

# CLIMATE SECURITY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CRITICAL AND TRADITIONAL SECURITY THEORIES

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**Abstract:** Climate change is considered as one of the most urgent global problems of the 21st century, not only an environmental issue, but also as more and more security problems. This study was how climate change was included in the international security agenda; It aims to analyze within the framework of theoretical decompositions between traditional security theories and critical security approaches. In the study based on literature screening, the limited interest of traditional approaches such as realism and neorealism to climatic threats, and critical security approaches such as Copenhagen School, Aberystwyth School and Paris School approached the issue with a broader definition of security. In addition, Diskur, which developed on climate security in the strategic documents of international organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union and NATO, has been analyzed. The study reveals that climate change should be evaluated not only through national security perspective, but also in a multidimensional framework such as human security, environmental justice and governance.

**Keywords:** Climate Security, International Relations Theories, Traditional Security, Critical Security Studies, Environmental Threats, Human Security, Copenhagen School.

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## INTRODUCTION

Climate change has become a multidimensional threat that deeply affects the sustainability of human life, economic development, food and water security, migration movements, and ultimately global security of human life. Since the 1990s, climate change has been settled in the center of more and more international security discourse (McDonald, 2013). Drought produces geopolitical fragileness that can trigger inter -state tensions (Busby, 2008). However, it is still controversial how climate change is considered as a security problem in the context of international relations theories. While evaluating traditional security approaches-especially realism and neorealism-security within the framework of military threats and state-centered interests, it often deals with boundary environmental threats such as climate change (Walt, 1991). In this perspective, climate change is not included in the “security” category unless it directly produces an armed threat. On the other hand, critical security studies redefine the meaning of the concept of security and carry the dimensions such as human safety, environmental security and social fragility to the center (Buzan, Wæver & De Wilde, 1998). The Copenhagen School argued that security is not limited to physical threats, but that it is a socially built and discursive -expanded phenomenon, and that environmental issues can be analyzed through “securitization” (security). The Aberystwyth school evaluates the climate crisis as a result of global inequalities and injustices and treats security on the basis of human dignity, ethical responsibility and freedom (Booth, 2007). In this context, the concept of climate security is not only related to environmental policies, but also to the epistemological limits of security theories. In spite of the increasing interest in the literature, holistic and comparative analyzes are still limited to how climate security is

theoretically based and how international actors are reflected in the strategic documents. The aim of this study is how climate change is positioned within the concept of security; to analyze the traditional security theories and critical security studies. Thus, it is aimed to contribute to the transformation of security discourse and to the theoretical understanding of the location of environmental threats in the international system.

## AIM

The main purpose of this study is to examine how climate change is theoretically positioned within the concept of security and to compare the theoretical approaches to this issue in the literature of international relations. In particular, traditional security theories (realism, neorealism) and critical security approaches (Copenhagen School, Aberystwyth School, Paris School, etc.) aim to reveal differences in climate security. Answer to the following basic questions will be sought within the scope of the study:

- How was climate change included in the international security agenda?
- Why do traditional security theories see climate threats as a secondary issue?
- How do critical security approaches “safety is of environmental threats and re -frame this threat on the basis of values?
- In the strategic documents of international organizations (UN, NATO, EU, etc.), how is climate safety defined and what threat perceptions are they shaped?

In this context, the study will not only offer a theoretical comparison, but will also shed light on the conceptual limits of

## METHOD

This study is structured based on qualitative research design and is basically based on the literature screening method. The aim of the study is to reveal how climate change is conceptualized in the context of international security theories and to compare the theoretical arguments of traditional and critical security approaches in this context. In line with this objective, the study was discussed with an interpreter perspective that includes a theoretical comparison and conceptual analysis. The data used in the study consist of academic literature, refereed magazines, books, corporate reports and strategic documents of international organizations. In this context, the works written on climate security, environmental threats and security theories, published between 1990 and 2024, were scanned. The mainly used databases are as follows:

- Scopus
- Web of Science (WOS)
- Google Scholar
- Jstor

In addition, the policy documents and security strategy documents of international organizations such as the United Nations (Flour), the European Union (EU), NATO and IPCC were included in the study. Criteria of Inclusion and Exchange

### Inclusive Criteria:

- The fact that it has been written in the theoretical framework of the discipline of international relations,
- Climate safety or environmental security themed,
- Being a refereed academic publication or official international organization certificate,
- It belongs to the post -1990 period (in line with the rise of the concept of climate security).

### Exchange Criteria:

- Popular media content, blog posts, technical engineering reports,
- Publications related to climate change but do not contain the security dimension,

Theoretical foundation weak and non -disciplined interpretations.

The collected sources were evaluated by thematic analysis method. Within the scope of this method, the approach of security theories to climate change is classified under certain conceptual themes. The main themes in the analysis are as follows:

- Definition and Scope of Security,
- State -centered threat perceptions,
- Human security and environmental justice,
- Securityization processes,
- Discourse transformation of international organizations.

In this context, the position of each theory or theoretical approach in the context of climate security has been analyzed at the

discourse level and in the normative framework. The study is limited only to literature -based analysis in order to provide theoretical depth; Empirical field data, case examination or quantitative analyzes are left out. In this context, findings are limited to inferences based on conceptual framework and academic literature. However, this approach provides an advantage in terms of comparison between theories and providing conceptual clarity.

## FINDINGS

### The Position of Environmental Threats in the Traditional Security Concept

In the discipline of international relations, security has been defined narrowly within the framework of military threats, state sovereignty and national interests for many years. This approach has been shaped by traditional security theories such as realism and neorealism; The state was accepted as the basic unit of security analysis (Waltz, 1979). Therefore, crises that do not have a direct military quality, border-exhausted and gradually developed over time, such as environmental threats, are excluded from this security paradigm. According to the realist approach, the international system is anarchic and states are obliged to ensure their safety. In this context, security; It has been associated with the protection of power balance, deterrence, alliances and military capacity (Morgenthau, 1948). Neorealists argue that the states struggle against external threats by carrying this frame to a more structural level (Waltz, 1979). In this approach, security threats should be concrete, direct and fast. However, the environmental threats that develop slowly, scattered effectively and collectively, such as climate change, are out of this definition (Dalby, 2002). Traditional security does not see environmental problems directly as a national security threat; It considers these problems as the subject of economy, development or environmental policies. For example, in the classical framework put forward by Stephen Walt in 1991, the inclusion of environmental issues within the scope of security activities was criticized on the grounds that theoretical purity would be impaired (Walt, 1991). According to this view, security activities should be limited to the military and strategic field. For this reason, environmental threats are secured only in the traditional approach:

- Environmental migrations that threaten national borders,
- Conflicts that may arise due to water resources,
- Weakening the state authority of environmental disasters,
- Ecological instability to prepare the ground for armed conflicts.

In this context, environmental threats are included in the security agenda only if the state has a direct impact on the internal order or sovereignty. The fact that the traditional security approach does not take environmental threats seriously has been subjected to intense criticism, especially since the 1990s. Copenhagen school has developed the approach of security sectors including five sectors such as environment, economy, society and politics, arguing that the concept of security cannot be limited only to military threats (Buzan, Wæver & De Wilde, 1998). In addition, the growth of the effects of the global climate crisis has made the inadequacy of traditional security understanding more visible. For example, environmental factors such as drought and exhaustion of water resources in the background of the Syrian civil war prove that environmental crises can produce direct and indirect security risks (Gleick, 2014). As a result, traditional security sees environmental threats as “secondary” or “indirect” security issues; However, this

IRASS Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies Vol-2, Iss-7 (July-2025): 6-11 approach is insufficient in the face of systemic, boundary-exaggerated and collective threats such as climate change. This theoretical limitation has prepared the ground for the development of alternative and more inclusive approaches in security studies; Human security, environmental justice and ethical security approaches have come to the forefront.

### **The Contribution of Critical Approaches such as the Copenhagen School, Aberystwyth School, and Paris School to Climate Security**

The narrow, state -centered and military -oriented framework of traditional security understanding has paved the way for the development of critical approaches, especially since the 1990s. These new security perspectives have dealt with a multi -layered phenomenon with its environmental, social, economic and human dimensions, rather than reducing security to external military threats only. In this context, Copenhagen School, Aberystwyth School and Paris School made significant theoretical contributions to climate security debates.

**Copenhagen School-Securityization Approach:** The most important contribution of Copenhagen School to security is the theory of security. According to this approach, it is possible for a phenomenon to become a security threat, rather than the objective characteristics of that phenomenon as a “existential threat ve and the social acceptance of this discourse (Buzan, Wæver & De Wilde, 1998). In this context, climate change is a “secure” issue with the discursive efforts of political actors, even if it is not a military quality. For example, the fact that the United Nations Secretary -General or NATO officials described the climate as a security threat justifies this process and transforms the agenda of the policy. This approach reveals that climate security is shaped not only by scientific data, but also by discourse and social construction processes. In addition, Copenhagen School is not only in the military field of security; It gives a theoretical ground to the multidimensional nature of the climate crisis by arguing that it should be analyzed in environmental, social, political, economic and technological sectors.

**Aberystwyth School-Normative and Human Security Perspective:** Aberystwyth School, adopting the tradition of critical theory in security studies, not the current order; It is based on the protection of people, freedom and justice (Booth, 2007). This approach argues that environmental threats should be considered not only in terms of the security of states, but also in the context of the right to life of individuals, social inequalities, global justice and exploitation relations. Climate safety According to this approach, not only the physical consequences of environmental changes, but also in terms of the rights of fragile groups (women, children, indigenous peoples), which are most affected by these changes, should be evaluated in terms of access to resources and power relations. The Aberystwyth school sees the climate crisis as a result of structural inequalities and forms of capitalist production and redefines security as an ethical responsibility field.

**Paris School-Security Practices and Micro-Figments:** Paris School sees security as an application, not a discourse, not a discourse (Bigo, 2002). This school examines how the actors, technologies and bureaucratic devices that manage security produce security in daily life. Climate safety in this context; It is shaped through various practices such as border controls, migration management, disaster scenarios, insurance mechanisms and data supervision. According to the Paris School, climate security (eg

IPCC reports), governance systems and transnational security bureaucracy (eg EU Climate Compliance Office, NATO Environmental Safety Units) form an intertwined security regime. The contribution of this school is to understand climate security not only through theoretical debates, but also with concrete practice practices. Thus, security is explained not only by “what it is said, but also by“ what it has done ”.

The common point of these three critical approaches is that they expand the reference object of security to individual, societies and nature, and to treat security not only military but an ethical, normative and managerial issue. Thus, climate change has become an increasingly legitimized security issue in the discipline of international relations.

- Thanks to critical approaches, climate safety;
- A broader definition of security,
- Multi -layer analysis levels,
- A approach based on human rights and justice,
- It is enriched with dimensions such as analysis of the practices of the practitioner actors.

### **Literature Discussions on the Relationship between Climate Change, Migration and Conflict**

Climate change deeply affects not only environmental balances, but also social structures, settlements and political relations. In particular, climatic effects such as decrease in water resources, drought, rise of sea level, decrease in agricultural production, forced individuals and communities to be displaced and this compulsory mobility can from time to time to trigger the dynamics of conflict (Reuveny, 2007). For this reason, the relationship between climate change, forced migration and violent conflicts in the literature has become an increasingly important field of discussion.

The approach that strongly advocates the claim of causality- “Environmental determinism”:

This approach sees climate change as the main reason for direct conflict and forced migration. In particular, from this perspective shaped around the themes such as resource scarcity, food insecurity and water wars, climate change functions as a catalyst of conflicts (Homer-Dixon, 1999). For example, it is emphasized that environmental deterioration observed in countries such as Sudan, Somalia and Nigeria combine with civil wars and ethnic tensions. Similarly, the extreme drought before the Syrian Civil War, the collapse of agricultural production and the acceleration of rural migration; It formed an important basis for the process of conflict (Gleick, 2014). Such examples show that environmental stress combines with social and political fragility and increases security risks.

**Critical approaches-Caution Against Simplification:** Some critical literature finds these causal associations excessive reduction and technocratic. He argues that migration and conflict emerged in much more complex socio-political contexts, that climate change may affect these processes but cannot be descriptive alone (Bettini, 2013). This perspective argues that concepts such as “climate refugees” reproduce the apolitical, reductionist and western-centered threat rhetoric. In this context, immigrants are seen as groups that are instrumentalized and excluded within the relations of power rather than climate victims. In addition, it is emphasized that factors such as lack of governance as much as climatic stress, social inequality and political exclusion

**Mixed Interaction Approach-Faculty of Multiple Models:**  
In recent years, developing literature, climatic-vomplation relationship, argues that it is a contextual and multi-dimensional interaction process, not linear and unidirectional. According to this approach, climate change triggers indirectly, such as the collapse of the agricultural economy, the rural poverty, the decline of state services; This may increase the risk of conflict if it is not managed (IDE, 2020). Especially factors such as weak state structures, low social resistance, ethnic divisions and limited adaptation capacity are critical thresholds that increase the potential of climate change into conflict. Therefore, the effects of climate change alone are not decisive, but when intersecting with other fragility, it constitutes a security risk.

The policy documents of international organizations such as the United Nations Security Council, the European Union and NATO are frequently emphasized. In these documents, it is stated that especially climatic migrations can pose a threat to international peace and stability, and measures such as early warning systems, durability strategies and disaster management of climate safety are proposed (ENC, 2021). Discussions in the literature show that climate change is neither a fully decisive reason nor a completely insignificant factor in migration and conflict relations. On the contrary, it should be accepted that the environmental stress caused by climatic changes can unite with social and political fragility to increase the risks, but this process is multidimensional. In this context, more holistic, multi-level and context-based analyzes are needed.

#### **The Place of Climate in the Security Discourse of International Organizations (UN, EU, NATO)**

Climate change has turned into a multidimensional problem that has settled not only on environmental policies but also the international security agenda. Since the beginning of the 2000s, leading international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have begun to define climate change among security threats; In strategic documents, speeches and action plans, he specially worked on this issue. This tendency shows that the process of securitization of climate is legitimized at the institutional level.

**United Nations (UN)-Human Security and Global Risk Framework:** The United Nations is one of the first institutional actors to define climate change as a threat to global peace and stability. The UN's approach on this issue is based on human safety and has developed a multi-layered security approach by associating climate change with facts such as food crisis, water insecurity, health risks and forced migration (UNDP, 2007). In 2007, the climate change was first brought to the agenda as an official security issue at the UN Security Council; In 2021, the issue was discussed more systematically. In the council minutes, it is stated that climate change can exacerbate the current conflicts, pave the way for new conflicts and make weak state structures more fragile (ENC, 2021). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) also described climate change as the larn the greatest threat to the sustainability of human development ;; He emphasized that environmental threats increase security risks when combined with social inequalities.

**The European Union (EU)-Normative Power and Strategic Transformation:** The European Union sees climate security discourse as the cornerstone of both foreign policy and internal environmental policies. The EU's approach has been built especially in a normative framework with the concepts of "Green Transformation", "Climate Diplomacy" and "Climate Justice". The 2008 EU Climate Change and International Security Declaration has clearly demonstrated that environmental changes increase security risks in areas such as migration, border disputes, resource competition and economic instability (European Commission, 2008). With this document, the EU has admitted that climate is a "power multiplier" (Threat Multiplier) in international relations; It has associated with fragile regions such as Africa and the Middle East. Within the scope of European Green Deal (European Green Deal), climate change is not only a environmental threat, but also as a versatile crisis with geopolitical, commercial and security dimensions.

To address the NATO-Climate threat from a military and strategic perspective: NATO has not seen climate change as a priority as a priority security problem as military threats for many years. In recent years, however, NATO's approach has changed especially on Russia's North Pole Policies, Energy Safety and Climate Migration. The NATO Climate Change and Safety Action Plan, published in 2021, shows that the Alliance gives a more institutional response to the climate crisis (NATO, 2021). The document has been associated with areas such as climate change, sustainability of NATO operations, fragility of military infrastructure, capacity to intervene in natural disasters and energy consumption. NATO describes the climate as a multiplier that complicates threats and transforms the strategic environment. In this respect, it coincides with the perspective of "security" of Copenhagen School. Although the UN, EU and NATO's climate security discourses vary in terms of institutional priorities and normative foundations, they recognize common points as a systematic risk of climate change. The UN has developed more human security, EU normative environmental leadership, and NATO has developed an approach on the axis of operational sustainability. These developments show that climate security gains legitimacy not only in the academic but also in international policy production and gaining a strategic dimension in global governance structures. At the same time, the discourses of these organizations offer important clues to how climate change is safe and what tools are tried to be managed.

## **CONCLUSION**

Climate change is now considered not only as an environmental problem in the discipline of international relations, but also as a multidimensional security threat. In this study, the concept of climate security was analyzed comparatively in the context of traditional and critical security theories. The findings show that the main differences between these two theoretical approaches contain deep structural decompositions not only in threat perception, but also in terms of the definition, scope and reference object of security. Traditional security theories, especially realism and neorealism interpret security in a state-centered, military and material threats; it either ignores the environmental threats of human beings, or only to the extent that it threatens the sovereignty of the state. This perspective is approaching the distance from being included in the security agenda because the climate crisis does not create a direct armed conflict. On the other hand, critical security approaches expand the

understanding of security and bring elements such as human safety, ecological justice, ethical responsibility and social fragility; It considers climate change as a manifestation of structural inequalities and global injustices in this context. Copenhagen school analyzes how environmental problems are discursively safe; The Aberystwyth School deals with climate security as an ethical issue and advocates a freedom -based security approach. In addition, the increase in climate change in recent years in the strategic documents of international organizations (UN, EU, NATO) shows that the concept of climate security is increasingly accepted not only in the academic level but also in policy -making processes. This can be considered as a sign of a paradigmatic shift in security studies. In this context, the study reveals that the concept of security has become a fixed and military structure and becomes a dynamic phenomenon that is increasingly integrated into socio-political and environmental dimensions. Climate safety contributes to the re -scratch of theoretical boundaries in the discipline of international relations, both the cause and result of this transformation.

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