SECURITISATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE: THE RISK OF EXAGGERATION

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"I am here today to say that climate
change constitutes a serious threat to global security,
an immediate risk to our national security, and,
make no mistake, it will impact how our military defends our country,"
[US President] Obama said.
"And so we need to act, and we need to act now."
(NBC News 2015)

In 2007-8, four global crises were purportedly in swing: financial, energy, food and climate crises. This was from a decidedly parochial OECD perspective; while there were food riots in several countries, much of the world's population may well have had rather different daily concerns or, in the case of Brazil, was on an upswing. In policy circles, however, declaring a crisis of global proportions legitimised extraordinary interventions, such as unprecedented public financial injections and the saving of large banks, which would otherwise be very hard to get accepted. The present contribution focuses on the 'selling' of one of these four crises, the 'climate crisis' to intended key audiences, both in the international domain and at home. We look into the mechanics of crisis framing, the audience, and the resonance that the frame had, as well as development over time in two cases: the UK addressing the UN Security Council and the State Advisory Commission on Deltas ('Delta Commission') seeking support in the Netherlands for drastic measures to address sea level rise.

For this, we apply the conceptual framework from critical security studies and securitisation, with contributions from the domains of crisis and disaster studies. While all policy issues can be said to be framed, securitisation theory stipulates that the framing of an issue as existential, as a *crisis* or disaster, has major impact on how it is handled. A crisis or disaster can be a focusing event, opening a policy window that can be used to insert a certain agenda that would otherwise be hard to promote (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972; Kingdom 1984; Birkland 2009; Lowry 2006; Buzan et al. 1998). There may be a (collective or particular) interest in pushing that window open or open it wider

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when ajar. For the purposes of this essay, disaster, crisis and emergency will be treated as within the same lexical field. The defining characteristics of a crisis are: "a serious threat to the basic structures or fundamental values of a social system, where a limited decision--making time span and a high degree of uncertainty require taking critical decisions. It involves a sense of danger, urgency and 'surprise'" (Rosenthal 1984). Some disaster studies experts stipulate that for an event to be a disaster, there needs to be a minimum number of victims, injuries and losses, and requiring non-routine interventions and coordination between different organisations. Others however have argued that a hazard only turns into a disaster when it crosses a critical threshold (tipping point) where the challenges exceed coping capacity (Quarantelli 1986).

As Balzacq (2010) indicates, insecurity is not wholly imaginary but short of a hurricane vortex on the horizon, the 'clear and present danger' is not unequivocally there. Many dangers are imaginary, potential, and we worry about them before they happen, seeking a 'way out' in anticipation to retain a sense of agency. The remainder of this article will first briefly introduces the concern with environmental security concerns and the multidisciplinary 'discovery' of discursive threat construction as a lever to legitimise exceptionality. Two cases in the domain of climate change may serve to illustrate the usefulness of this analytical approach. A discussion and conclusion end the contribution.

Securitisation

With the fall of the Berlin wall, the security agenda changed radically. The Cold War over, new security threats were identified and anticipated, including civil wars, terrorism and violent environmental conflict. Preventing violent 'green' (environmental) conflict, especially 'water wars' (see 1990s publications by Starr/Stoll, Bulloch/Darwish, de Villiers), became a security policy priority, leading to the creation of a US departmental division and deployment of military advisors in potential environmental conflict 'hotspots' such as the Nile basin. At the same time, European studies made a constructivist turn, indicating that threats are not objective, measurable phenomena, but constructions in the minds of policymakers and the public. Different domains of study discovered similar territory. Ophir, a philospher, elevates the catastrophisation as a "anxiety disorder"; known in psychology at the individual level, to the level of society. A catastrophist sees "catastrophe is imminent", normally without concrete empirical evidence. To invoke exceptionality, he claims, agents in the humanitarian realm are prone to 'catastrophising'. They then seek to mitigate the catastrophe by way of Disaster Risk Reduction. But they cannot, or will not, eliminate the catastrophe; rather, they keep it 'in suspense' (Ophir 2010).

In the policy sciences, it is noted that the framing of an issue as existential, as a *crisis* or disaster has major impact on how it is handled. Rochefort and Cobb (1994) note that defining policy problems not only involves identifying but also typifying them. Labelling them as crises and emergencies, using the rhetoric of calamity, lifts them out of the ordinary and signals the need for quick action. Boin et al (2009) identify the same phenomenon as one of three 'crisis frames' that may be in contest when something happens or is feared to happen: presenting a crisis as an apocalypse, in contrast negating

or denying a crisis, or presenting crisis as an opportunity to radically change course. A crisis or disaster can be a 'focusing event', opening a policy window that can be used to insert a certain agenda (Lowry 2006). There may be a (collective or particular) interest in pushing that window open or open it wider when ajar.

For this essay we will predominantly rely on Buzan, Waever and de Wilde (1998) who have coined the term securitisation in their publication 'Security: A New Framework for Analysis' to theorise this same phenomenon. It laid the groundwork for the securitisation theory that we now refer to as the Copenhagen School. The Copenhagen School defined Securitisation as a speech act: an issue is presented as an existential threat, thereby allowing for the endorsement of exceptional measures to deal with the identified threat, making it so (Buzan et al., 1998). Securitisation, then, is a successfully launched security frame, in which an issue is presented and dealt with as if being a matter of top security, legitimising the breaking of 'rules that would otherwise bind' (Buzan et al., 1998: 5). Spoken from a position of authority in the right context, a crisis label may enable extraordinary measures, the sidelining rules, procedures and accountability that otherwise would not be permitted. A 'securitising move' seeks to kick an issue into a hallowed space over and above everyday politics, scrutiny and cost-benefit analysis.

Saying 'security/catastrophe' however does not make an issue a security issue unless it resonates with a core audience. (Buzan et al. 1998: 25). To promote its acceptance, security discourse needs to be spoken from a position of authority (Buzan, Waever, de Wilde 1998). A shock event is only actually a disaster when someone who is authorized to say that it is, does so (Green 2003). Thus, a serious event that nevertheless remains unpronounced never make it to the authoritative 'EM-DAT' emergencies database, compiled by the Centre of Research on the Epidemology of Disaster (CRED). The power to declare or ignore an emergency however extends beyond public officers. The popular press has proved is a highly influential 'authority' declaring disasters and crises, forcing politicians to take action. NGOs may also declare a crisis on behalf of mankind, assuming a moral authority. It is even possible to "speak security" from a subaltern position (Aradau 2004).

In fact, officially calling a crisis, a disaster, an existential security issue is not enough - the crisis needs to be declared *successfully*, that is, such that is followed up. The securitising move needs to resonate with its intended audience(s) and followed up. This works better if the threat has been faced in the past, so that invoking it brings a response, such as saying 'dikes' to evince destructive historic floods in the Netherlands (Buzan et al. 1998).

Its success is thus 'contingent upon a perceptive environment', and is no simple consequence of just saying something is a matter of security (Balzacq (2005;2011). Context matters when shaping a security discourse and in influencing its success (Balzacq 2005;2011; Boas 2015). A 'crisis' is a thus a discursive construction of a situation or an event with serious social and policy implications. As a consequence, not all major events are labelled catastrophe, while not all publicly declared catastrophes are major events. For a constructivist, whether or not something is a crisis is a social decision. There is no need to pass judgment about whether there 'objectively' is a crisis, or whether a molehill has been made to look like a mountain. Many 'dangers' and 'crises' are ambiguous. Fra-

ming what the crisis is about intervenes in determining what will count as a proper crisis response (Dewulf 2016).

Presenting threats as a catastrophe may even be (seen as) *instrumentalised* for ulterior, political (or moral) ends. Up to a degree, crises can be constructed, manufactured through representing the event as catastrophic, or non-catastrophic, or backgrounded. As a result, the authority of the narrator of the frame may also be doubted, as having by ulterior political motive. There is, therefore, political capital in presenting a crisis and its solution as a national or even global rather than a particularist concern.

Strategic, instrumentalised discourse has been actively analysed in the field of organisation and administrative studies (Fincham, 2002; Lindseth, 2005; Vaara et al., 2004; Warner and Van Buuren, 2011; Watson, 1995). Such literature examines policy-making and policy-struggles on a more micro level and provides particular insight into the role of policy-makers, politicians, diplomats, managers, in making strategic usage of narratives or of certain frames to endorse policy or management strategies. Social actors engage in strategic labelling and construction of narratives to sell, legitimise, or to make sense of a certain policy or management strategy (Fincham, 2002; Lindseth, 2005; Vaara et al., 2004; Warner and Van Buuren, 2011; Watson, 1995). For instance, in a study on the implementation of a Dutch programme on the construction of a bypass to the Dutch river IJssel to improve water safety, Warner and Van Buuren (2011) demonstrate how involved parties strategically mobilise certain narratives to ensure that the design of the bypass supports their objectives. The analysis shows how actors engage in discursive strategies to reach or legitimise certain objectives and values. Lindseth (2005) even explicitly *advises* policy-makers to make strategic use of frames or narratives in policy-planning: discourses offer policy-makers a frame that can present a policy in a particular manner which can help to induce policy-change or policy-success. Actors in the arena however have to take care not to overstate their doomsday discourse, or for that matter their reassurance, so as to prevent a discursive 'boomerang' (Warner & van Buuren 2011). This literature however to our knowledge has not centred on questions of climate security.

The assumption that framing can be actively instrumentalised to resonate with particular audiences to obtain a particular outcome suggests a kind of 'social marketing' targeting particular publics needed for their legitimisation. The speaker calculates what metaphors and arguments are most likely to persuade the intended public. Calling a crisis constructs the kind of persuasive storyline that legitimises the political generation of catastrophe[i] and mobilizes people to take part in it. The political consequence is to legitimise coercive measures that are impossible in normal times. Seeking to have a situation or event declared as a disaster may be perceived as serving humanitarian but also utilitarian, political instrumentality, to tackle the deficiencies in the status quo ante (Boin 2002) and to enable measures that are unfeasible in normal times - calling a crisis to force change. Desecuritising moves may contest and defuse the 'security' frame, aiming to shift 'issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining processes of the political sphere' (Buzan et al. 1998: 4). Effective contesting of securitisation means the rethorical move is unsuccessful.Then again, securitisers can never fully anticipate who their audience is, who acts upon a securitising move, as discourses are diffuse and can travel across contexts (Stritzel 2011).

Climate change as a special threat

Climate change is perceived as a global environmental mega-crisis (Wada-Endter and Ingram).Unlike a force conquering territory, climate change is a special domain of emergency, that of 'threats without enemies' (Prins 1993).

Buzan et al. have indicated that environmental securitisation is an uncertain domain for securitisation. In climate change, the burden of evidence is especially tricky. It is hard for the invisible phenomenon of climate change, as a source of anticipated disasters that have yet to happen, to compete with visible weather events in the 'attention economy' (Hamblyn 2005). While the academic community is by and large convinced of 'clear' anthropogenic climate change, other publics are not (Trombetta; Salter), and within the academic community, there is no ready consensus that a climate change crisis is already 'present', and if so, that it can be successfully averted through a particular course of action.

That does not stop some from trying to securitise climate change. The memory of disaster quickly fades (Hiuber 2004, Hartmann 2012), and thus momentum is easily lost. Securitising Climate change has been a move to put Disaster Risk Reduction and climate action back into the frame. (e.g. ADB 2015; Boas 2015). In the case of climate change, such measures can take shape as a type of "confrontational politics,… with the Security Council adopting resolutions to impose emissions targets, and even military action against polluting factories; and surveillance systems to monitor individual emissions" (Trombetta, 2008: 599). An overemphasis on security reduces democratic accountability (Coaffee et al. 2008). As we will see, in 2007 and 2011 the United Nations Security Council indeed pronounced climate change as a security issue (Boas 2015). Some scholars have warned that a security framing of global warming may result in aversive policies in the field of climate change, such as (in an extreme case) a larger role for the military to cope with the effects of climate change like climate-related migration (Deudney 1990; Hartmann, 2010). Indeed issues that can affect military capability, such as pandemics, stand a better chance of securitisation than those that don't (Fidler 2007).

Another peculiarity of climate change however is the absence of a 'saviour'. The army can defeat an invading enemy, civil engineers and water manager can stop the flood, but no single actor can stop climate change. A pitfall of climate securitisation therefore is that of precipitating ontological insecurity in the intended audience. Presenting an apocalyptic picture without a 'way out' upsets people's basic sense of security and trust in the world around them, it instils a feeling of helplessness in the recipients of the message, a lack of agency, leading people to ignore the issue and stick to a false sense of security in their home and community (Harries 2008). Alarmist articulation of climate change is dramatized to such an extent that it produces an image of political actors incapable to respond to the threat of climate change, subsequently placing the responsibility and trust of governance with piecemeal and technocratic policy measures. The security discourse on climate change 'is so exaggerated that it prompts the opposite: routine and micro-practices of risk management' such as measures aiming to mitigate carbon dioxide emissions (Methmann and Rothe, 2012: 337). The threat is presented as too big and too all-encompassing that we cannot do anything, even something exceptional, to stop it,

and therefore our only option is to try and manage it. Thus, despite the alarmist manner in which climate change has been discussed, it has not resulted in securitisation (Corry, 2012; Methmann and Rothe, 2012; Oels, 2012; Trombetta, 2008; 2011; Boas 2015).

Is climate securitisation even taking place in Europe? While demonstrating how US politicians and policy-makers use security language to enhance the domestic political and public traction to the issue of climate change, Hayes and Knox-Hayes (2014), argue that such securitised language is 'minimal in the construction of climate policy in the EU' (Hayes and Knox-Hayes, 2014: 92). By contrast, the present article shows that the UK and the Netherlands, but also the EU as such, have been amongst the most active actors in advocating a climate security discourse internationally to achieve a more ambitious climate policy.

This article, then, shows how a security narrative is strategically constructed and played on by political actors to 'sell' climate policy under the UNFCCC. The next section will examine such discursive strategies on climate change and security through the case of the UK's FCO's climate diplomacy in the international policy arena. Thereafter, our second case traces the genesis, 'marketing' and resonance of a national plan to make the Dutch delta climate-proof.

2. UK: A security narrative as a diplomatic strategy on climate change

The FCO has been amongst the leading actors in portraying climate migration as a matter of security, both within the UK and internationally, as part of a wider narrative on climate change and security (Trombetta 2008; Boas and Rothe 2016). The FCO was for instance the UK ministry that thought of the idea to hold a debate on the topic of climate change (including climate migration) in the UN Security Council in 2007 and pushed for it to happen, both domestically and internationally. It was tasked to convince the international community that climate change was an important and urgent matter to be addressed in the UNFCCC. It is in that context that innovative strategies, such as securitising moves on climate change, emerged to endorse low-carbon development and a global climate agreement amongst the international community that would succeed the Kyoto Protocol.

A security narrative on climate change was introduced in the FCO in the early 2000s. It was a time that the topic climate change was granted a higher profile in the Labour Government. Prime Minister Tony Blair for instance made climate change a key priority at the UK's presidency of the G8 and the EU in 2005 (Blair, 2004; 2005). As a consequence of these developments, climate change obtained a central position in the FCO's environmental diplomacy (FCO, 2004: 84). The FCO's Environment Policy Department (established in 2000) subsequently changed into the Climate Change and Energy Group in 2004 (renamed into the Climate Change and Energy Department in 2010) (FCO, 2005: 8). The FCO's climate change diplomacy was tasked to achieve greater action among the international community towards the mitigation of climate change, with an emphasis on achieving a low carbon global economy. There are two pathways through which the FCO tries to achieve this policy objective: through a binding international

agreement under the UNFCCC and motivating individual countries to take voluntary steps towards a low-carbon economy (Ashton, 2011: 7; FCO, 2013: 11).

In order to effectively conduct this climate change diplomacy, the FCO officials strategically searched for narratives that could support these endeavours. In the early 2000s, the security argument on climate change emerged as such a narrative. It warns of climate-related conflicts and mass climate migration to amplify the negative consequences of inaction on climate change mitigation. John Ashton, head of the Environmental Policy Department from 2000-2002, and the FCO's Special Representative on Climate Change from 2006 until June 2012, played a particular prominent role in this regard. His perspective was that the FCO cannot change what governments think about climate change through negotiations under the UNFCCC. Instead, he argued that the FCO needs to influence the domestic political conditions that inform a government's political agenda and strategic priorities in order to increase action on climate change. Therefore, he proposed to highlight the economic impact of inaction, to emphasise business opportunities associated with low-carbon development, and to exemplify the security implications of unmanaged climate change. Such arguments were hoped to move up climate change on domestic political agendas of other states[ii].

FCO's concern resonated in the UK and abroad as at the time climate change was more frequently presented through lenses of national security, survival, conflict and instability in the press, reports and by prominent speakers. For instance, in 2004, David King, the UK Government's chief scientific advisor at the time, described climate change as being 'a far greater threat to the world's stability than international terrorism' (BBC, 2004). A number of UK-based think tanks and NGOs raised concerns about insecurity caused by climate change (see e.g., Smith and Vivekananda, 2007). This widespread presence of such ideas on climate change and security provided a conducive discursive space in which the FCO could develop, strengthen and employ its security narrative (Trombetta, 2008: 594-595). As argued by Ashton: 'It seemed to us…that if you wanted to push up ambition and urgency in responding to climate change then it would be a good idea to make the climate security discourse more prominent in the broad debate'.[iii]

The security narrative on climate change became particularly prominent when Margaret Beckett became Foreign Secretary in 2006. Prime Minister Tony Blair had asked Beckett to promote climate up the international agenda,[iv] with the Copenhagen UNFCCC Conference of December 2009 approaching. Climate change became an official strategic priority for the FCO under the banner of 'delivering climate security' (FCO, 2007: 70) and Beckett actively promoted a security narrative on climate change on an international level, raising the issue of climate security in Berlin, India, Mexico, the US and in the UN Security Council (see FCO 2007: 71). The debate at the UN Security Council was particularly considered a high profile move, as demonstrated by the high amount of attention by the press, and by follow-up debates in the UN General Assembly in 2009 and in the UN Security Council in 2011 (UNGA 2009; UNSC 2011b; 2011c). The debate was aimed to grasp the attention of heads of states and to create additional momentum to make action on climate change a key priority. It functioned as part of a wider diplomatic strategy by the FCO towards the Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen.

The aim was to keep climate change high on the political agendas of other states and to mobilise action. As commented by a FCO official:

> 'It is like the old water wars debate. Arguing that climate change is going to cause security problems helps you gain more international attention. This in turn can generate pressure on States to make the difficult compromises needed to agree on a successful post-Kyoto framework.'[v]

In the Spring of 2009, a security discourse on climate change even became institutionalised when FCO instated a Climate Security Team as part of its Climate Change and Energy Department. In September 2012, the name of this team changed into the Global Strategic Impacts Team, in order to engage with a wider range of narratives than just those on climate change and security. The Team's primary task was to mobilise greater action and agreement on climate change through the narrative of climate security. Security arguments on climate migration were for instance uses perceived as an effective vehicle to achieve the key objectives of climate change diplomacy:

'I think the migration strand is quite useful, because when you are trying to persuade other governments that this [climate change] is an important issue, migration is a very visible thing, it is a political thing, a thing that the electorate cares about. So, depending on the country, it can be a good avenue to engage politicians.'[vi]

As argued by Ashton, the FCO's Special Representative for Climate Change until June 2012: 'The security constituency is always a powerful one and if the security constituency becomes agitated about something then by and large it increases the chances that something is being done about it'.[vii] With a view to this, the FCO, in collaboration with the UK Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD), created a UK Climate and Energy Security Envoy in 2009, a position that ran until the end of 2012. The Envoy's primary assignment was to engage 'the defence and security community [within the UK and those of other states] on climate security to help create the political conditions necessary for a global deal on climate change' (FCO, 2010: 21).

The debate also managed to attract other state actors to the issue of climate security. Germany for instance provided clear support to the discourse by initiating the second UN Security Debate fully focussed on climate change, held in July 2011 (UNSC, 2011). The Small Island Developing States (SIDS) have actively promoted the climate security discourse since the 1990s, also in the Security Council debates. They have played on particular climate security storylines to raise concerns and fears amongst the broader international community. For example, Papua New Guinea has argued that global warming is 'as likely to cause massive dislocations of people as past and present wars' (UNSC, 2007: 28), playing on images of millions of climate refugees destabilizing international security. The FCO sees such states as 'message multipliers'.[viii] By strengthening the climate security coalition, more pressure is put on those states still needing to make ambitious mitigation

commitments under the UNFCCC. The primary countries the FCO aims to target are therefore the US and the emerging developing countries (see e.g., FCO, 2007: 71).

But these emerging countries are precisely those who have overtly rejected the security narrative on climate change. In the UN Security Council debates on climate change of both 2007 and 2011, leading developing countries criticised the move to discuss climate change in the Security Council and expressed great scepticism regarding alarmist security framings on climate change. To counter the security discourse on climate change, the Brazilian delegation for instance argued: '...utmost caution must be exercised in establishing links between conflict and the utilization of natural resources or the evolution of climate on our planet (UNSC, 2007: 20)'. Similar sceptical comments were made by other emerging developing countries, such as China and India, and has been supported by other developing countries who see climate change as a matter of sustainable development (Sindico, 2007). In particular, emerging developing countries with no special voting powers in the UN Security Council – such as India and Brazil – have been highly sceptical of these moves and thus prefer climate change to be discussed in forums where they do have decision-making power. In the 2011 debate, a number of emerging countries that were generally sceptical of a security framing of climate change - China, Russia, Brazil and India - were considerate of the precarious situation of developing small island states (SIDS). Brazil, for one, commented that the 'rather indirect relationship between security and climate change in no way diminishes the urgency of supporting countries and populations that are most vulnerable to climate change, in particular small island developing States, many of which face truly existential challenges' (UNSC 2011: 8). The emerging developing countries however accused the West of intending to change the terms of the debate by making climate change a subject of the UN Security Council, risking the further polarisation of the climate debate.In addition to these problems, the alarmist climate security narrative was also unable to maintain support within the UK itself in recent years. The tide has changed somewhat since the Coalition Government came into power in 2010 and the promotion of climate action in the UNFCCC was given a lower level of priority. In the 2010 National Security Strategy and the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review produced in the time of the Coalition Government, the need for a multilateral deal on climate change mitigation is only mentioned once (Cabinet Office, 2010: 18), and a security narrative had not been employed to promote efforts towards such action. The policy constituency within the UK fizzled out, making space for alternative and related framings (Boas and Rothe 2016).

Thus, in line with Robert Putnam's 'two-level-game', governments match the expectations of their negotiation partners with the expectations of domestic 'winning coalitions' needed to ratify cooperation agreements at home (Putnam 1988).

3. Climate securitisation: Securitising the Dutch delta

Due to its low lying, densely populated territory, the Netherlands is highly vulnerable to flooding. More than half its territory is prone to river and coastal flooding. For the Western Conurbation in which much of the population lives, including the cities of

Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague, horizontal large-scale evacuation in the event of a major flood is illusory.

After a disastrous storm surge in February 1953, claiming nearly 2000 Dutch lives, not mention Belgium and the UK, the Dutch decided to invest heavily in infrastructural coastal protection works, which have kept the Netherlands dry up until now. In the early 1990s, however, the underlying rationale for the flood security standards came undone as climate became an issue in Dutch professional water management circles, both in terms of sea level rise and increased river peaks due to glacier snowmelt (Kwadijk 1993). Two consecutive riverine near-floods in the early 1990s had served as wakeup calls of the latter, legitimising the fast-tracking of new structural river interventions by way of an emergency law (1995-1997) including a ban on building in the floodplain which was lifted in 2005. At the same time, it opened a window of opportunity for 'green engineering', rehabilitating widening rivers for safety but also restoration of natural, cultural and landscape values instead of building more flood defences.

After the turn of the millennium however there was a deeply-felt sense within the professional water community in the Netherlands that this greening went at the expense of safety; as the memory of disaster faded, security was dangerously skidding down the level of priorities. The responsible politician, Schulz, was a liberal sociologist without roots in public works, had shaken up standing advisory committees dominated by civil engineers. From 2004, items started to appear on national TV invoking existential threats. Well--known natural-science professors started to work the media to stem the tide[ix]. It helped that in 2004 the Pentagon released a scenario in which the Dutch administrative capital, The Hague was flooding due to climate change-induced flood. That same year, the first report was written assessing flood risk the same way as other risks, the Netherlands. In 2005 moreover, the havoc wreaked by Hurricane Katrina in and around New Orleans, widely explained as a 'climate disaster', put flood in deltas in the news. A high-level delegation led by the Dutch Water Minister visited New Orleans soon after, concluding that 100% safety is impossible to realise and the country needed to clean up its act.

A national advisory committee, the Dutch Delta Commission, was instated in 2006, presided over by former Agriculture Minister and Wageningen University CEO, Cees Veerman, and consisted of representatives from the domains of politics, science, engineering and civil service (Boezeman *et al.* 2013). In 2008 its conclusions were presented on national TV with great fanfare. Several discursive elements were mobilised or maximum impact For one, the name of the commission and the film introducing the accompanying 'media show'[x] harked back to the Delta Commission instated in the 1950s, instated after the destructive 1953 flood which claimed more than 1800 lives in the Netherlands and made many thousands homeless. But where the first delta commission had spent 7 years on its study and produced 6 volumes, presenting a blueprint for flood defence, the second commission less than 2 years and 100 pages on a vision rather than a plan (Verduijn et al 2013). The main idea was to give the Dutch 'bellyaches' over climate change-induced sea level rise. To make that happen, the commission already in the run-up to its report invoked the 1953 flood and Katrina as fearful examples, and used a rhetoric of war in which water is the enemy.

The Commission also stretched its mandate. Rather than a range of scenarios, it only opted for extreme sea level rise overtopping the Dutch dikes; instead of a range of policies, it gave one option. Rather than concentrating on the coasts, it presented a vision for the whole country (Verduijn et al 2013). At the same time the commission suggested a way out: if the Dutch was to invest 1 billion euros each year for the next century in coastal and river defences, it would be safe even in the worst case. In this context, we can appreciate that the commission had advised against renewal of floodplain zoning: the report's key message was that the Dutch can build wherever we like, because they have the know-how and technology to be safe.

At first there was blanket support and acclamation among parliamentary parties and in the press for the Commission's report after its launching on 3 September 2008. Then an Amsterdam aquatic ecologist broke the spell with a letter in the progressive *Volkskrant* quality daily, followed by scathing Wageningen[xi] and Delft commentaries. There was a strong sense among some of these responses that the committee had 'exaggerated the numbers and purposefully neglected the uncertainties that surround predictions about climate change' (Verduijn et al). It went beyond the IPCC '07 assessments or the KNMI 06 (Dutch Met Office) scenarios (Katsman et al., 2011, q. in Vink et al 2012). Rather than 4 degrees Celsius, the report took 6 degrees of global warming by the year 2100 as its poìnt of departure, bringing extra sea water expansion. KNMI had been consulted on the various scenarios about the 2006 models[xii]; the commission however decided to only consider an extreme sea-level rise scenario, which according to its director, Wilco Hazeleger, is as unlikely as no change at all, and at any rate was based on an as yet unpublished calculations (HAZELEGER 2008). The point of the commission however was to show that even in the craziest scenario, the country could sleep safely[xiii].Finally, the committee's interest in 'blue and 'green' technology completely bypassed community resilience – people do not really feature in the recommendations (De Vries and Wolsink 2009).

A different critique came from the opposite end: Delft engineers felt it was not structurally focused enough, pandering to faddish 'green engineering' trends. Unlike the original Delta Committee, the second commission only involved one engineer, a geologist (Stive). Climate securitisation legitimised environmental values playing hopscotch, paid from public money that was only intended for security: EUR 700 mln in dikes would have done the trick while EUR 2.4 bn was being spent to make space for the river. The Commission's advice would multiply this 'soiled' budget for the future (Rijcken 2008). Likewise a liberal parliamentarian, Neppérus, claimed the funding of the plan hypothecated future generations.

It is fair to say that it is so much not these professional and political misgivings that eroded the initial impact, but the economic crisis hitting the Netherlands three months after the report's public presentation. An economic as well as political landslide slowed much of the momentum built by the Delta Commission. The next elections brought no workable parliamentary majority. The centre-right coalition that took office needed the support of a rightist climate-sceptic populist party PVV to prop up the minority government. In exchange, it banned 'climate change' from all policy documents.

In the next, current coalition, climate policy has been somewhat restored. The Delta Commissioner's mandate was reduced and budgetary promises were deferred. The retrenchment only reinforced the second frame: there is little institutional backing and budget for non-structural options (van Buuren, Ellen, Warner 2016). Levees are considered more effective than any other combination of disaster risk reduction policies; any alternative is delusional (Jongejan, Jonkman and Vrijling, 2012). In that unpropitious context, it is remarkable how much of the orginal ideas have stood up in its implementation – taking place largely outside the limelight, and clearly shorn of the politics of urgency.

Discussion and Conclusion

Securitisation has two sides: an existential, life-and-death threat and its corollary: an extraordinary course of action the only way out. By reducing the number of scenarios and options, and seeking to control the 'staging' of its public communication, the Delta Commission is almost a textbook example of turning the logic of 'choice' into one of 'necessity'.

Table 1: comparison of climate securitisation

	UK	NL
Securitising move	Existential Threat: Appealing to hard security concerns	Existential Threat: Coastal and riverine flooding due to extreme climate change
	Only way out: mitigation of GHG emissions, a low carbon economy	Only way out: long-term funding for(green) infrastructure.
Resonance	In BRICS: scepticism. Sympathy with SIDS	In media and parliament: max In science: scepticism
Desecuritising move from opponents	Don't exaggerate	Don't exaggerate
Political dynamics over time	Change to centre-right government, backgrounding of climate diplomacy	Change centre-right government, rise of populist climate change negation, even erasing climate change from policy documents

Both case studies discussed show a dramatic securitising move, where climate change is presented as the source of great potential crisis that will harm us all, unless we take urgent action – either for mitigation (the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions) or for adaptation. The securitisation of climate presents the environment as a threat rather than an assetS. While successfully placed on the agenda of priorities, however its effect has been lacklustre. In line with arguments advanced by scholars such as Trombetta (2008), Corry (2012) and Methmann and Rothe (2012), we note the urgent action promoted here sits within the 'mundane', everyday realm of climate policy: the mitigation of GHG emissions via carbon markets and technological innovation without major implications

for the world economy. Whilst endorsing an exceptional discourse with grave predications about climate crisis and the use of terms such as 'war' and 'chaos' and nods to disasters, in both cases the securitisers ultimately sought to endorse "a rather piecemeal and technocratic approach" (Methmann and Rothe 2012: 324).

In so doing, our comparative analysis (Table 1) helps us to further explain discrepancies in securitisation processes. Intentions are crucial in securitisation (Floyd 2010). Since the FCO's securitising move was strategic and instrumental, it used alarmist warning messages to raise the urgency of mitigation measures rather than to endorse, consciously at least, exceptional measures such as military intervention and martial law. Even its actions within the UN Security Council remained mundane, as FCO primarily used the Council as a platform for raising further awareness, rather than to actually institutionalise climate change within the UN Security Council, which would have been a more exceptional move.

Likewise in the case of the Delta Commission, securitisation consciously narrowed scenarios, options and communication outlets, presenting infrastructural investment as the 'only way out', but did not call for drastic action. Rather, the Commission aimed to secure long-term funding and legitimacy for infrastructural investment, and in so doing (if in watered-down form) was more successful than FCO's move. The Commission aimed for a century-long year-on year funding, in light of a time line running up until 2200, which in many other countries would be considered absurd. Attrition and erosion inevitably took their toll, but the plans essentially still stand.

Both cases furthermore illustrate that security language does not necessarily help to increase the urgency of climate action. Apocalyptic discourses risk fuelling public disengagement with climate change and promote a sense of fatalism or scepticism. It leads 'to denial of the problem and disengagement with the whole issue in an attempt to avoid the discomfort of contending with it' (O'Neil and Nicholson-Cole 2009: 371). As the case on the securitisation of the Dutch Delta perfectly demonstrated, the dramatic imaging of climate change fuelled a sense of anti-environmentalism and scepticism regarding the likelihood of extreme weather impacts, such as severe and sudden storms and sea-level rise (see also Lowe et al. 2006; Hulme 2007, 2009: 213; Bettini 2013: 69). Exaggerating the gravity of the crisis, the Delta's commission risked losing its credibility. In a similar vein, the FCO's securitising move fuelled further mistrust and scepticism amongst key target audiences within the UN Security Council debates. It made emerging countries more sceptical of the UK's intentions on climate change and felt pressured through scare stories that were unfounded.

All in all, the analysis illustrates that particularly in the domain of climate change, where the future remains uncertain and many of discussions focus on issues of risks and potentialities (Corry 2012), securitisation is complex. An audience is not easily persuaded when hearing that something is an urgent threat – such a discourse needs to resonate with a context giving some indication that the doom scenario might come true. The debate on climate change and security is in many respects 'dominated by its futurology' (Baldwin et al. 2014: 121), making it an easy target for politicians to play on but also a difficult one to successfully securitize.

Given the lack of an immediate threat, the time element easily works against climate securitisers. Climate change was 'hot' for some years, but was both 'out-securitised' by other concerns such as the economic crisis and the Arab Spring, while the political climate changed priorities as well. By the 2010s the momentum created after Al Gore's film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, started to unravel. A prominent IPCC member, prof Richard Tol, took distance from the summary of the alarmist summary of the IPCC report – though not of the more nuanced report itself. EU industry commissioner Verheugen lambasted the 'climate hysteria' taking hold of Europe. It seems plausible to say that the climate alarmism worked up in both cases under scrutiny here indeed boomeranged. A different strategy may well be needed to restore climate on national and international agendas.

Notes

i A 'catastrophe' is 'a large-scale, sudden and disastrous event that causes widespread death, destruction and suffering'(Fidler 2007).

ii This information is based on interviews and phone interviews with key players by the second author.

iii Telephone interview by second author, John Ashton, 31 January 2012.

iv Interview by second author, Margaret Beckett, 23 November 2011, London.

v Telephone interview by the second author, FCO Official, 24 March 2011

vi Interview by the second author, Head of the FCO's Climate Security Team (now called Global Strategic Impacts Team), 8 March 2011, London.

vii Telephone interview by second author, John Ashton, 31 January 2012.

viii Based on interviews held in the FCO conducted in 2011 and 2012. See also Ashton 2011, on the need to use narratives to strengthen coalitions in the UNFCCC (see p. 10, 12).

ix Well-known Delft professors Vrijling and Stive successfully promoted climate change up the national political agenda in the Netherlands, while another, De Vriend, criticised the neglect of climate change in the *Washington Post* (Rijswoud 2012). A Wageningen environmental scientist, Vellinga, called for a new Delta Comission.

x Oomkes, L. 2008. 'Veerman's PR show', comment, *Trouw* daily, 5 September. Online: http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4500/Politiek/article/detail/1208078/2008/09/05/De-pr-show-van-Veerman.dhtml

xi To declare an interest, it should be added that the present article's first article was involved here, with various co-authors in various newspaper

xii Based on the experts it consulted, the commission considered '0.65–1.30 m in 2100 and 2–4 m in 2200 as plausible. In contrast, the KNMI '06 (Dutch Met Office) scenarios had projected 0.35 up to 0.85 m for 2100, without autonomous soil subsidence estimated by the Committee to be 0.10 m in 2100' (Vink et al 2012) .

xiii Veerman, C. & Fresco, L. 2008. De Delta kan zelfs zwartste scenario aan. *De Volkskrant* daily. 24 September 2016; interview by the first author with prof Stive, together with D. Roth, in 2009.

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SECURITISATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE: THE RISK OF EXAGGERATION

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***Abstract*:** The present contribution focuses on the 'selling' of the 'climate crisis' to intended key audiences, both in the international domain and at home. We look into the mechanics of crisis framing, the audience, and the resonance that the frame had, as well as development over time in two cases: the UK addressing the UN Security Council and the State Advisory Commission on Deltas ('Delta Commission') seeking support in the Netherlands for drastic measures to address sea level rise.
For this, we apply the conceptual framework from critical security studies and securitisation, with contributions from the domains of crisis and disaster studies.
Both case studies discussed show a dramatic securitising move, where climate change is presented as the source of great potential crisis that will harm us all, unless we take urgent action – either for mitigation (the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions) or for adaptation.

***Keywords*:** Climate Change. Securitization. Disasters. Adaptation. United Nations.

***Resumo*:** Esta contribuição tem como foco a "promoção" da "crise climática", para seus principais públicos, tanto no âmbito internacional como no plano doméstico. O olhar é para os mecanismos de enquadramento dessa crise, seu público e sua repercussão, bem como seu desenvolvimento ao longo do tempo, em dois casos: o do Reino Unido, na sua relação com o Conselho de Segurança da ONU, e o da Comissão Consultiva Estadual do Delta dos Países Baixos ("Comissão Delta"), buscando apoio nos Países Baixos para medidas drásticas para lidar com o aumento do nível do mar.
Para isso, aplica-se o quadro conceitual dos estudos críticos de segurança de securitização, com contribuições de estudos de crises e desastres.
Ambos os estudos de caso discutidos mostram um dramático movimento de securitização, no qual as mudanças climáticas são apresentadas como motivo de uma grande crise potencial, que vai prejudicar a todos se não tomarmos medidas urgentes – tanto para a mitigação (redução das emissões de gases de efeito estufa) quanto para a adaptação.

***Palavras-chave*:** Mudanças Climáticas. Securitização. Desastres. Adaptação. Nações Unidas.

Resumen: Esta contribución tiene como enfoque la "promoción" de la "crisis climática", para sus principales públicos, tanto en el ámbito internacional como en el doméstico. La mirada se posa sobre cómo se enmarca esta crisis, su público, y su repercusión, así como su desarrollo a lo largo del tiempo en dos casos: el del Reino Unido, en su relación con el Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU, y el de la Comisión Consultiva Estatal del Delta de los Países Bajos ("Comisión Delta"), buscando apoyo en los Países Bajos con el fin de implementar medidas drásticas para lidiar con la elevación del nivel del mar.

Para ello, se aplica el marco conceptual de los estudios críticos de seguridade y securitización, con contribuciones de investigaciones de crisis y desastres.

Ambos estudios de caso discutidos muestran un movimiento dramático de securitización, en el cual el cambio climático es presentado como motivo de una potencial gran crisis que perjudicará a todos si no adoptáremos medidas urgentes, tanto para la mitigación (reducción de emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero) como para la adaptación.