



Climate Security Challenges for NATO

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“Building Transatlantic Climate Resilience: Considerations and Capabilities”

(Transcript of pre-recorded video message)

Alice Hill, David M. Rubenstein Senior Fellow for Energy and the Environment, Council on Foreign Relations

Hello, my name is Alice Hill. I am the David M. Rubenstein Senior Fellow for Energy and the Environment at the Council on Foreign Relations, and I was previously special assistant to President Obama and senior director for resilience policy on the National Security Council staff.

I really wish I could be there in person with you today, but for a variety of reasons, that can't be. You are meeting today on an extremely important topic. How can NATO make a difference when it comes to understanding climate risk? What is its role going forward?

This issue is very real in Americans' minds right now. Of course, we are suffering from massive wildfires in our American West, with close to five million acres burned, and also we are facing the approach of more hurricanes that have intensified and hit our shores than we typically see.

So the question is how can we better prepare ourselves, as well as our military forces to withstand these types of impacts?

Everyone is at the beginning of their journey of understanding climate risk. As NATO works toward a vision for NATO 2030, it has the potential to help the international security community understand and address the growing security threats posed by climate change. The NATO Alliance is crucial to guaranteeing the joint security of its members, as well as the international community at-large.

Less than a decade ago, many countries and many people considered climate change a threat for the distant future. But recent events—typhoons and hurricanes forming earlier and being more intense, wildfires rapidly advancing across unprecedented amounts of territory, and droughts and temperatures that exceed anything in recorded history—have made clear that the traditional threat environment has changed. It is changing quickly and dramatically. The borderless challenges posed by climate change are already destabilizing fragile countries and vulnerable regions.

Because climate change brings new extremes never before experienced, it will require military forces to examine all aspects of their mission. They must anticipate more frequent calls for humanitarian assistance. They must also plan for how climate change will affect military readiness, its operations, and its acquisitions. Can their fighter jets take off and fly in high heat?

What kind of runways do we need? Can young men and women soldiers remain healthy as temperatures soar? Are military bases prepared for bigger storms, deeper drought, and sea-level rise?

As the Allied forces seek answers to these questions, they have a lot to learn from each other. If NATO develops a strategy for how to adapt to climate change, including mainstreaming consideration of climate risks into its operations, plans, programs, and strategies, it will enhance the security of all. It would also serve as a model for militaries across the globe.

The United States military is still struggling with the issue of climate change and security. In 2018, Hurricane Michael damaged every building on Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida, while only one month earlier, Hurricane Florence had devastated Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. In that single year, the damage to these military installations cost the Department of Defense \$8 billion. Similarly, it spent a billion dollars building a space radar station on an island in the Pacific, an atoll, but in the planning of that construction, it neglected to consider the effects of sea-level rise, which already threaten the freshwater supplies on the island. Currently, over two-thirds of the military's operationally critical installations are threatened by climate change within the United States.

These threats to military readiness are not unique to my country. With increased exposure to worsening flooding, drought, desertification, wildfires, and melting permafrost, international military installations are at increasing risk. This poses an immediate threat to the armed forces' readiness to respond to security emergencies at home and abroad. NATO could play a key role in helping military forces understand their growing vulnerabilities. By developing a strategy for climate change, it will help build a cadre of security experts that understand what is at stake and what needs to be done.

NATO could also lead exercises and create scenarios to test the Alliance's capabilities under varying conditions. Scenarios and exercises are nothing new, but focusing on climate risks is new. And who knows, maybe the efforts will pay off?

U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower, who led the Allied forces during World War II in Europe, once stated that "Plans are useless, but planning is essential." Planning lets people understand the risks and consider a full range of solutions. Between World War I and World War II, the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Marine Corps engaged in war games. From 1933 to 1937, they met at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. They used the time to plan the entire Pacific campaign against an anticipated threat from imperial Japan. The military services fought almost exactly that same campaign across the Pacific from 1942 to 1945. And they won.

In the case of increasing threats to global security fueled by a changing climate, NATO has the opportunity to serve as a leader in driving considerations of climate change and helping nations to understand their collective risk.

I want to thank you for having me here today, especially to NATO and the Environment & Development Resource Centre (EDRC). I appreciate your hosting this important dialogue, and I'm anxious to hear the outcomes. This is a chance for all of us to see security improve and to learn from each other. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.