Foreword

Throughout history, disruptive events have driven significant changes to the known order of the world. The devastating Thirty Years’ War exhausted the European subcontinent, and drove the establishment of the nation-state system at Westphalia in 1648. The catastrophic World War II precipitated the creation of a new international order made up of these nation-states, legally enshrined and institutionalized in the United Nations (UN). With the lesson of the failed League of Nations in mind, the world’s powers created an enforcement arm for this new order called the UN Security Council. This governing body was designed to protect the sovereignty of nation-states against external aggression, and to lessen the likelihood of destructive, international conflict. A waxing and waning of its perceived legitimacy aside, this is the world order we live in today, and the UN Security Council is its keeper.

The world, however, has become a lot more complicated since the creation of the UN Security Council. Rapidly growing populations, dramatic increases in global wealth (and inequality), the rise of new powers in the Global South, and unprecedented technological changes, have placed significant strains on the post-World War II order that cannot be ignored.

A significant stress in the background of all these changes is climate change. Unprecedented in human history, which has developed during a geological period of climate stability known as the Holocene, rapid climatic changes are already influencing the availability of critical natural resources, such as food and water – resources that are necessary for the survival of people and nation-states. These rapid changes, coupled with other difficult-to-manage trends, may impair the ability of nation-states worldwide to provide basic resources for populations that are increasingly demanding more, thus potentially contributing to state failure, mass displacements of people, and even intra- and interstate conflict. Climate change is, in essence, changing the very geostrategic landscape on which global governance rests.

In this context, the UN Security Council, the de facto and de jure keeper of international stability, cannot afford to ignore it. This volume accepts that basic reality: the UN Security Council will, or must, play a
role in managing climate risks to the global system. With that question out of the way, the authors ask and answer more important questions: What does that role look like? What form should Security Council interventions on climate change take? How do we ensure the effectiveness of such interventions, while also improving their legitimacy? And how do we avoid foreseeable unintended consequences?

In placing climate change at the center of questions about global governance at the highest level, this volume places itself in the indispensable column for world leaders.

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