



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

Royal Military Academy  
Hobbemastraat 8, 1000 Brussels  
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## Introduction to the Programme and Objectives

Alexander Verbeek



Thank you Minister Reynders

Indeed we need both engagement, like the creation of a 'clearing house' in the UN system, as well as debate and reflection. And that is what brings us here today: geo-engineering is typically an example of the latter category.

Intuitively it is typically the kind of issue that gives you mixed feelings. A bit like nuclear weapons. You may not like them, but the possibility that somebody else might consider to use them is already a good reason to debate and reflect upon it.

Five times in the history of the earth, there has been a mass-extinction event. We all know about the one with the asteroid that wiped out the dinosaurs. But in the other four cases it was climate change caused by greenhouse gasses.

The worst one was 250 million years ago. The earth got some 5 degrees warmer. 96 percent of all marine species became extinct.

The good news is that for once we were not the ones to blame, simply because we weren't around. Only some 200.000 years ago did we become those bright homo sapiens.

Now the bad news is that scientists estimate that the increase of CO2 in our atmosphere increases now at least ten times as fast as during the worst extinction ever.

It is getting hot.

Worse, it is rapidly getting hot.

We are witnessing the beginning of the sixth mass-extinction.

We already lose some 200 species per day

Only 3 to 4 percent of the mass of all land animals is left as wildlife. The rest is basically us and the animals that we eat.

Climate change is no longer just a theory. Nor is it some distant future.

September was the hottest month ever measured. August the second hottest month, July the hottest ever and so was June.

Climate change is manmade.

The last time that we created a man-made global disaster that cost tens of millions of peoples their lives was the Second World War. It led to the creation of the United Nations to avoid that we would make the same mistakes again.

Just to remind you of the 4 main purposes of the UN:

To keep peace;

To develop friendly relations among nations;

To improve the quality of life of those that are poor, hungry, sick or illiterate. And that includes the promotion of human rights.

The fourth purpose of the UN is to be the centre for harmonizing the actions of nations to achieve these goals

Now of course nobody thought about climate change in 1945. They had other things on their mind. And besides, although it is 19th century knowledge that burning too much fossil fuels will cause global warming, it seemed then a distant - almost theoretical - problem, best to be dealt with in science fiction books.

I fully agree with the Belgium governments' position that the impact of climate change on security needs to be on the agenda of the Security Council.

It does fit within the four purposes that I just mentioned. It is typically an issue where nations need to work together to keep the peace.

And within the United Nations it is only the Security Council that has the power to make decisions that member states are then obliged to implement. Other organs of the United Nations can only make recommendations to member states.

And yes, I am well aware that there is no consensus amongst the member states on this issue.

So what to expect of climate change?

If all nations would really stick to the national commitments that they made under the Paris Agreement we will end somewhere above three degrees.

But I am sorry to say: they won't

Realistically we talk about some 4 degrees or higher at the end of the century, and I never understood why we only look until the year 2100. My daughter is likely to still be alive, and she will have kids and grandchildren that also need a healthy planet.

There is no peace without development, and there is no development without peace, and that human rights are an essential building block to get there.

We have seen the political impact here in Europe of about a million Syrians fleeing a war that has climate change fingerprints all over it.

The World Bank estimates that in 30 years some 140 million people may be displaced because of climate change. The UN's estimates are even higher: 200 million by 2050.

Tackle the root causes of climate change and you promote peace, good relations, and the lives of people.

And for the same reasons we also have to strengthen adaptation & resilience.

And if there ever was an urgency to harmonize the actions of nations to promote peace, good relations and the lives of people it is right now. We are standing at the brink of the destruction of our planet as we know it.

Somehow the young people get this message better than our generation. They are out in the streets with millions to remind us of our responsibilities.

The window for action is closing rapidly. If we had taken action in 2000, we needed only to reduce emissions by 3 percent per year to stay below 2 degrees. Now we have to reduce 10 percent per year and if we wait another ten years it will be 30 percent per year.

Last year's IPCC 1.5 report relied heavily on technology to somehow get the carbon back out of the atmosphere. Technologies that are often still on the drawing table, certainly not up to scale, and sometimes only found in the minds of visionaries.

But if the official UN scientific report gives CCS so much importance, it makes sense that we discuss the technology that might save our planet also in other fora of the UN.

Not that I am a blind believer in technology. It is part of the solution, but if we have no silver bullet to solve climate change, each part of the solution is important. I believe governance is an even bigger obstacle than technology. How come we still give worldwide five to six times more subsidies on fossil fuels than on renewables? Why do I pay more for a veggie burger than a meat-burger?

Increasingly, the elected members of the Security Council have put the relationship between climate change and security on the agenda. And more will follow: Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and hopefully Switzerland, just to name a few European countries.

At the Environment & Development Resource Centre, we work on many interrelated planetary security issues.

The three main pillars of our present activities are:

A regular dialogue in Brussels between more than 30 institutions on the relationship between climate change and security

Developing a trans-Atlantic dialogue on the environment

And we coordinate the activities of the Global Military Advisory Council on Climate Change, often referred to as GMACCC.

We also contributed to FEPS' 'UNited for Climate Justice' project and the recent meeting in New York.

Geo-engineering is sometimes referred to in our meetings, but in none of the dialogues it has ever been the central topic. I am therefore happy to see this initiative today. And I welcome the collaboration between EDRC and the Belgium Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Do we need geo-engineering? Should we use it? Who decides what? What will it cost? What are the risks? Who is in charge? Will we get round two of the loss and damages debate? Will the powerful ignore the weak?

I do look forward to the debates today. We will now begin with the presentations and discussion on Understanding Geoengineering and its Security Implications, moderated by Ashly Moran

Thank you



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**For more information about this seminar visit:**

<https://www.edrc.net/events/the-security-implications-of-emerging-climate-altering-technologies>

