

HERE . NOW OrissaPOST

SPECTRUM ENVIRONMENT

Climate change and national security



Avilash Roul

INDIA VOTED AGAINST THE RESOLUTION AS THE UNSC WAS NOT THE PLACE TO DISCUSS EITHER ISSUE OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

On 13th December, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) failed to adopt a resolution on climate change-induced security risks that exacerbates conflict across the geo-political fault lines. India, as the only non-permanent member voted against the draft resolution with Russia, a permanent member, vetoing it, while China abstained. UNSC recorded 12 votes in favour of the resolution.

India voted against the resolution as the UNSC was not the place to discuss either issue of climate change and climate justice. India, also, intensely submitted that handling of climate change at the UNSC is neither acceptable nor desirable. Despite India's staunch opposition to UNSC's mandate on climate change, the securitisation of climate change is inevitable and indispensable.

The draft resolution, sponsored by Ireland and Niger and supported by Kenya and majority of the UNSC members, recommended adopting climate-related security risk as a central component into UNSC's comprehensive conflict-prevention strategies. The draft resolution argued that adverse effects of climate change can lead to 'social tensions, exacerbating, prolonging, or contributing to the risk of future

conflicts and instability and posing a key risk to global peace, security, and stability'. It is to be noted that the UNSC mandate as per the UN Charter is 'to maintain international peace and security in accordance with the principles and purposes of the UN'.

Additionally, the draft resolution asks the Secretary-General to submit a report 'on the security implications of the adverse effects of climate change in relevant country or region-specific contexts on the Council's agenda as well as recommendations on how climate-related security risks can be addressed' in two years to UNSC. The draft resolution was drawn heavily from a Germany drafted resolution of 2020 but that was never put to vote due to tough resistance from China, Russia and the US.

While generally it has been believed that India's negative voting against the resolution is a reflection of its long-standing position of opposing any expansion of agenda items of UNSC beyond its Charter, it needs to be looked into India's domestic and international positioning. India's long campaign and advocacy on reforming and restructuring post-World War institutions including a permanent seat at the UNSC is well known. Barricading intrusion of climate

change into the UNSC agenda and expanding UNSC itself - so far the most undemocratic set up with five nations deciding world peace, is self-contradictory.

India's apprehension is well conveyed that only five countries will have a free hand in deciding on all climate-related issues than 196 countries + European Union (EU) as parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The UNSC functions in secrecy with powerful 'veto' politics than UNFCCC, which works in consensus with transparency. The UNSC is the antithesis of what UNFCCC has been collectively progressing through 'common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities' of members. Perhaps India cautiously calculates that sanctions may be imposed against India and other emerging or developing countries under UNSC if they don't meet their climate mitigation targets. Ironically, UNSC permanent members are the largest greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters at 50.47 per cent of global emissions in 2020.

In all probability, India has either overlooked or deliberately misunderstood the context of expanding security discourse by linking it into climate change (terrorism is other item in the draft resolution).

While aware of relative ambiguity on defining national interest or national security, it is absolutely relevant to adopt and accept climate change as a threat to national or global security and peace for policy implications.

To contextualise the UNSC debate, it is sensible to explore the environment and security discourse within India that is at its nadir, both policy wise and academically. Too much bad blood has been spilled over between proponents of several high profile development projects and opponents of those projects. Many in the government as ill-advised by less knowledgeable satraps baselessly blame environmental crusaders and champions as impediments to securing so-called national security. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court has recently said in the Chardham Road case that 'there is no doubt that sustainable development has to be balanced with national security requirements'. Protection of the environment and natural resources for future generations is in part of safeguarding national security.

The writer is guest professor of Humanities and Social Sciences at Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai.