.

Altering the weather is not a 21st-century-concept. As early as the 1830’s, an American meteorologist proposed controlled forest-burning to induce rain. He was called the “Storm King” by his generation.

Today, cloud seeding is used by some for the same purpose. But these techniques raise questions about their sustainability and their geopolitical consequences. What if the neighbouring country, thirsty for water, steals your rain?

What if a specific nation causes environmental degradation beyond its borders in its effort to combat the impacts of climate change? In its 2019 report on Global Risks, the World Economic Forum catalogues “weather wars” as one of the “potential future shocks”.

Geoengineering is defined by a 2009 Royal Society report as: “the deliberate large-scale intervention in the Earth’s climate system, in order to moderate global warming”. It covers techniques to remove CO<sup>2</sup> out of the atmosphere and solar radiation management. I leave it to our speakers to introduce the audience to these complex intervention techniques.

Today we can say that none of the techniques has been conclusively proven to be free from detrimental impacts. As such, the conference of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at its 10th and subsequent sessions has called for a strict precautionary approach with regards to geo-engineering activities that may affect biodiversity. Such activities are not to be undertaken until there is an adequate scientific basis on which to justify them. The precautionary principle is one of the fundamental principles that guide EU environmental decision making.

However, this does not imply we should stop talking about these techniques and learn more about their consequences and effects. Or that we should remain silent about the potential geopolitical impact of their large scale use.

To the contrary: intervening in the planet’s energy balance might provoke tensions; this creates an acute need for strict regulation, embedded in a multilateral framework.

Bringing the scientific debate into the political sphere is specifically why we have all gathered here today. Indeed, we do not have to wait for a new “Weather King” to stand up.

I would like to conclude by thanking the Royal Military School for welcoming us here and express my gratitude to the Environment & Development Resource Centre and all other partners for their collaboration in developing this project. I wish you a fruitful afternoon.

Thank you.