

Climate Security Challenges for NATO

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“Climate-related Security Risks – Coordinating International Responses”

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1. Climate change impacts on peace and security

Climate change: **systemic change altering the Earth systems**. The impacts are dependent on **context**, the climate conditions and ecosystems, but also the socio-political context. The idea of cause-effect challenged due to the spatial and temporal reach of cc.

The systemic character of cc → the security impacts span across **different understandings of security**: human, communal, territorial security, international. Each approach provides an understanding from that angle, but we also need to pay attention to the others. They are interlinked – the IPCC used ‘**comprehensive security**’ to capture this multidimensional approach.

Taken together, this challenge the security analysis, which needs to be developed. On this, it is relevant to pay attention to the following:

- a) Cc is not the primary reason for any conflict, but leaving nature out of the analysis lead us to overlook one factor among others in the conflict analysis.
 - a. Looking at UN peacekeeping operations, we identified last year that 8 out of ten of the biggest operations (in terms of staff) are located in areas highly exposed to climate change.
 - b) One way to advance the understanding of how climate change may impact (unique outcome of) violent conflicts is to explore **pathways – a process-oriented approach** in which the analytical interest lies on the **intermediating factors and human agency**. We have adopted this approach (e.g. on East Africa) and the analysis shows how cc impacts both the causes of conflicts (worsening livelihood conditions and changing mobility patterns) and the dynamics of ongoing hostilities (tactical considerations and elite exploitations of local grievances).

2. Organisations responses to climate security challenges

During the last 20 years, a slow, but steady growth is discernable regarding how organisations are developing their analysis and work on climate security challenges. The debate began in defence actors in

the US in the early 2000s and EU began developing its thinking more strategically in 2007-2008. These debates have revolved round the discourse of “**threat multiplier**” and focused on how climate change will impact vulnerable countries, which could lead to insecurity for these wealthy nations, but also highlighted fear of increased international migration as well as that the opening of the Arctic will lead to a new arena for (competing) geopolitical interests (of the natural resources).

This debate has been heavily criticized. The lack of evidence is one source of criticism, but another is the very framing that has been used – threat multiplier – and that **this framing identifies vulnerable populations and communities as being a threat for others.**

Despite this criticism, there is no doubt how detrimental the effects of climate change are on livelihood, on infrastructure, on economies, and also alters territories. In our analysis of how intergovernmental organisation are paying attention to climate security challenges, we can see how **the interests is increasing and that from different kinds of organisations** – not only defence, but also foreign policy, environment, development, health etc. Importantly, they employ different understandings of security.

A key finding is that these organisations **perceive collaboration** as critical for mitigating climate security challenges. The systemic challenge, the need to mutually work on mitigating greenhouse gases and adapt to climate change requires transformation processes in organisations. Organisations have **mandates**, but the very mandate may also have to be **revisited**.

To enhance collaboration across organisations (and also within organisations) framings do matter. To explore how climate security is framed also invites us to scrutinize which interpretations that are privileged and **what is at stake and for whom.**

Examples: comparing **EU’s framing of climate security** to regional organisations in Asia and Africa, we have identified substantial differences. Food security, for instance, comes high up in Asia and Africa, but plays a very minor role in EU’s foreign policies on climate security. We have also identified that when actors within the **African Union** changed approaches from framing climate change as a threat multiplier to instead emphasise the human security dimension, new more **productive spaces for political deliberation has come to the fore.** In my view, these insights is also important for NATO in its work to identify its process to outline which strategies it should take on advancing its policy and practices on climate security.

Policy level (policy frameworks and strategies) – translation into practices. EU – an example of a lot of policy, but very difficult to trace any practices. Possibly reasons: leadership (strategic and persistent), capabilities and competence, incentives (it includes revisiting new forms of modes of operation but also norms).

3) What does climate security challenges mean for NATO?

Should NATO care? Absolutely, yes. NATO should care. I may sound it shouldn’t, but instead my answer is a strong yes. Why?

- Climate change is a matter for all organisations and businesses. It is about **mitigation** (taking part in the transition towards a low carbon future), but it is also about **adaptation**. For NATO, the former involves a huge transition away from fossil fuels (defence actors are high

emitters). The latter – adaptation – includes multiple areas: it is about changing operation environments and what that means in terms of challenges faced, working conditions, and with whom to collaborate, but it is also about possibly new tasks, e.g. defence organisation may have increasing roles to play in supporting disasters following extreme weather events.

- But equally important, it is also about fostering a new mindset of how we perceive security risks. Climate change alters the basic of what human societies thrives upon, and this calls for a re-thinking also of how we perceive security. We have to span across short-term, pressing challenges of today, with long-term goals of sustainable peace. This has implication for analysis, but also working modalities. It is also a matter of critically scrutinizing which secondary effects its operations have on insecurity. (being conflict-sensitive in the transition towards renewable energy, but also in its operation).
- The systemic character of climate change calls for collaboration across regions and organisations. To enable this, it is crucial that organisations with a lot of power, such as NATO, are sensitive to how its work is perceived and which security interests its privilege. The impacts of climate change expose global inequalities and all organisations have to reflect upon these injustices and how it should relate to them.
- Likewise, it is also about cooperation among NATO member states. What role does for instance US policy on climate change have for how NATO could advance its work? How could NATO's knowledge on climate change and its security implications also advance changes in the US?