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Abstract

Climate change and national security: need for divergence

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In the traditional sense, national security has been defined in territorial frame of reference. This frame of reference suited the security discourse in the times when the enemy was on the other side of the border and it was possible to use military strength to fight the enemy. Territorial framework also suited the times since the notions of victory and defeat were clearly demarcated. Moreover, the territorial sense of national security gave rise to nationalism among the citizens inhabiting a certain territory, which aided the state centric security discourse.

Since the end of cold war, a lot of literature that has tried to redefine national security has been published. A lot of it has focussed on national security threats emerging from climate change and environmental challenges to national security. However, on the main this research has focussed on climate change only in an indirect manner, in which its impact on national security is analysed. What this has meant that the cooperative frames of reference necessary for addressing climate change has been sidelined and climate change has been fed into the traditional notion of security. The cooperative notion of security needs to be used with regard to climate change given the trans-boundary nature of threat and given the lack of clear winner and losers in the threat by climate change, unlike the traditional threats to national security.

It was expected by some of the initial research that use of the notion of national security would enable to elevate the sense of urgency required in dealing with the issues of climate change. While this may have happened in most of the cases, it has also proved to be counterproductive given that national security inevitably leads to nationalism and in most of the cases nationalism helps hide the faults within and makes one look for solutions outside the ambit of one's activity.

Therefore, one could see the emergence of the divide on the issue of mitigation and adaptation in the negotiation leading up to Copenhagen round of discussions. National security framework hinders the two levels at which the response to climate change must be prioritised. First being the individual and the second being the regional and multilateral. The role of nation state should be only of facilitating the dialogue between the two levels. In this sense, this paper will discuss the limits of national security framework in responding to climate change in future.