

## Climate Security, the Amazon, and the Responsibility to Protect\*

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In this article, I briefly present the multilateral discussion on 'climate security' and its relation to the protection of the Amazon. First, the text points out the importance of the Amazon for keeping global climate balance, the drastic change to the environmental agenda of Brazilian diplomacy, and the growing call in international public opinion for an internationally coordinated action to reverse deforestation in the region. Next, it introduces the concept of 'climate security', its development within the United Nations Security Council, and its relation to the principle of responsibility to protect (R2P). Finally, based on contextual evidence, I carry out a prospective analysis of the narratives that might be constructed to justify applying this principle to the Brazilian Amazon. **Keywords:** Climate security; the Amazon; responsibility to protect; multilateralism.

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## Introduction: the destruction of the Amazon as an existential threat to humanity

We cyclically live the collective agony brought by apocalyptic prophecies saying that our lives will be destroyed by catastrophic events. Often, the pre-apocalyptic periods that we have collected over the past few decades have been followed by the announcement of our redemption within the terms of the system that generated the crisis itself. This was the case with the threat of mutual destruction by nuclear weapons during the Cold War, and it is with the Covid-19 pandemic and the environmental cataclysm. Although the climate apocalypse is currently an indisputable fact, it may not be the same for the discourse of environmental justice that occasionally accompanies it. One should understand that modern environmentalism makes use of apocalyptic narratives to diagnose the ecological crisis and puncture discourses of liberal progress with suggestive utopian visions to solve the problem (McNEISH, 2017).

Indeed, the report 'State of the Global Climate 2020' - published in early 2021 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the UN agency responsible for promoting international cooperation in climatology - states that, despite the relative decrease in emissions due to COVID-19 policies, the global climate was still changing at an alarming rate during the first year of the pandemic. From the humanitarian perspective, the situation is concerning. After decades of decline, the number of people suffering from food insecurity has increased due to a combination of factors such as conflicts, economic crisis, climate variability, and extreme environmental conditions. By the end of 2020, approximately 690 million people, or 9% of the world population, suffered from malnutrition, and more than 750 million, or approximately 10% of the population, were exposed to severe levels of food insecurity (that is, without the guarantee of at least three meals a day). In addition, it is estimated that over 50 million people have been doubly affected by environmental disasters such as floods, droughts, and storms. According to the report, the context of insecurity that was already serious before the pandemic tends to get worse when combined with the effects of climate change: "Climate-related events already pose risks to society through impacts on health, food and water security, as well as human security, livelihoods, economies,

infrastructure and biodiversity” (WORLD METEOREOLOGICAL ORGANIZATION, 2020, p. 34).

Because the Amazon plays a crucial role in absorbing carbon dioxide (the forest absorbs about 2 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year, which is approximately 5% of the planet's annual emissions), the region is at the center of the debate about reversing climate change<sup>1</sup>. However, it is clear today that, in addition to decreasing the gas absorption capacity, deforestation is currently releasing a significant additional amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and, as a result, accelerating the process of global warming (BRANDO et al., 2020). Moreover, according to climatologist Carlos Nobre, a member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), we might have already passed the tipping point where the rainforest could turn to savannah. Once this disastrous event occurs, an impressive amount of carbon dioxide will be released into the atmosphere, resulting in a temperature increase in the region, followed by the shrinking of Andean glaciers, the drying of Amazonian rivers, and the impossibility of agricultural production in the Brazilian Cerrado region<sup>2</sup>. Nobre's statement is consistent with the study 'Carbon and Beyond: The Biogeochemistry of Climate in Rapidly Changing Amazon', which suggests that the dynamics of gaseous exchanges between the Amazon Forest and the atmosphere is already negative, that is, we may have already passed the tipping point so that the emission of gases from the forest might have started to accelerate climatic change (COVEY et al., 2021).

The uncontrolled devastation of the Amazon is not an isolated threat when it comes to the global environment. But the fact remains that its destruction is no longer a purely national issue. It is an event with global repercussions and, therefore, it captures the attention of the public.

Although the Amazon Forest is spread over nine South American countries, 60% of its land is inside Brazil's territory, reaffirming the importance of Brazil's active engagement in preservation initiatives in particular and global climate security in general. However, the public in Brazil and elsewhere has witnessed with

<sup>1</sup>Available at <[https://news.mongabay.com/2019/11/amazon-deforestation-rises-to-11-year-high-in-brazil/#:~:text=While%20deforestation%20in%202019%20only,1%2C765%20square%20miles\)%20in%202012](https://news.mongabay.com/2019/11/amazon-deforestation-rises-to-11-year-high-in-brazil/#:~:text=While%20deforestation%20in%202019%20only,1%2C765%20square%20miles)%20in%202012)>. Accessed on April, 22, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Available at <<https://valor.globo.com/brasil/noticia/2021/02/05/savanizacao-da-amazonia-esta-mais-proxima-diz-nobre.ghtml>>. Accessed on April, 25, 2021.

astonishment the tragedy in the Amazon region and the neglect of Bolsonaro's government in protecting the most biodiverse ecosystem on Earth. According to the National Institute of Space Research (INPE), deforestation increased by 34% in 2019 (Bolsonaro's first year in office) when compared to the previous year; despite the economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the figures continued to rise in 2020<sup>3</sup>.

Other practical effects of climate change that could be driven by the destruction of the Amazon include loss of habitable and arable land due to droughts, melting ice and floods caused by rising sea levels or heavy storms, and forced migrations of hundreds of millions of people. Not to mention the risks to food supply chains and food security in developed and developing countries, as well as to energy supply due to dam collapse, droughts, and political and economic instability. Finally, there is the risk of future pandemics: humans are more exposed to new viruses because of deforestation and contact with new disease vectors found in the forest; it is known that "the Amazon has thousands of coronaviruses" (MESQUITA, 2020).

Despite these data, the government has been violating its constitutional obligations and international commitments while dismantling the scarce institutional structure for environmental protection available in the country. The Annual Budget Bill of 2021 - presented by the presidency to the National Congress - foresaw a 27.4% reduction in the budget of the Ministry of the Environment and its two bodies working on environmental inspection and firefighting (Ibama and ICMBio). This is the lowest budget proposed for the ministry in the past two decades. Similarly, although the devastation of the Amazon is driven by anthropogenic factors, that is, it is caused by human activity, the number of infraction notices issued by Ibama has been dropping dramatically in recent years. In 2019, 14,641 infraction

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<sup>3</sup>Dataset available at <[http://terrabrasilis.dpi.inpe.br/app/dashboard/deforestation/biomes/legal\\_amazon/rates](http://terrabrasilis.dpi.inpe.br/app/dashboard/deforestation/biomes/legal_amazon/rates)>. Accessed on April, 21, 2021.

notices were issued, while in 2020, there were 9,516<sup>4</sup>. This trend is accompanied by recurring complaints of political interference in the environmental agency<sup>5</sup>.

Today, this is how the Amazon is publicly and internationally discussed. The security of the forest is disputed as if the whole planet and life as we know it depended on it. The worsening of the devastation of the most diverse biome on Earth has increased domestic and external pressures for tackling the problem over the past few years. Apparently, both sources of pressure were kept on balance for some years. **Brazil accepted its obligation to protect the forest and took a leadership role on the environmental issue, becoming a respected reference in the area. With the election of a far-right government in 2019, this situation was reversed. The balance between internal and external pressures was lost when the country started to promote a new agenda for environmental exploitation.**

Brazil's international image has gradually shifted from an environmental leader to a country unable to face the challenge of protecting the Amazon, thus jeopardizing the environmental security of the entire planet. Such a shift increased international pressure for an effective solution. Since the dialogue between Brazil and other countries and international bodies has not achieved the desired result, questions are arising in international public opinion: what more could be done to prevent an environmental catastrophe since the Brazilian government does not cooperate? At times, this question seems to bring a once impossible answer: multilateral action on Brazil. Some of the proposed solutions are drastic and include supporting an international intervention against a government deliberately acting in favor of worsening the environmental crisis<sup>6</sup>. Experts and policymakers consider using the principle of responsibility to protect (R2P) by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to take such international action. The expected goal would be to force Brazil to review its stance on environmental policies, but also to hold the

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<sup>4</sup>Available at <<https://www.oeco.org.br/noticias/ministerio-do-meio-ambiente-tem-menor-orcamento-das-ultimas-duas-decadas/#:~:text=Se%20aprovado%2C%20o%20minist%C3%A9rio%20ter%C3%A1,ambiental%20e%20combate%20a%20inc%C3%AAndios.&text=Est%C3%A3o%20previstos%20R%24127%20milh%C3%B5es,de%20R%24193%2C9%20milh%C3%B5es>>. Accessed on April, 27, 2021.

<sup>5</sup>Available at <<https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/salles-atuou-de-forma-explicita-favor-de-madeireiros-diz-delegado-da-pf-afastado-24981339>>. Accessed on April, 27, 2021.

<sup>6</sup>Available at <<https://www.standard.co.uk/comment/comment/amazon-inferno-is-a-threat-to-us-all-and-the-un-must-lead-the-intervention-a4225006.html>>. Accessed on April, 28, 2021.

international community responsible for a crisis that cannot be tackled by a single developing country.

Although unusual at first glance, the idea of applying the R2P principle has gained momentum and tends to appear on the list of arguments used against Brazil in multilateral talks. That said, to answer the question of whether R2P could be applied to the Brazilian case in order to protect the Amazon, one should know the meaning of climate security and the way in which it relates to the R2P principle, as well as its application by the Security Council. Finally, I will offer a prospective analysis of three possible scenarios for the implementation of R2P in the Brazilian Amazon. In the final section, I offer some contextual evidence on the performance of external agents who promote the securitization of the environment.

### Climate security and multilateralism

Unlike other security risks, climate change came to be a collective concern not because of a major event or particular crisis such as a nuclear or terrorist attack. It became a security issue because of two processes: on the one hand, political-military efforts were reduced following the development of a more mature relationship between the two superpowers as of the 1970s. On the other hand, the increased access to information and rapid diffusion of public opinion turned climate change into a topic of public debate alongside complementary agendas such as identity, human, and food security.

The concept of climate or environmental security was built around the prospective debate on climate change and its effects on land, biodiversity, atmosphere, water, and forests. This shift in consciousness stems from the accumulation and overlapping of scientific research findings and political agendas that had very little to do with the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

In fact, the environmental issue gained ground on the multilateral agenda with the Stockholm Conference in 1972, and it became a priority in 1987 with the publication of the report 'Our Common Future', headed by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) of the United Nations (UN). The document introduced the concept of sustainable development - which is based on the conscious exploitation of natural resources - and stressed the possibility of

combining environmental preservation with economic growth. To this end, the report offered three recommendations that remain valid to this day: to recognize the global and cross-border nature of environmental issues, to emphasize the need for international cooperation to design and implement an economic revolution based on environmental preservation, and to promote awareness and commitment of all sectors of society to this enterprise.

A recommendation made by this report in its section 'Environmental Stress as a Source of Conflict', however, received little attention in international discussions over the following decades. According to this document, "Environmental threats to security are now beginning to emerge on a global scale. The most worrisome of these stem from the possible consequences of global warming caused by the atmospheric build-up of carbon dioxide and other gases [...] Slowing, or adapting to, global warming is becoming an essential task to reduce the risks of conflict" (UNDP, 2021).

This was not a trivial statement, as it still challenges the traditional conception of security characteristic of the main national and international defense agencies, which are more concerned with the warlike nature of states (due to the accumulation of power) than with the multiple threats to life. In fact, the recommendations on security of 'Our Common Future' were ignored in multilateral talks in the decades that followed, from the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) - also called Rio 92, which produced the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) - until the 2015 Paris Agreement. Despite being discussed in numerous panels, workshops, and sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COPs) annual meetings, climate security has never been systematically and definitively addressed by the UN. The closest we have come to a practical result was in 2018 with the interagency initiative called Climate Security Mechanism, which was led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)<sup>7</sup>. Climate

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<sup>7</sup>United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Supporting climate security. Available at <<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development/peace/conflict-prevention/climate-security.html>>. Accessed on April, 30, 2021.



Security Mechanism remains an unfulfilled promise to develop a methodology for assessing climate-related security risks.

As the understanding of the environmental issue improved, it became clear to countries that they were facing a transnational challenge. The issue should thus be discussed as part of the agenda on collective security. The basic assumption of collective security is that “the main threats to international security come not from individual states but from global problems shared by the entire international community: nuclear war, the heavy economic burden of militarism and war, disparities in living standards within and among nations, and global environmental degradation” (PORTER and BROWN, 1991, p. 109). Consequently, it is acknowledged that certain phenomena pose a threat that could destabilize peace and order in the international system and, therefore, should be collectively addressed, even if the threat is located in one or a few states of the system.

As Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen state in ‘The Evolution of the International Security Studies’, “processes of institutionalization, such as the joint organizing of a program on Environmental Security in the 1980s by PRIO and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) also worked to situate environmental security as one of the first sectoral expansions of national security beyond the military” (BUZAN and HANSE, 2009, p. 129). According to the authors, if the predicted catastrophic scenarios of climate change or global epidemic are confirmed, these events “will reshuffle the cards with which [the International Security Studies] ISS has mainly been played since 1945” (BUZAN and HANSE, 2009, pp. 268-269). Ten years later, the Covid-19 pandemic and increased devastation of the Amazon seem to confirm their predictions.

The consolidation of the concept of climate security brings important implications for the framing of the current situation in the Amazon as a matter of security. In view of the complex chain of interrelated events that exist between the Amazon and all dimensions of human activity in particular and the ecosystem in general, any threat to the survival of the Amazon represents an existential threat to an unlimited variety of referent objects that require protection. It is precisely for its multifaceted nature that the Amazon is valuable; however, it is not possible to separate its parts without breaking the forest’s delicate balance. The image of a devastated Amazon crystallizes the existential threat to humanity, and as such, it



should be the focus of attention of the body that, according to the UN Charter, is entrusted with the task of ensuring collective security, that is the Security Council. In other words, we could say that the formula contains the 'perception of an existential threat' (devastation of the Amazon) 'against a referent object' (the future of humanity).

### **Responsibility to protect the environment**

An action by the Security Council in the face of an existential threat necessarily involves mobilizing the available discursive resources to justify such an action. I will later show how instrumental the Council's work has been in creating the necessary conditions to frame climate change as a threat within the Council itself. First, however, I introduce the R2P principle, indicating its potential enabling role in framing the environmental threats that require urgent responses within the Council while also offering a course of action to the Council itself.

Responsibility to protect embodies the normative principle developed by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in 2001 to govern cases of international humanitarian intervention. The then newly elected UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan commissioned the report to enhance the UN's reform efforts after a decade of failure to prevent the massacres in Somalia (1993), Rwanda (1994), and Srebrenica (1995). The R2P principle was inspired by the right to intervene (*droit d'ingérence*) and originally designed to help the international community draw clear limits for action in the face of atrocious crimes. The responsibility for ensuring the preservation of life - distributed between each state and the community of states - is organized in three concentric pillars. The first pillar establishes that the primary responsibility for defending and safeguarding the lives of populations rests with each state, which would have a moral obligation to protect its populations from four crimes of mass atrocities: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. The second pillar establishes that the international community is responsible for encouraging and assisting states in upholding their individual responsibilities. Finally, the third pillar establishes that, if a state manifestly neglects or fails to protect its populations, the international community must prepare to take the necessary collective measures, quickly and decisively, in accordance with the UN Charter. Notably, the notion of 'protection'

entails the act of preventing or ceasing an act of atrocity - a prospective element is thus present in the application of R2P, as was in the case of Libya in 2011, as we will see next.

In 2005, R2P was adopted by the UN General Assembly with World Summit resolution A/RES/63/308 and added to the multilateral terminology for the prevention of atrocities. It was most famously – and controversially - used in March 2011 when the Security Council decided to use the language of R2P to authorize a military intervention led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Libya. It is noteworthy that Brazil held a temporary seat at the Security Council in 2011. Along with Russia, China, Germany, and India, Brazil abstained from voting for Resolution 1973, and strongly opposed applying the language of R2P and using force against another sovereign member state. According to the Brazilian mission to the UN at the time, despite recognizing the excesses of Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi and the risk of a massacre in Benghazi, Brazil insisted on the need to exhaust all peaceful means available to the Council before authorizing an uncertain military operation that would most likely lead to the escalation of the conflict. This episode led the Brazilian representation to present to the Council a conceptual note entitled ‘responsibility while protecting’ (RwP)<sup>8</sup>, criticizing the instrumental and unreasonable use of R2P. The Brazilian position could be summarized in the medical principle ‘primum non nocere’, according to which the treatment of a disease cannot be worse than the disease itself. In other words, an international intervention by the Security Council intended to prevent or stop an atrocity cannot have the side effect of creating even more suffering than it was expected to alleviate.

Despite the stigma associated with R2P following the intervention in Libya, the principle continued to be used exponentially by the Security Council. It was invoked in at least 90 Council resolutions<sup>9</sup> concerning crises in the Central Africa Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Except for the Syrian case, R2P was casually used to reinforce the international norm of shared responsibility. In fact, the continued use

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<sup>8</sup>Responsibility while Protecting: Elements for a Development and Promotion of a Concept, A/66/551 S/2011/701. November, 11, 2011.

<sup>9</sup>Data available at <<https://www.globalr2p.org/resources/un-security-council-resolutions-and-presidential-statements-referencing-r2p/>>. Accessed on April, 30, 2021.

of the principle helped build a better understanding of it and a broader consensus around its less controversial elements. Not by chance, its use came to be associated with other principles (such as the protection of civilians and peacebuilding), and normative spheres (such as the UN Human Rights Council reports and resolutions)<sup>10</sup>. Resolutions of regular UN mandates for peacekeeping operations also came to incorporate this principle. Indeed, since 2011, two trends have been observed in the development of the R2P norm within the Security Council. First, although the use of R2P is still restricted to the four crimes of mass atrocities, its scope has been increasingly extended to include a preventive dimension of the norm. In other words, it became part of the language of multilateral security that is used to justify the actions of the Security Council - actions that may deter or discourage those atrocities. Secondly, since 2011, R2P has not been used to authorize the use of force against a member-state.

With respect to the relation between R2P and the securitization of climate change, it should be noted that R2P is a principle that applies to a state - whenever this state is the main responsible for protecting its populations - or to a group of states whose responsibility is shared. Although R2P foresees severe punishment to the state where the atrocity occurs, the same is not true for the states who are involved in the conflict or benefit from it in some way. One should understand that R2P does not apply to a group of states as if they were directly responsible for a massacre. That is to say, if a 'responsibility to protect the Amazon' were to be implemented, it would necessarily apply only to the Amazon countries, exempting other countries that are directly or indirectly benefiting from the exploitation of the forest. For instance, R2P would not be applied to European Union countries or China, regardless of their consumption of food whose production is linked to deforestation in the Amazon.

As previously mentioned, although the connection between R2P and environmental protection is not impossible to be achieved, establishing such a link is unlikely and would require a certain degree of creativity. This is because this principle has never been used in response to environmental threats (EVANS, 2009), and it has always been used to protect civilian populations from mass atrocities. For

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<sup>10</sup>Data available at <<https://www.globalr2p.org/resources/un-human-rights-council-resolutions-referencing-r2p/>>. Accessed on April, 30, 2021.

this reason, it focuses on preventing and responding to genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing. Furthermore, the responsibility to protect is not equivalent to the use of force. Several forms of collective action can be taken to create the necessary pressure for a country to reconsider its criminal activities, ranging from a condemnatory statement to economic sanctions (JÄRVINIEMI, 2019).

Nevertheless, as with other political languages within the UN Security Council, R2P has been shaped by the interests at play within the Council (ELLIOT, 2003; GILLEY and KINSELLA, 2015; WELSH, 2019). In practice, the UN Security Council has associated R2P to a much more diverse list of atrocities than the four above-mentioned crimes. Over the past ten years, the concept has increasingly been used in discussions about unorthodox global threats such as terrorism, corruption, and the destruction of humanity's cultural and natural heritage<sup>11</sup>. As we will see, the principle underwent a process of adaptation that allowed for it to be used on intervening variables in the relationship between a state's environmental policy and the environmental disaster itself. That said, as a prospective exercise on the issue, we identify three theses that might eventually be used against Brazil in the future if everything else remains the same.

### United Nations Security Council

In 2021, the UN Security Council recognized climate change as a multiplier of threats<sup>12</sup>, a notion close to the original idea of environmental security expressed in 'Our Common Future' in 1987, which stated that environmental issues could be among the causes and consequences of conflicts that threaten international peace and security. This means that the Council is moving towards the recognition that environmental factors are intervening variables in the construction of what should be understood as a threat. Two important conclusions follow from this. First, the Council still does not recognize environmental changes as an independent variable in the construction of the threat. Therefore, climate change would not in itself trigger an action by the Council - differently from what is expected to happen for the four

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<sup>11</sup>Data available for consultation at <<https://www.globalr2p.org/resources/>>. Accessed on April, 30, 2021.

<sup>12</sup>Available at <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/01/1031322>>. Accessed on April, 30, 2021.

crimes of mass atrocities originally envisaged by R2P in 2005. However, and this leads us to the second conclusion, once the Council recognizes climate change as a multiplier of threats but not as the main source of the threat, it is indirectly acknowledging that climate change is caused by human activity, therefore allowing states to be held responsible for exacerbating these changes. Again, once an ongoing - or 'upcoming' - humanitarian disaster is established, the Council could mobilize its resources to act.

If we take the report 'Our Common Future' (1987) as a starting point, it took more than 30 years for this notion to take root in the Council. In reality, the environmental security issue entered the Council's agenda only in 2007 - and with much disagreement among the member states. According to Russia, the "Council should only deal with the consideration of questions that directly relate to its mandate" (UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL, 2007, p.17). As for China, climate change "could have certain security implications, but, generally speaking, it was, in essence, an issue of sustainable development" (Idem, p.12). Representing the broad coalition of developing countries known as Group of 77, Pakistan stated that discussing the environmental issue at the Security Council would represent a distortion of the principles of the UN Charter. This country also emphasized the importance of taking the issue to other UN traditional bodies, namely the General Assembly.

It was only in 2011 that discussions on the issue of climate change and security were resumed in the Security Council. At that time, Germany recalled the statement by then President of Nauru Marcus Stephen - who was representing a group of other Pacific islands - saying that climate change represented a "threat to international peace and security" (UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL, 2011a, p.23) comparable to nuclear proliferation and terrorism. For its part, the United States, then under the Obama administration, advocated for a broader approach to the threats on which the Security Council should act, including climate-related threats. However, Russia and China maintained their position that the issue was a matter of development, not security. Finally, the discussion led to the adoption of a Presidential Statement (S/PRST/2011/15) expressing a middle-ground position. According to this statement, "The Security Council expresses its concern that possible adverse effects of climate change may, in the long run, aggravate

certain existing threats to international peace and security” (UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL, 2011b, p.1). Although seemingly unambitious, this was the first time in the 70 years of the Council’s existence that the language of environmental security was used.

It is also noteworthy that, on the two occasions in which the issue was discussed - in 2007 and 2011 - Brazil held a temporary seat on the Security Council. Recognized for its multilateral efforts and technological advances in biofuel, Brazil marked its position in 2007 by emphasizing the need to acknowledge that each group of countries bears different shares of historical responsibility for global warming - thus creating a division between industrialized and developing countries. The country’s position against the securitization of the environmental issue and in favor of discussing it in the UN General Assembly has also been repeatedly mentioned in other international forums. According to the Brazilian representative, the debate on the issue should take place in the General Assembly. Its view can be summarized as follows:

The debate at the United Nations should not seek to become a substitute for the negotiations in the context of the Climate Change Convention and the Kyoto Protocol. It might, nonetheless, add to the political perspective of the debate and underline issues of utmost importance for developing countries, such as the recognition of the historical responsibilities and the funding of adaptation measures in the context of both the “polluter pays” and “common but differentiated responsibilities” principles. (BRAZIL, 2007).

At that moment, supported by the propositions established by the Kyoto Protocol, Brazil reinforced its position as an environmental leader who represented the interests of developing countries. The country recognized the urgency of the issue but stressed its inalienable political character as opposed to a possible attempt to securitize the issue and, therefore, to leave no room for discussion.

During the 2011 discussions, the Brazilian representative repeated the speech of four years earlier and added that there was still no solid evidence to ascertain what would be the consequences of climate change for international security. According to the record, “the possible security implications of climate change were far less obvious [than between climate change/security and

development], as environmental impacts did not threaten international peace and security on their own” (UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL, 2011a, p.8).

According to the study ‘What can the UN Security Council do on Climate and Security?’, led by the Climate Security Expert Network, a growing number of resolutions, open debates, and Arria-formula meetings<sup>13</sup> have been held since 2007 to develop a collective understanding of international and environmental security and identify what actions are available to the Council. (VIVEKANANDA et al., 2020) Among the most recent Security Council resolutions on the subject is Resolution 2349<sup>14</sup> on Lake Chad. Issued in 2017, it recognized that adverse effects of climate and ecological changes, such as water shortages, drought, land degradation, desertification, and food security contribute to political instability in the region.

In 2018, four other Council resolutions addressed similar cases. Resolution 2408<sup>15</sup> on Somalia resumed the Presidential Statement (S/PRST/2011/15) to express concern about the link between climate change and the worsening of the humanitarian crisis in the country. In this resolution, the Council sees the environmental issue as one of the variables to be considered by the UN mission in Somalia, along with other unconventional concerns such as the protection of civilians and counterterrorism, that is, items that have been added to the Council’s agenda as of the 2000s. Resolution 2423<sup>16</sup> on Mali has a section dedicated to the environmental issue, in which it recognizes that the adverse effects of climate change and environmental disasters carry security implications, thus undermining the country’s stability. And finally, Resolution 2429 on Darfur maintains the tone and adds a request for the UN Secretary-General to undertake risk assessments and

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<sup>13</sup>Security Council open debates are ordinary meetings conducted by the [president] of the Council (one-month mandates) to discuss the Council’s activities or examine specific issues, depending on the Council and presidency’s agenda. In addition to the 15 member states that make up the Council, other member states, specialists, and representatives of international bodies are allowed to speak to the Council with its authorization. Arria formula is the name given to informal meetings held by members of the Security Council on various matters directly or indirectly related to the Council’s prerogatives according to the United Nations Charter of 1945. Arria-formula meetings usually set the tone and interpretation that the Council is likely to adopt on a matter that has not yet reach a consensus within the body.

<sup>14</sup>United Nations Security Council (UNSC). S/RES/2349 (2017). March, 31, 2017. Available at <[https://undocs.org/S/RES/2349\(2017\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2349(2017))>. Accessed on April, 30, 2021.

<sup>15</sup>United Nations Security Council (UNSC). S/RES/2408 (2018). March, 27, 2018. Available at <[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2408\(2018\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2408(2018))>. Accessed on March, 27, 2018.

<sup>16</sup>United Nations Security Council (UNSC). S/RES/2423 (2018). June, 28, 2018. Available at <[https://undocs.org/S/RES/2423\(2018\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2423(2018))>. Accessed on April, 30, 2021.



risk management strategies related to environmental factors. These were the first occasions in which the Council recognized a relationship between the effects of climate change and national and regional stability.

Coincidentally, the above-mentioned resolutions refer to three peace operations authorized by the Security Council to resolve local disputes, stabilize the areas, and protect civilians. These resolutions were adopted based on Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which gives the Council the authority to decide on the use of force in international relations. This, however, is not an unprecedented initiative. Over the years the Council has adopted resolutions that are progressively more comprehensive, permissive, and aggressive, in which non-conventional security language such as ‘child protection’, ‘cultural heritage’, and, currently, ‘climate security’, is frequently used.

Finally, it should be noted that the link between Chapter VII and the environmental language within the Council was first established by Resolution 687 of 1991. That was when the body recognized that Iraq was “liable under international law for any direct loss, damage - including environmental damage and depletion of natural resources - or injury to foreign governments, nationals and corporations as a result of its unlawful invasion and occupation of Kuwait” (UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL, 1991, p.14). Throughout the 1990s, a series of resolutions helped bring the climate issue into the Council, usually through the recognition that natural resources played a strategic role in the conflicts arising in some countries. Similarly, Resolution 1625 of 2005 was important in establishing a connection between conflict prevention and the monitoring of natural resources exploitation, particularly in African countries.

Although the Security Council is gradually opening up to the agenda on environmental security, this trend should not be overestimated. In what concerns climate change, recent discussions within the Council recognize the need to avoid raising the average global temperature by more than 1.5°C in order to prevent potential humanitarian catastrophes. However, the body’s stance on climate security still seems to be a long way from naming the major actors responsible for accelerating climate change and ecological imbalances. Indeed, the Security Council’s approach to climate change focuses on its consequences, not its causes. This was the case for the High-Level Open Debate on Climate and Security held by

the Security Council on February 23, 2021. Despite the commonly held idea that the world is facing the ‘collapse of everything’<sup>17</sup>, the UK-led meeting focused on topics such as peacebuilding and climate-related conflict drivers but avoided discussing the shared responsibility of member states<sup>18</sup>.

### **Three theses for a crime**

#### **Ecocide**

At first glance, protecting the Amazon may sound like protecting the fauna and flora from extermination. This is the ‘ecocide’ prevention thesis (GREENE, 2019), which refers to when human activity violates the principles of environmental justice by systematically damaging or destroying ecosystems or endangering the health and well-being of a species (including humans). Ecocide is an idea of the 1970s, but it is still not recognized as an international crime by the United Nations (AXWORTHY and ROCK, 2009). To assume that the lives of plants and animals are as sacred as those of humans seems yet a distant reality in the history of diplomacy.

However, an international action based on the R2P principle and on international standards of non-intervention is less likely to be driven by the ecocide thesis. The industrialized countries that currently support an environmental agenda are precisely those that most destroyed their forests during their industrialization process (MARCHAND, 2016). To a large extent, these countries became economic powers as a consequence of wiping out their natural resources or doing so in their former colonies.

#### **Cultural genocide or ethnocide**

Cultural genocide or ethnocide is the most recent – and most fragile - thesis in the current context. Cultural genocide or cultural cleansing is not an international crime recognized by international law. It is also terminologically inconsistent since ‘genocide’ means ‘the extermination of the people’, with ethnocide being the most appropriate term. Moreover, a consensus has not been reached on the meaning of

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<sup>17</sup>Available at <<http://webtv.un.org/watch/maintenance-of-international-peace-and-security-climate-and-security-security-council-open-vtc/6234686966001/>>. Accessed on April, 30, 2021.

<sup>18</sup>Available at <<http://webtv.un.org/watch/maintenance-of-international-peace-and-security-climate-and-security-security-council-open-vtc/6234686966001/>>. Accessed on April, 30, 2021.

cultural genocide. One of the most adopted definitions is from the Armenian Genocide Museum, which defines it as “acts and measures undertaken to destroy nations ‘or ethnic groups’ culture... [through] national, spiritual, and cultural destruction” (“THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE MUSEUM” FOUNDATION, 2021).

Nonetheless, since we are conducting here a prospective analysis to identify ideal types of arguments that could be mobilized to justify applying R2P to the Amazon, this thesis should not be promptly discarded. From this perspective, the approval of Resolution 2347<sup>19</sup> by the Security Council in 2017 was a historical decision, as it stated that the destruction, trafficking, and smuggling of cultural heritage and archaeological and religious sites are to be considered war crimes under the 1999 Rome Statute and thus liable to condemnation by the International Criminal Court.

Although there is a widely accepted distinction between cultural and natural heritage, both go hand in hand with the 1972 Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage. In the Convention itself, culture and nature are combined, for instance by stating that a natural heritage can be defined by its ‘beauty’ or ‘aesthetic value’, and that cultural heritage can also be defined by the ‘combined works of nature and of men’ with recognized etymological or anthropological value.

In 2003, UNESCO recognized the Central Amazon Conservation Complex in the heart of the State of Amazonas as a natural heritage of humanity<sup>20</sup>. Coincidentally, in January 2021, the minister of the environment, Ricardo Salles, announced that the private sector will be allowed to exploit the area. The idea is for the national parks of Anavilhanas and Jaú to be included in the federal government’s Investment Partnerships Program<sup>21</sup>. This fact will not go unnoticed by enthusiasts of the cultural genocide strategy.

As previously mentioned, it has been a common practice of the Security Council to use R2P language when referring to other agendas that are indirectly associated with the four crimes of atrocity envisaged at the World

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<sup>19</sup>Available at <<https://en.unesco.org/news/security-council-adopts-historic-resolution-protection-heritage>>. Accessed on April, 28, 2021.

<sup>20</sup>Available at <<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/998/>>. Accessed on April, 28, 2021.

<sup>21</sup>Available at <<https://www.gov.br/pt-br/noticias/meio-ambiente-e-clima/2021/01/parques-do-sul-do-pais-passam-por-leilao-de-concessao>>. Accessed on 28, April, 2021.

Summit 2015. Therefore, it is not surprising that Resolution 2347, which is celebrated for expanding the notion of war crimes to include humanity's heritage, directly employs R2P language in its text. The resolution says:

[The Security Council] Stresses that Member States have the primary 'responsibility in protecting' their cultural heritage and that efforts to protect cultural heritage in the context of armed conflicts should be in conformity with the Charter, including its purposes and principles, and international law, and should respect the sovereignty of all States;(emphasis added) (UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COOUNCIL, 2017, p. 04).

In other words, the primary responsibility for the protection of cultural resources lies with each state individually. The logical question is: what is understood by cultural and natural heritage of humanity, and who defines it? Also, what should be the consequences for a country that fails to fulfill its 'responsibility to protect its cultural heritage'? Since the Brazilian Amazon is home to more than a hundred indigenous peoples and languages - many of which risk extermination or face cultural and religious persecution - and considering that Brazil has one of the largest and most profitable markets for smuggling wild animals and natural resources (such as wood, seeds, flowers, fruits, and a wide range of biological material), could the country be found in violation of its responsibility to protect its cultural assets?

### **Genocide and crimes against humanity**

Finally, the last thesis - a humanitarian thesis - speaks of the responsibility to protect Brazilians from other Brazilians. That is, to protect native populations from a genocide that has been overlooked or even assisted by parts of the government itself. Equally controversial, this last argument is even more distanced from the traditional ecological agenda than the others, but it is the one most likely to be accepted multilaterally.

This thesis began to take shape in recent years as a result of an intricate network of transnational actors, and its use in Brazil dates back to Dilma Rousseff's government. In 2012, NGOs and human rights activists started to denounce the government of the Workers' Party (PT) in multilateral forums of the UN

and the Organization of American States (OAS). The complaints – which referred to the construction of the Belo Monte dam and its socio-environmental impacts on the Amazon region - were submitted to the UN Human Rights Council and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and characterized the Brazilian government's actions against its native populations as systematic human rights violations<sup>22</sup>. The goal was to generate sufficient outside pressure to overcome the internal resistance of the Brazilian state.

Since Bolsonaro took office, the number of complaints has increased to an unpredictable level<sup>23</sup>. The sharp rise in the number of murders in rural areas and on indigenous land has been the object of complaints against Bolsonaro's government in national and international forums. Even the government's neglect in protecting and vaccinating indigenous peoples against COVID-19 has been characterized as a government strategy to eliminate native peoples and weaken the opposition to environmental destruction<sup>24</sup>. The UN Human Rights Council is allowed to use the IACHR reports or issue its own reports on human rights violations or atrocity crimes in Brazil and send such evidence to the Security Council<sup>25</sup>. In fact, if the Council decides to use the R2P principle in the Amazon, this could be the last stage of the process.

In short, this exploratory exercise was not intended to encompass the multiple dimensions of each of these three theses, nor does it affirm that these are the only theses that could be mobilized to justify applying the R2P principle to climate-related risks in general – or to Brazil in particular. A wide range of possibilities exists between the humanitarian and environmental versions of R2P when applying the principle to the Amazon. In the first case, the norm is well established, while in the second, it is still developing.

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<sup>22</sup>Available at <<https://www.conectas.org/noticias/nota-publica-de-apoio-a-decisao-que-suspende-a-licenca-de-belo-monte>>. Accessed on April, 27, 2021.

<sup>23</sup>Available at <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/13/brazil-institutions-stand-bolsonaro>>. Accessed on April, 28, 2021.

<sup>24</sup>Available at <<https://www.conectas.org/en/news/new-study-exposes-federal-government-strategy-to-spread-covid-19>>. Accessed on April, 25, 2021.

<sup>25</sup>Available at <<https://www.socioambiental.org/en/noticias-socioambientais/isa-report-at-the-un-denounces-high-risk-of-genocide-of-isolated-indigenous-peoples>>. Accessed on April, 25, 2021.

## Securitizing actors in action

Finally, I briefly present some of the main securitizing actors engaged in shaping international public opinion so that the current environmental crisis in the Amazon is perceived as a civilizational threat. Some of these actors are members of the Security Council, acting as strategic agents within the process of securitization of new threats. In August 2019, Brazil was directly mentioned for the first time on this issue when researcher Stephen Walt expressed the idea of mobilizing R2P to justify the use of force against Brazil in his essay 'Who Will Save the Amazon (and How)?'. The eminent Harvard scholar brought R2P back into the discussion and declared: "It's only a matter of time until major powers try to stop climate change by any means necessary [...] Brazil isn't a true great power, and threatening it with either economic sanctions or even the use of force if it refused to protect the rainforest might be feasible" (WALT, 2019, p. 01). Walt (2019) seems to have predicted what would come next.

A few days later, President of France Emmanuel Macron declared the need to discuss the internationalization of the Amazon and possible intervention to protect the forest. In August 2019, in the face of extensive fires in the Amazon region, he declared that the G7 should discuss giving the Amazon an international status. According to Macron, the protection of the forest would be a real issue if a sovereign state were to take concrete measures that are clearly against the interest of the planet<sup>26</sup>.

This attack led to a reaction by the Brazilian government, which has put into question the data from national and international space agencies, claiming that this was a 'fabricated' crisis intended to limit Brazil's sovereignty over the Amazon and its resources<sup>27</sup>. Speaking to the UN Security Council, the minister of foreign affairs of Brazil at the time, Ernesto Araujo, denounced the link between environmental protection and totalitarian multilateralism<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup>Available at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-g7-summit-amazon-idUSKCN1VD2AM>>. Accessed on April, 30, 2021.

<sup>27</sup>Available at <<http://funag.gov.br/index.php/en/component/content/article?id=3095>>. Accessed on April, 30, 2021.

<sup>28</sup>Available at <<http://funag.gov.br/index.php/en/component/content/article?id=3172>>. Accessed on April, 30, 2021.

It is worth remembering that France has a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and is the greatest enthusiast in applying the R2P principle for the prevention of atrocities around the world. Encouraged by President Macron, French environmental actors increased the pressure to turn ecocide into an international crime. In the words of the French president, “There is an ecocide taking place at the Amazon, and it’s not only in Brazil” (BARROUX, 2020). Macron has also supported movements that sought to frame the destruction of the Amazon and other environmental crimes around the world as “acts of ecocide”<sup>29</sup>. Other prominent environmental leaders endorsed the campaign, such as Greta Thunberg and Pope Francis. According to the pope, ecocide is “the massive contamination of air, land and water resources, the large-scale destruction of flora and fauna, and any action capable of producing an ecological disaster or destroying an ecosystem” (SPEECH POPE FRANCIS, 2019). The head of the Catholic Church also suggested that ecocide is a threat to international security as he said that “This is a fifth category of crimes against peace, which should be recognized as such by the international community” (Ibidem). Finally, the papal bull even suggested that the crime of ecocide is a ‘sin’ for Catholics.

After the altercation with France, Brazil clashed with China, another permanent member of the Security Council. China is Brazil’s largest trading partner, interested in expanding its economic activities - such as the construction of hydroelectric dams and infrastructure for the transportation of grains - in the Amazon region. However, the good relationship between the two countries was shaken in 2020 by recurrent episodes of xenophobia against the Chinese perpetrated by members of Bolsonaro’s family and former minister of education Abraham Weintraub<sup>30</sup>.

Brazil’s situation further deteriorated after another permanent member of the Security Council stepped in and expressed dissatisfaction with the country. During his presidential campaign in 2020, President-elect of the United States Joe Biden declared that he would lead an initiative for an international fund of 20 billion

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<sup>29</sup>Available at <<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/ecocide-movement-pushes-new-international-crime-environmental-destruction-n1263142>>. Accessed on April, 30, 2021.

<sup>30</sup>Available at <<https://www.france24.com/en/20200406-brazil-minister-offends-china-with-racist-virus-tweet>>. Accessed on April, 30, 2021.



dollars for Brazil to stop ‘tearing down the rainforest’ and warned that if Brazil fails to protect it, the country would suffer ‘significant economic consequences’<sup>31</sup>.

Finally, William Hague published his neocolonial argument in the journal ‘Environmental Affairs’ in 2021, arguing that British armed forces are likely to be deployed to act on environmentally related security and human rights issues in the near future. In the words of the former British Foreign Secretary (2010-2014): “In the past, the UK has been willing to use all of our firepower, both military and diplomatic, to secure and extract fossil fuels. But in the future, the UK will need to use all of its diplomatic capacity to ensure that these resources are not used and that natural environments are protected [...]” (HAGUE, 2021, p. 25). This insinuation about the use of force is clearly directed at Brazil. According to Hague (2021), it will be increasingly hard for the UK to solve the dilemma between easing up the pressure on “climate change delinquents like Brazil or forget[ing] about your trade deals” (Idem, p. 25) and do something about it.

## Conclusions

Since the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015 and the consequent recognition that countries urgently need to cut emissions, the notions of climate emergency and climate security have become increasingly popular in international public opinion. The first climate emergency was declared in December 2016 by the City of Darebin, in Australia. By April 2021, 1,934 local governments in a total of 34 countries on all continents had issued a climate emergency declaration. It is noteworthy that the concept of climate emergency became popular among the most industrialized countries on the planet: United Kingdom, United States, and France, all permanent members of the UN Security Council, are among the top-10 countries declaring climate emergencies. Although this notion is being more and more accepted among developing countries - whose populations are the most affected by climate change – the issuing of such declarations in these countries is still incipient (CEDAMIA, 2021).

Massive life-threatening events in developing countries usually do not affect public opinion in developed countries, where the public is not concerned with

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<sup>31</sup>Available at <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-win-raises-pressure-on-brazils-bolsonaro-to-protect-amazon-11607346002>>. Accessed on April, 30, 2021.

armed conflicts, epidemics, or environmental catastrophes in poorer countries unless they are convinced that these events could somehow have an impact on them. Apparently, the same goes for the destruction of the Amazon and its populations.

Applying R2P to the Amazon also means submitting the region to multilateral tutelage in order to take military action and progressively implement policies of multilateral intervention in the region. In other words, once the issue is captured by R2P terminology, there is no going back.

In this article, I briefly presented the issue of climate security, the Security Council's role in building the securitization agenda, and the application of the R2P principle to the Brazilian Amazon case. Moreover, three theses on the application of the R2P concept were presented in the form of ideal types. I acknowledge that these theses have nuances, and some issues have not been addressed in the present text. For instance, it could be argued that the theses of ecocide and genocide of native peoples could be combined to create an intermediate - although still paradoxical - category based on the notions of self-defense or national security, thus allowing other UN member states that feel threatened by the destruction of the Amazon to act for the sake of own their survival. A similar argument could be made in reference to the liberal thesis of non-intervention justified by humanitarian protection. These are just two of the acknowledged limitations of the present work.

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