

## V Maritime Security Course

### *“Climate Change and Security Challenges in the Atlantic”*

2-6 June 2025, São Miguel Island, Azores, Portugal

## CONCEPT NOTE

Climate change currently manifests as a multidimensional challenge, encompassing political, legal, economic, and security risks. Its transnational nature underlines its status as a "*de facto*" Whole-of-Atlantic threat, demanding cooperative efforts to address the associated security risks effectively.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), 2024 was the “warmest year on record while upper-ocean heat content experienced a record high”<sup>1</sup>. Despite what this data suggests, while climate change (CC) is often linked with “global warming” like previously thought,<sup>2</sup> in fact, global warming is but an example of a vast array of anthropogenic induced disruptions that fall under the umbrella of CC.

Likewise, in 2024, as an example, Spain was hit with record-breaking rainfall which resulted in flash floods and dozens of casualties,<sup>3</sup> while the Amazon rainforest in Brazil was struck by worst forest fires in two decades, affecting indigenous communities and biodiversity alike.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, a testimony to the transnational nature of CC, the people of the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin regions are enduring contrasting weather events.<sup>5</sup> Climate Change is indeed a phenomenon of extremes. Frequent droughts but also floods, which some authors argue are fuelling ethnic violence due to climate-induced migration,<sup>6</sup> shows a political side of CC.

CC is certainly political.<sup>7</sup> In the Atlantic, recent attention has been given to the North, namely the Arctic. Arctic Sea Ice is steadily decreasing, with data suggesting that the Arctic is both warming, Sea-Ice is thinning while its extent is also decreasing.<sup>8</sup> These

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/news/global-climate-202413>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>

<sup>3</sup> <https://wmo.int/media/news/devastating-rainfall-hits-spain-yet-another-flood-related-disaster>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvgxv8n7wd0o>

<sup>5</sup> [Floods in the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel: The Climate Change-Conflict Nexus](#)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2022-11-03-expert-comment-european-public-opinion-climate-change-has-become-politicised>

<sup>8</sup> Accessed through <https://zacklabe.com/arctic-sea-ice-figures/>, Data from NSIDC Sea Index v3.0 (ANNUAL, Satellite)

changes in geography simultaneously reflect the introduction of political interests in the region. The Arctic is rich in mineral resources such as zinc and nickel, and it also contains significant hydrocarbon deposits.<sup>9</sup> In addition, due to Sea-Ice shrinkage, new Maritime trade routes (North Sea Route and the Northwest Passage for example) and fisheries areas will be accessible, which has the potential for human clashes.

Other relevant data suggests that by 2050, over a billion people living in low-lying coastal cities and towns shall face increased risk from climate-related hazards including sea-level rise, tropical cyclones, and coastal flooding.<sup>10</sup> CC is thus forcing states to respond to extreme weather events by adapting coastal critical infrastructure, such as ports, power plants, dams etc.<sup>11</sup>

From an international legal perspective, CC is urging States to collectively address what is perceived as a common challenge. The Paris Agreement is in that respect,<sup>12</sup> a key achievement, and international legal understanding is developing to encompass a novel interpretation of State responsibility in relation to CC. Small Island developing states (SIDS) are taking the lead in rethinking international law due to the existential imperative that CC poses on their territories and livelihoods.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, while legal knowledge constructs, paradigms, principles and practices are changing, so is military doctrine and force planning. CC is also pressuring States' armed forces to adapt to extreme weather events and to respond and support the hypothetical human aftermath (such as climate induced displacement).

Climate Change possesses three components that make it a noteworthy topic to be addressed: Multidisciplinary, transnational and unequal. The Atlantic Community faces these and other climate related challenges on a yearly basis, and, in order to continue to deliver timely courses and research that delves into the concerns of the Atlantic basin community, after having gathered the feedback of all 24 member-states, the fifth edition

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<sup>9</sup> Dmitrieva, D., & Solovyova, V. (2024). A Taxonomy of Mineral Resource Projects in the Arctic: A Path to Sustainable Financing? *Sustainability*, 16(11), 4867. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16114867>, page 1 and 2.

<sup>10</sup> Pal, I., Kumar, A., & Mukhopadhyay, A. (2023). Risks to coastal critical infrastructure from climate change. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 48(1), 681–712. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-112320-101903>, pag 683.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pag 683

<sup>12</sup> Paris Agreement. (2016). Official Journal, L 282, 4-18. CELEX: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:2016A1019\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:2016A1019(01)) [legislation]

<sup>13</sup> See as an example ICLOS Advisory opinion on the Request by the commission of small island states on climate change and international law, here: [https://www.itlos.org/fileadmin/itlos/documents/cases/31/Advisory\\_Opinion/C31\\_Adv\\_Op\\_21.05.2024\\_orig.pdf](https://www.itlos.org/fileadmin/itlos/documents/cases/31/Advisory_Opinion/C31_Adv_Op_21.05.2024_orig.pdf)

of the Atlantic Centre Maritime Security Course (V MSC) will be dedicated to the topic of “Climate Change and Security Challenges in the Atlantic”.

This edition will be organised by the Atlantic Centre in partnership with the Luso-American Development Foundation (FLAD), the National Defence Institute of Portugal, the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Institute, in Accra, and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research among other partners.

The main topics and objectives of the V MCS are:

**1. Climate Change as an Atlantic security problem:** What is the Atlantic facing now, and what will it be facing in the future?

- 1.1. Emphasize the importance of defining the Atlantic as global commons where states from different continents share relevant strategic challenges with respect to CC.
- 1.2. Provide a multidisciplinary overview of CC from an Atlantic perspective and assess to what extent CC is shaping the Atlantic landscape in both political, economic and social ways.
- 1.3. Analysing to what extent CC is impacting human activities such as food production and trade.
- 1.4. Understand the nexus between extreme weather events and human migration, analysing the political outcomes of such nexus.

**2. Understand the science behind Climate Change:** Where is the Atlantic now, where is it going?

- 2.1. Learn on the effect of CC on marine and coastal ecosystems and biodiversity. Understand the effects of CC on the Atlantic Ocean, its resources and possible adaptation or mitigation solutions.
- 2.2. Discuss extreme weather events: Droughts, floods, wildfires, storms and analyse the causality with CC.
- 2.3. The role of new technologies (AI, Satellite monitoring etc) in addressing CC.

**3. Climate Change and great power competition in the Atlantic:** How is CC impacting States’ political, economic and military strategies.

- 3.1. Understand the role of CC on critical infrastructure in the Atlantic, more specifically, coastal critical infrastructure.
- 3.2. Small Island Developing States and their existential imperative.

- 3.3. Research on military procurement. How are Atlantic States' Armed forces addressing CC.
4. **Civil Society and Climate Change:** To what extent are local and regional organisations tackling CC.
  - 4.1. Examine the role of academia and higher education in CC research.
  - 4.2. Explore the role of civilian and coastal community leadership in supporting CC and security.
  - 4.3. Explore the role of international Think Tanks and NGOs in investigating CC.
  - 4.4. Analyse the role of the Private Sector (energy and insurance companies, banks and other) with CC.
5. **International Law and Climate Change:** Describe in what ways is international law interpreting CC in the light of UNCLOS, Paris Agreement and other relevant legal jurisprudence.
  - 5.1. To what extent is international law capable of holding States accountable for loss and damage with respect to CC.
  - 5.2. Understand the legal weight of current jurisprudence in upholding the Paris Agreement's objectives.