

DESERTIFICATION OF NORTH AFRICA AND THE DESERTION OF ITS REFUGEES

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ABSTRACT: There were 20 million new climate refugees in 2008. There are 17 million people fleeing desertification right now. 60-75 million people in the North African region of the Sahara-Sahel desert region face displacement due to desertification. Climate change is causing desertification via droughts and temperature increases at levels never before seen. The United States must act: it should set a precedent of accepting climate change refugees, providing funds for United Nations Conventions, and become party to the International Criminal Court. The Sahara-Sahel is suffering and the international community is turning a blind-eye to their pain.

Introduction

Research Question

How can the United States adopt a unilateral response to address both the lack of refugee status and support for climate change refugees facing desertification in Northern Africa?

Research Methodology

The research method in this paper is also the format of how the paper is organized. The initial focus was on gathering data on the human rights violation and the statistics on the populations that are being affected by desertification. This research then opened up into a wider research lens, gathering information on all of the relevant international conventions and policies. Once this international scene was researched, the focus turned to how the United States was involved, eventually leading to the addition of the European Union's involvement, due to their proximity to the issue.

Limitations of Research

There are several limitations to the research of this paper. A Global focus on climate change is a relatively new direction of international policy, so the amount of available history of climate data or policy impact is limited. Additionally, the displacement of people in North Africa is in-

credibly understudied. The world, thus far, has seemingly turned a blind eye to the encroachment of the Sahara-Sahel zone due to a historical lack of voice and underrepresentation of the North African community on the global stage. This lack of discourse is explainable within the context of historical colonization. The colonial powers in Europe do not acknowledge a situation in which they are faced with the task of assuming responsibility for millions of displaced people. Providing aid for the climate change problem of desertification is an acknowledgement of the irreparable loss and damage that is occurring to the local environment of the Sahara-Sahel region. After a research trip to Washington D.C., the Norwegian Ambassador to the United States of America, Kåre R. Aas, was quoted as saying “[the] moral obligation [to displacement from climate change] due to oil production [is] not discussed.” This statement reveals additional limitation resulting from the hypocrisy of the United States and Europe. Nearly all of these states are party to the conventions on desertification and climate change, but are still major polluters, do not want to acknowledge their responsibility to the people climate change is displacing (Environmental Protection Agency, n.d.).

Definitions

Asylum-Seeker: An individual fleeing their

home and applying for temporary protected status, also known as sanctuary status, which is the right to be recognized as a refugee and receive legal protection and material assistance; an asylum seeker must demonstrate that their fear of persecution in their home country is well-founded (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016).

Climate adaptation: A preventative measure made through investment of capital and political will towards transforming a social or economic base to a base in which climate change is less harmful. For example, switching to a crop that grows better in higher temperatures in areas facing desertification.

Climate loss and damage: Damage that has been done to the climate, on different levels of magnitude, that are irreparable; this cannot be made resilient or adapted to as the base climate has been destroyed.

Climate mitigation: Describes a community's ability to survive given differing levels of damage to their local climate.

Climate resiliency: Used to describe a general level of resistance to the damages of climate change; preparedness of a region to survive given changes to their climate.

Counter-desertification: For the purpose of this paper, this term will describe an aggregation of climate adaptation, climate mitigation, and climate resiliency policies.

Desertification: The United Nations Convention on Desertification defines desertification as "land degradation in arid, semi-arid and sub-humid areas resulting from various factors including climatic variations and human activities ("What is Desertification," 2017).

Refugee: Someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence; a refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016).

Risk-multiplier: For the context of this paper, this term is used to describe climate change and

desertification as a baseline cause that increases the severity of internal strife and conflict.

Sahara Desert: An arid zone that encompasses almost the entire African continent north of the Sahel Desert (Peel & Allman Gritzner, 2016).

Sahara-Sahel: For the purposes of this paper, the Sahel Desert and Sahara Desert will be lumped together into a zone of severe aridness called the Sahara-Sahel Zone, as it is a region heavily interconnected on the issue of desertification.

Sahel Desert: A semi-arid transitional zone between the Saharan desert in the North and the tropical region of Central Africa, it spans laterally from the Atlantic Ocean to Sudan (Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2010).

Overview of the Problem

Refugee Mechanisms

"We don't have, in international law, or any kind of mechanisms to allow people to enter a State against the will of the State, unless they're refugees." - The Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, François Crépeau (Randall, 2014).

Refugee status is the only way fleeing individuals can gain access to territory during the extreme circumstances. As stated by the 1951 Convention on Refugees: the only way a person can legally become a refugee is if they are fleeing a well-founded fear of persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group, or their political opinion (Guterres, 2011). This framework provides no room for the tens of millions of people who are fleeing their homes due to climate change (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification [UNCCD], 2016b).

As per Karen Grisez of Friend and Frank, the alternative to the refugee mechanism is the in-person asylum-seeking process. In the United States, any individual fleeing a well-founded fear of persecution can apply for temporary protected status (TPS). The United Nations refers

to this same concept as sanctuary status. This mechanism is distinctly different from the refugee process, because individuals, generally, are already physically in a nation like the United States when they apply for TPS. The refugee mechanism is, generally, used in vetting processes that happen outside of the United States, rather than the customs process which happens when individuals apply for TPS within a nation's territory. Individuals leaving their homes due to desertification are left with no other option than to travel to a state with a safer climate and apply for protection for reasons of persecution, rather than the primary driver of desertification. This is, of course, an issue because it means that displaced populations have to travel illegally to a host nation, rather than moving legally to a safer place.

The refugee mechanism is the ideal protocol for large movements of displaced people. There are conventions that create frameworks for their protection, with some level of precedent for large movement of refugees fleeing persecution, which increases the chances of a successful relocation. The asylum-seeking/TPS process is a bandage rather than a concrete solution. It shoe-horns displaced people into certain social groups because they have to find a 'well-founded' fear of persecution, such as their race or social group status, when such a fear may not be the cause for their flight. The criterion of persecution ignores displacement due to climate change.

Displacement Figures and Desertification

In 2008, a United Nations study showed that there were 20 million new refugees from climate change in that year alone (Barnes, 2013). By 2050, there could be close to 200 million climate change refugees (Barnes, 2013). The most disastrous and understudied issues of climate change refugees are the tens of millions of people living on the margins of the Sahara-Sahel, dealing with the encroachment of desertification from drought (UNCCD, 2016b). There is an expected 40% reduction in freshwater availability in nations on the Northern border of the

Sahara-Sahel (Radhouane, 2013). Already, on the Southern border of the desert, in Chad, they recorded only 135 mm of rainfall, compared to 350 mm of rainfall in 1950 (Rehrl, 2009). This lack of rainfall and decrease in freshwater is being coupled with increases in average temperature. By 2050, south of the Mediterranean, warm afternoons will be as hot as 114 degrees Fahrenheit, (Max Planck Institute for Chemistry, 2016). Both of the above factors will result and is currently resulting in massive land degradation, causing desertification.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimate, alongside corresponding reports, that there are currently up to 17 million people globally who have fled desertification (Warner, 2009). Currently, there are 135 million people who are at severe risk of displacement due to desertification (Warner, 2009). There are no reports that have set out to specifically record how many of these millions of people are at-risk in Northern Africa. The Africa Action Summit has roughly estimated that there are 60 million people at risk from displacement due to desertification (UNCCD, 2016b). The United Nations has published a report stating that at least 75 million people in Africa will be affected by water scarcity, and that Sub-Saharan Africa is the most prone for displacement due to water scarcity (United States Department of Economic and Social Affairs [USDESA], 2014).

Human Rights Violations

The core of the issue in this situation is the denial of several rights specified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While the UDHR itself is non-legally binding, it provides a theoretical moral obligation for later conventions and specific legal frameworks. Since there are no international frameworks for those fleeing desertification, they are left only with the grand concepts to drive the creation of later legal framework. The first violation comes from Article 3: a human's life is in danger when there is no fresh water and lethal heat waves (UN General Assembly, 1948). Additionally, deserti-

fication is a risk-multiplier, causing the destabilization of states and societies, leading to deadly conflict, like the civil war in Syria. The second article being violated is Article 25: a standard of living is not adequate to meet the criteria of human dignity when the land around them is unlivable (UN General Assembly, 1948).

These violations are essential to understand because they paint the policy and legal argument of what is happening and why it is wrong. In terms of displacement due to desertification, it is critical to understand the lack of any binding legal framework that protects individuals directly from displacement. There are conventions to address water insecurity, violent unrest, but they are missing the destruction of millions of people's way of life. What is at stake is not necessarily instant death for tens of millions of people, but a massive wave of destabilization as their culture and societal norms have their rug pulled out from underneath them; so to speak, their homeland is becoming uninhabitable desert.

Classification Issues from Insufficient Mechanisms

The tens of millions of individuals being displaced by desertification are being wrongly classified as economic migrants (UNCCD, 2016b). First, this classification is due to the fact that there is no proper legal term for these afflicted individuals. Because there is no proper legal classification, they cannot claim refugee status due to habitability-destroying drought in their homeland. Secondly, it is in the best interests of powerful states around the world to ignore this issue of misclassification. This issue will be expanded upon during the stakeholder analysis, but it can be generalized as states not wanting to accept more refugees, or alternatively not seen as rejecting more refugees. Finally, the international community is focused, not without reason, on the humanitarian crisis in Syria from the civil war. Unfortunately, one of the main issues of the Syrian Civil War is being ignored, which was a record-setting drought directly be-

fore the demonstrations in cities across the state (Weinthal, 2015). This has led to a situation where Syrian War Refugees are masking other displacement concerns, as Europe's attention is focused on them, rather than the tens of millions at severe risk of displacement in North Africa.

Current International Policy Statures and Effects

There is no desire by the influential states of the United Nations to create a refugee mechanism for those seeking to leave areas affected by desertification. However, there is a policy framework put into place by the United Nations Convention on Combating Desertification. This framework is called the 10-Year Plan, and has four objectives for the UNCCD: reduce the negative impacts of affected populations, reduce negative impacts of affected ecosystems, create global benefits, and mobilize resources between national and international actors (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification [UNCCD], 2016a). The 10-Year Plan hopes to accomplish these strategic objectives by advocacy and awareness, a revised policy framework, increase in scientific knowledge, capacity-building, and to increase financial and technology sharing. The 10-Year Plan was created "after a decade of implementation, it is recognized that limiting factors have prevented optimal deployment of the Convention" (UNCCD, 2016a). Essentially, it was a response to an ineffective initial convention, but has suffered from the same fate, except for two positive differences. The plan does not have sufficient financial resources or organizational cooperation. It did, however, mention the people who are being displaced by desertification, "growing numbers of environmental refugees and migrants shedding new light on the impacts of poverty and environmental degradation" but left this component entirely out of the effective language of the 10-Year Plan (UNCCD, 2016a). Secondly, the 10-Year Plan extended the lifespan of the Global Mechanism, which is a framework that connects development partners to climate projects in ar-

eas facing desertification.

In contrast to the failure of an international convention, the Africa Action Summit met for the first time during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change COP22 summit meeting in Marrakesh, November 16th 2016 (“Marrakech,” 2016). This summit reaffirmed three initiatives: the Security, Stability, and Sustainability Initiative, the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative, and the Adaptation of African Agriculture (“Marrakech,” 2016).

The Security, Stability, and Sustainability Initiative is a general affirmation and recognition of the potential for massive displacement of people affected by climate change. They note that 60 million people are at risk of displacement due to climate change (UNCCD, 2016b). The parties to the summit agree to focus on land restoration and increasing climate resiliency capabilities. This is a non-binding resolution, and has had no significant outcome, partly due to its very recent creation.

The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative is a more robust policy framework that’s goal is to create a “7,775km [wall] from Senegal to Djibouti – the “wall” consists of a mosaic of projects implemented by countries in the region” United Nation Convention to Combat Desertification [UNCCD], 2016c). These missions, in practice, are agricultural projects that focus on re-planting of local flora, as well as tilling land with crops that are specifically tasked with growing in semi-arid environments. Those two examples encapsulate the terms climate mitigation and climate resilience, in order. Furthermore, the policy is preparing for a temperature increase of up to five degrees Celsius, which could cause population displacement of up to 60 million people (UNCCD, 2016c). This is another way of saying that the Green Wall Initiative is preparing for the impacts of desertification. In terms of its funding and partnerships, the 10-Year Plan does have some role in organization of financial resources, but its links are minimal, and mostly

operate through the creation of the Front Local Environnemental pour une Union Verte (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, 2013).

The Adaptation of African Agriculture is an intricate policy framework, developed by the Kingdom of Morocco, under framework guidance of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It focuses on connecting equally distributed climate financial resources to four different types of solutions: soil management, agricultural water control, climate risk management, and capacity building solutions.

The Paris Climate Accords focuses on emission standards, which is only indirectly related to the displacement of populations due to desertification. Fortunately, for the sake of policy progress, it recognized and legally affirmed the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC], 2013). It is a historic breakthrough that acknowledges climate change will cause irreparable loss and damage. The framework that was created focuses on advocacy and awareness of these concerns, connects stakeholders and fosters dialogue, and increases support for research on the potential loss and damage from climate change (UNFCCC, 2013).

Other Critical Conventions

The refugee convention of 1951 and the 1967 modification should be essential conventions concerning the displacement of millions of people due to desertification, but as the problem stated, current refugee mechanisms do not include climate change as a sufficient cause for refugee status. Its significance should and could be greater, but this component will be further discussed in the stakeholder analysis and in the policy recommendation. Historically speaking, the initial 1951 convention was created as an answer to the displacement of population in Europe after World War II (Guterres, 2011). The 1967 protocol expanded the convention to cover

any individual around the planet that meets the criteria for a refugee (Guterres, 2011). Again, this convention fails to protect displacements due to desertification.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was ratified in 21st of March in 1994 (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC, 2014). “Preventing ‘dangerous’ human interference with the climate system is the ultimate aim of the UNFCCC” (UNFCCC, 2014). It is a sister convention of the UNCCD, as they were both created by the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Critical to the later policy recommendation, it places the onus on ‘developed’ nations to create the path towards a solution to the issues of climate change. There are three major developments that the UNFCCC has sponsored: the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Climate Accords, and the Africa Action Summit. The Kyoto Protocol was the first international agreement, while ineffective, of setting emission standards (UNFCCC, 2014). The recent Paris Climate Accords have an optimistic framework at curbing emissions, and also critically acknowledge the Loss and Damage protocol, as stated earlier in this paper (UNFCCC, 2014). Finally, the Africa Action Summit is a committee that is held within the framework of the UNFCCC and at its summits; it is a group that has proposed similarly optimistic counter-desertification policies.

United States Policy on Climate Change Displacement

The United States already has a storied history with population displacement from climate change. In the 1930’s, the Dust Bowl caused 2.5 million people to be displaced (Reuveny, 2007). Now, of course, the desertification in areas like North Africa are not solely from poor land management, but from regular and enduring droughts. Moving forward from the 1930’s, the United States is in fact facing desertification. A 2001 report noted that there is extensive land degradation and desertification underway in the American South West (Asner, 2001). The report

utilized Imaging Spectroscopy to measure the ‘greenness’ of the region. This greenness has been steadily decreasing, which is a symptom of the historic droughts the region has been facing, such as California (Swain, 2014). These droughts are causing immense stress on water infrastructure and consequently resulting in the desertification of arable land in the American South West. There has been no noticeable population displacement due to the desertification of this region.

Nonetheless, The United States of America has practically recognized the displacement of populations due to climate change. In January of 2016, the Department of Housing and Urban Development created one billion dollars in grant money for climate resiliency projects (Robertson, 2016). One particular community attracted a great deal of attention, the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw tribe of Southern Louisiana. Their community lives on a small island that is now flooding regularly due to rising sea-levels and climate-change-enhanced storms (Robertson, 2016). They have been given a grant for climate change resilient improvements and relocation. The above, of course, is not an acknowledgment of displacement due to desertification, at least domestically. The United States does study the environmental displacement of populations due to desertification, but only as an indirect cause of migration from Mexico to the United States (Schwartz, 1994).

In summary, the United States does not acknowledge desertification as a substantial cause of population displacement. They do not have refugee mechanisms to accept environmental displacements, as they still call the few individuals they have recognized as migrants. This policy is inconsistent with the reality of dangers the nation faces from internal and external displacements of people due to desertification.

On international policy, The United States has ratified the UNCCD, but it has not created nor does it maintain an action plan, and it does not have a synergistic investment mechanism (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertifica-

tion [UNCCD], 2015). It does have a desertification monitoring system (UNCCD, 2015). The United States has also ratified the UNFCCC, but has no significant connection to desertification projects via this convention (UNFCCC, 2013). Finally, the United States has ratified the Paris Climate Accords, but its significance of its membership is at risk due to the resentment of the accords by the new Trump administration (“Donald Trump would ‘cancel’ Paris climate deal”, 2016).

Stakeholder Analysis

This section of the paper will outline the stakeholder positions of actors that have not been mentioned so far, or have not clearly had their positions developed. It will follow a general format of explaining the background of the actor, how the background connects to the issue of desertification and its refugees, with a final statement on the actor’s involvement with the policies and conventions discussed thus far.

Populations at Risk through Case-Studies

Two case-studies provide a stakeholder position for both the individual people who are facing the effects of desertification, as well as states that are suffering from similar effects of desertification. The Kingdom of Morocco provides an African stakeholder on the northern side of the Sahara-Sahel region. Conversely, the Republic of Chad provides a stakeholder of desertification on the southern side of the Sahara-Sahel region. Both have unique perspectives on the issue of displacement from desertification, and have conducted themselves differently on issues of policy.

The Kingdom of Morocco is a leader amongst the Africa Action Summit, as well as being the nation that is pioneering the counter-desertification project: Adaptation of African Agriculture. This nation is particularly prone to the effects of desertification because much of its economy is dependent on agriculture, which is itself dependent on unsustainable amounts of water use

(Karmaoui, Ifaadassan, Babqiqi, Messouli, & Khebiza, 2016). “Land classification in Morocco shows that 78 percent of the area (56,000,000 ha) is in desert and dry zones (annual average precipitation <250 mm/year)” (Karmaoui et al., 2016). Furthermore, Morocco also contains a population of over 33 million people (“Morocco,” 2016).

The Kingdom of Morocco has to be a leader on desertification because its existence is in jeopardy. The Saharan desert expands from the south east with every drought. These droughts place extensive stress on the already unsustainable amount of water usage. The majority of the Moroccan population depends on an agricultural economy that is vanishing due to the lack of fresh water and increasing temperatures. In this nation alone, there are potentially tens of millions of people who could be displaced. The Kingdom of Morocco has been utilizing funds from the Global Mechanism to fund counter-desertification projects like the Adaptation of African Agriculture. It is unlikely that these projects will halt all population displacement, they believe in the optimism of displacement prevention.

The Republic of Chad, while still being party to the UNCCD, UNFCCC, and the Africa Action Summit, has taken far less leadership on the issue of desertification. Additionally, their nation has been less innovative on the implementation of counter-desertification policies or projects. Their nation has roughly 14 million individuals, of which 11 million are located in rural regions (“Chad,” 2016). “Agriculture and livestock occupy about 73 percent of the workforce” (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAOUN], 2016). This section of the workforce is dependent on an average rainfall of 322 mm of rainfall per year (FAOUN, 2016). However, Chad has been experiencing historic droughts, and for the year of 2015, recorded only 135 mm of rainfall, compared to 350 mm of rainfall in 1950 (“United Refugees, 2016). Just as in Morocco, Chad faces a potential disaster of millions of displaced agricultural workers

due to the expansion of the desert and drought.

In both case-studies, the reality of impending population displacement is clear. What is less clear is the impact such displacement will have on the individual's livelihood, culture, and security. One comparison could be the nation of Syria. In the years leading up to the spark of the civil war, there was a historic drought (Weinthal, 2015). It forced ex-agricultural workers into the cities where they were confronted with unemployment, starvation, and the harsh reality of a dictatorship. The drought was one of the causes of a civil war which has spiraled out of control into the present world's worst humanitarian crisis. Armed factions splintered, allowing organizations like ISIS to take over, causing the massacre of societies like the Yazidi people (Cumming-Bruce, 2016). In Syria, livelihoods, cultures, and security have been lost, not to mention the millions of refugees who have been forced to flee. Because North African nations in the Sahara-Sahel region, like Morocco and Chad, have such a high dependence on agriculture, a significant loss in agricultural production would put entire economies and societies on the brink of collapse.

Europe

The European Union, as a political organization, is represented in the UN as an observer state (United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe, 2007). Another component of its representation is held by whichever nation holds the EU presidency. Currently Slovakia sits as the President of the EU (European Council – Council of the European Union, 2016). On climate change issues, the EU holds itself most tightly to the Kyoto Protocol, which links them to an acknowledgement of policies limiting emissions. Such a standard does not directly link to desertification, but does indirectly link them to the UNFCCC. The UNFCCC then cooperates with the UNCCD's Global Mechanism, allowing the EU to fund FLEUVE, which generates funds for counter-desertification projects in North Africa. As a side note, for this paper

due to a criterion of relativity to desertification, the European Union will act as an umbrella for every member-state, unless they are specifically mentioned below.

France is a key European stakeholder because it held much of North Africa prior to the liberation of its colonial territories. One particularly strong link is between France and the Kingdom of Morocco. At the first Africa Action Summit, the President of France attended in support of the summits leadership by King Mohammed VI of Morocco ("Marrakech," 2016). France is a party to the UNCCD as well as to the UNFCCC, and the subsequent Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Climate Accords (Parkinson, 2015). The above agreements mean that France is an active financial partner with the Africa Action Summit and other counter-desertification policies.

Critically, though, Southern Europe, which includes France, and to a lesser extent the rest of the European Union, holds a hidden position on the issue of population displacement due to desertification. Due to past colonial connections, and many millennia of trade, many of the individuals facing desertification are going to be displaced further north into Europe, specifically the southern nations of Europe. It is in these nations' best interests to preemptively stop the issue of displacement before it leads to catastrophic population displacement. Or, at the very least, continue to ignore the gaps in legal protection of these affected populations. European societies are already buckling from the Syrian refugee crisis (Parkinson, 2015). The Syrian refugee crisis is an order of magnitude smaller than the potential tens of millions of displaced people from the Sahara-Sahel region.

The United States of America

The critical, so far undeveloped, stakeholder position of the United States is the uncertainty of Donald Trump's new administration. President Obama had a consistent record of support for the UNCCD and the UNFCCC, as well as initial support for the creation of the Paris Climate Accords (Somander, 2016). Donald Trump

has vowed to reverse President Obama's policies, calling for the removal of the United States from the Paris Climate Accords. The Heritage Foundation is expected to be one of the policy think-tanks that have the most influence on the Trump administration (Chemnick, 2016). Furthermore, the Heritage Foundation has been hard at work identifying withdrawal options out of the UNCCD and the UNFCCC, and their subsequent treaties and accords. Such a withdrawal, procedurally, would likely take more political capital than Trump is willing to spare. Nonetheless, even the thought or attempt would still deal a major blow to the support for counter-desertification projects. The tragedy, though, would be sentencing those at risk from desertification to a damned state of existence.

Regardless of the United States' official position in these international conventions and agreements, the Heritage Foundation provides some insight into the climate change policy of a Trump administration. Steven Groves, a policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation, was quoted as saying that "[American] national security issues from global warming is bullshit". Moreover, "everything caused by climate change is bullshit". The first quotation is in response to a question about the destabilization of population displacement. The second quotation is a general response on the validity of issues like desertification being caused by climate change. Overall, these quotations develop an understanding of where Trump's policies will stand on counter-desertification efforts.

Policy Recommendation

The policy recommendation will be consistent with the research question: how can the United States take unilateral foreign policy actions to address this substantially grave issue of desertification? Throughout this entire paper, the usage of the term 'refugee' to describe those who are being displaced due to desertification has been consciously avoided. The term was not used because a climate change refugee does not ex-

ist. This issue will be the first component of the unilateral policy recommendation. The second component of the recommendation will be the unilateral increase in financial support to conventions and their development groups, such as the Global Mechanism. The third component will be the necessity of signing onto the Rome Statute that established the International Criminal Court. Before any other step forward, refugee mechanisms must be addressed.

Refugee Mechanisms

"Illegal migration is not illegal, rather it is an asylum process issue" – Scott, Senior Refugee Analyst, Oxfam

There should be no such thing as an illegal refugee, so long as that person is not a war criminal. An individual fleeing their homeland because desertification has turned once arable land into uninhabitable desert is as valid of a reason for relocation, as is war and persecution. While the United States cannot solely amend the international definition of refugee, it can set the critical precedent of granting asylum to individuals based off of the reason of climate change. The fear of the slippery slope of a flood of refugees is overblown, as the United States has the capacity to handle several million refugees. If nations like Germany, that are a fraction of the total size and population of the United States can accept over one million refugees, then the United States can certainly handle many more (AFP, 2015). The issues of cultural and economic integration are valid concerns, but are separate issues from the attention of developing a solution for refugees fleeing desertification. Refocusing on refugee mechanisms, once the precedent of TPS has been set for climate refugees then an amendment can gain traction on the international stage.

The reason why Europe was heavily detailed in the stakeholder analysis is that they wield some of the most influential support within the United Nations. Furthermore, given the membership status that many EU nations have in NATO, as well as other military deals, and

trade deals, the United States could strong arm Europe into supporting the amendment of the definition of refugee. Also, this change would still be beneficial for Europe because they could have a greater level of control over the influx of refugees into their nations, rather than maintaining a system where refugees are scrambling to reach the land and many are dying along the way (International Organization for Migration, 2016).

Financial Support

A second issue that the United States can unilaterally address is the funding of the UNCCD, UNFCCC, the Global Mechanism, and the Adaptation of African Agriculture. As pointed out by Oxfam climate analyst, Sasanka Thilakasiri, there is never enough funding for development projects. The United States currently does not send any funds to the UNCCD and subsequently has no investments into the Global mechanism (UNCCD, 2015). The United States, similarly, sends very few to no funds towards the UNFCCC, or towards the Adaptation of African Agriculture. A revision of this strategy to begin to invest money into these conventions and policies would be an effective tool in improving the climate adaptation and climate resiliency in North African nations facing desertification.

While climate adaptation and resiliency have been lambasted in this paper, they are still effective strategies; we should not decide to simply abandon a third of the African continent to the Sahara-Sahel, but the reality is that many people are going to have to leave due to temperature increases that are beyond the point of return.

This funding strategy embraces a top-down and bottom-up approach. Funds sent to the overarching framework mechanisms of the UNCCD and the UNFCCC trickle funds down through the top, while direct investment into regional plans like the Adaptation of African Agriculture supports more localized plans. The two funding routes create a multi-faceted process towards reducing the effects of desertification.

Become party to the International Criminal Court

One of the inherent flaws in international agreements like the UNCCD and the UNFCCC is a lack of accountability. This is an issue that plagued the 10-Year plan of the UNCCD and the Kyoto Protocol of the UNFCCC. While the Adaptation of African Agriculture and the Paris Climate Accords look promising, they are not concrete policies. The United States should become party to the Rome Statute, which established the International Crimes Court (I.C.C.) to increase the accountability of other nations in adhering to the policies nations signed on to. While the I.C.C. has a troubled history with the continent of Africa, this is a separate issue to refugees of desertification. In fact, the United States would more than likely be focusing on nations like Europe to adhere to, hopefully, changes to the refugee definition which could include climate change as a reason for asylum. The United States' role in the I.C.C. could also be to ensure that the ratifying parties of the UNCCD and the UNFCCC are contributing funds and accepting refugees as needed. While it is essential to not become the 'world police', the United States for better or worse has a global leadership responsibility. It needs to use this leadership role to create and enhance accountability.

Limitations and Practicality of the Policy Recommendation

Given the upcoming stakeholder position of the United States under the Trump administration, the above recommendation seems futile at best. Nonetheless, given the research and analysis on the grave implications that millions of people in North Africa will encounter or are encountering, radical action is necessary. The above steps are all reasonable goals that the United States should adopt, and move about accepting them as soon as procedurally possible.

“There is nothing more un-American than being anti-refugee” – Michael Turner, legislative aid for Representative Adam Smith of Washington State

Conclusion

The Human Rights violations that refugees of desertification face are complicated and under-labeled. They are distorted not because these people are not suffering and are not going to be suffering, but rather because there is a void in protective policies that has led to the exclusion of their distress. There were 20 million new climate refugees in 2008. There are 17 million people fleeing desertification right now. There are 60-75 million potential refugees of desertification in North Africa. These are real people, not just statistics; they are children, young men and women, with families and their own life stories. Due to the limitations of researching an underrepresented region of the world, we are left mostly with estimations. One of the outcomes of this paper is to stress that these communities and regions have stories of struggle from desertification that need to be told and brought to global attention, and should not be marginalized as a number. Furthermore, a second major outcome is that the United States must take a unilateral role of leadership to mobilize other influential global players, specifically the European Union. Their proximity to this crisis places the EU in the best position to aid the millions of people that are fleeing desertification. Even without multilateral support, the United States must set a precedent of acknowledging and accepting refugees of desertification, they must pour funds into the international mechanisms that do exist, and they must stand ready to defend these international mechanisms and enforce their accountability.

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