



BRUSSELS
DIALOGUE
ON
CLIMATE
DIPLOMACY



Climate Security Challenges for NATO

12th meeting of the Brussels Dialogue on Climate Diplomacy

Thursday, 17 September 2020

SUMMARY REPORT

The 12th meeting of the Brussels Dialogue on Climate Diplomacy (BDCD) - co-organized by the Environment & Development Resource Centre (EDRC) was held on Thursday, 17 September 2020 and hosted by the Policy Planning Unit in the Office of the NATO Secretary General.

This event was organized in the context of [NATO 2030](#), the forward looking reflection on the future of the Alliance, which was officially launched by the Secretary General on 8 June 2020. As part of this process, NATO is organising a series of thematic events to engage more in-depth with civil society, advocacy and expert groups. These will focus on the topics of climate and security, human security, economic security and democracy. The specific aim of this conference was to hear from civil society and other key stakeholders how they see NATO's role in mitigation of climate change and adaptation to climate security challenges.

The 17 November virtual conference brought together over 30 representatives of civil society organizations from the BDCD and 25 officials from NATO Headquarters and SHAPE as well as other regional and international organizations (EC, EEAS, OSCE, UN, etc.)

The aim of this session was to hear from civil society and other key stakeholders on how they see NATO's role in mitigation of climate change and adaptation to climate security challenges. Ideas and suggestions are to be fed into both the reflection on NATO 2030 and the ongoing conversation within NATO on developing a coherent approach to climate issues. Fifty participants took part in the event including experts from civil society organisations and observers from international and regional organisations.

Welcome and Introduction

The meeting was opened by **Dr. Benedetta Berti**, Head of Policy Planning, Office of the Secretary General (NATO-PPU) and **Ronald A. Kingham**, Executive Director, Environment & Development Resource Centre (EDRC) followed by remarks by **Robert Dresen** Policy Planning Advisor, Office of the Secretary General, who then provided a short overview of NATO's past and ongoing efforts related to climate and security. Robert explained that in the Strategic Concept of 2010 NATO has recognized climate change as a factor impacting its security environment, and that NATO has been working since 2014 on reducing military energy consumption in the context of the Green Defence framework. The NATO Secretary General is now looking to step up this work because climate change impacts NATO in three ways. Climate change affects our security environment leading to new challenges that must be anticipated. Climate change leads to different circumstances in which NATO must be able to operate, such as hotter, wetter, and generally more unpredictable environments. And finally, NATO must take

its share of responsibility to reduce emissions – while realizing that it is not the first or foremost actor when it comes to overall climate policy.

“Climate-Related Security Challenges for the Military”

The first session, moderated by **Dr. Jamie Shea**, Professor of Strategic Studies, University of Exeter and Secretary General of the Global Military Advisory Council on Climate Change (GMACCC) featured a keynote presentation by **Rear Admiral RN (Ret.) Neil Morisetti**, Vice Dean (Public Policy), Faculty Engineering Sciences at University College London / Member, Global Military Advisory Council on Climate Change (GMACCC).

Neil spoke about how both geopolitics and the security environment are highly impacted by climate change, directly and indirectly, causing instability and the risk of conflict. While climate change may not be the first-order cause of conflict, it can amplify tensions as a consequence, as seen in the Arab Spring and Syria. He emphasized that these new transboundary, non-traditional threats demand action, as no action would lead to greater risks in the future. Not only will it cause loss of land or livelihoods, but climate change will be felt globally, in disruptions of supply chains and the loss of markets as well as in the geopolitical realm.

The impact of climate change, threatening countries both internally and externally, calls for the essential engagement of NATO. Its relevance is dependent on moving beyond traditional security challenges, understanding risks holistically. Neil further emphasized the need for partnership with specialized and global institutions to be able to make effective use of NATO's capacities, tools, and expertise, which could help ensure stability and security in the future. Neil emphasized the consideration of "wider security lens" which may allow NATO to move beyond just challenges to also profit from new benefits and opportunities.

“What Role for NATO in Climate and Security Issues?”

The second session was moderated by **Alexander Verbeek**, Policy Director at the Environment & Development Resource Centre (EDRC).

“Building Transatlantic Climate Resilience: Considerations and Capabilities”

In her video message, **Alice Hill**, David M. Rubenstein Senior Fellow for Energy and the Environment at the Council of Foreign Relations, speaking on “Building Transatlantic Climate Resilience: Considerations and Capabilities” critically assessed the importance of the military forces to better prepare for the "borderless challenges posed by climate change". Alice provided a distinctive focus towards not simply civilians' vulnerability to intensified weather events, such as wildfires and hurricanes, but further laid out the threat of climate change for military forces. "Over two-thirds of the military's operationally critical installations are threatened by climate change within the United States", therefore military forces need to reassess their "military readiness, operations, and acquisition" based upon climate risk considerations.

Alice recognized the role of NATO in helping to understand the intensifying vulnerability for the armed forces, developing strategies, and creating scenarios under the conditions of climate risks. This will enable nations and the international security community "to understand their collective risks" posed by climate change.

“Climate-related Security Risks – Coordinating International Responses”

The Programme Director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), **Dr. Malin Mobjörk**, introduced her vision by emphasizing the need for a contextual understanding of “Climate-related Security Risks – Coordinating International Responses”. Security multidimensionality across “human, communal, territorial, and international security”, calls for an interlinked “comprehensive security” approach. Malin reminded us that despite climate change predominately challenging society in broader sense, it is also a factor in conflicts and needs to be considered relevant as impacting both the cause and dynamics of conflicts.

Framing climate change as a “threat multiplier” is not a viable approach due to the challenges climate change pose to societies or complexity in regional organizations’ perception of climate security in its specific context. Global collaboration thus has to reflect upon the diversity of security interests across regions and organizations. Malin identified NATO’s role in addressing climate security challenges both in mitigation, as moving away from fossil fuel, and adaptation in terms of operations, working conditions, collaboration, and new tasks.

“Climate Change and Peacebuilding & Stabilization Operations”

Olivia Lazard, Environmental Peacemaking Expert, Visiting Researcher at Carnegie Europe and Policy Advisor at the EDRC talked about the need to question how we conceive of peacebuilding and stabilisation operations in a climate-disrupted world. It is not just that theatres of operations are going to change, and that conflicts will protract in several dimensions. It is also that some of the responses necessary to mitigate climate change are found in conflict and fragile zones. Indeed, marine, and terrestrial ecosystems are the key regulators of the climate regime. Some of the most important are located in conflict and fragile zones with ongoing missions (the Sahel, the Mediterranean, the Congo Basin, Myanmar). Protection and regeneration of ecosystems is needed in order to reverse global warming over time AND to adapt quickly and effectively to climate-related disasters that are already locked into the system as a result of past emissions and continuous breaking of ecological interdependencies at all levels. In short, NATO needs to now evolve its security and mandate framing to include ecosystems-based approaches, ranging from analysis to repurposing some of its civilian and military capabilities, to contributing to institutionalisation of ecosystems-based actions.

First, since NATO partially defines itself as a disaster management alliance, it must now evolve its mandate into dealing with the climate disaster which is unfolding in slow and continuous motion. As such, active, pre-emptive, and continuous management of disasters is critical. NATO must adapt its analytical capacities to anticipate where disasters will hit and prepare accordingly. Second, NATO must contribute to addressing root drivers of climate disruptions – not just through its equipment and infrastructure overhaul – but through directly addressing the plundering of environmental resources feeding into conflict economies and criminal networks. This entails that NATO should contribute to tackling transactional environmental crime. Third, NATO should integrate complex regeneration in its disaster management mandate and repurpose civilian and military capabilities to execute complex regeneration within NATO territory, in partner countries and in zones where NATO is deployed. Complex regeneration through natural means is both necessary to prevent and mitigate disasters and reinforce our global capacity to tackle climate change. If done properly, it can support reconstruction, stabilisation, and prevention of conflicts. It requires acquiring new analytical competencies and active expertise to support adequate and effective regeneration designed for human and environmental benefits. Finally, NATO can contribute to institutionalizing ecosystems-based approaches, which are needed across the board, as a new governance and security framework. It can do so by engaging in scientific partnerships via the SPS programme. It can also contribute to deconflicting and de-escalating tensions in areas such as the Arctic and the Mediterranean by adopting new types of ecological diplomacy frameworks based on regeneration and scientific partnerships.

If NATO fails to adapt to the meta challenge of climate change, and fails to comprehend holistically the drivers of climate change and tackle them, it will eventually drive itself into obsolescence as security and climate-related shocks increase in time and impact exponentially over the coming two decades.

“Energy Transition and the Defence Sector”

Dr. Radostina Primova, Senior Analyst, Economic Program, Center for the Study of Democracy, Sofia, identified a variety of new threats to security next to Climate change. Cybersecurity has become more crucial as the digital transformation has facilitated harm through cyber-attacks. Radostina further emphasized that nuclear energy as a means to low carbon decarbonization will impact dependencies as well as sustainability and climate policies within the EU. She raised attention to the importance of nature-based solutions, instead of geoengineering as an answer to climate change. The potential consequences of technological interventions in the ecosystem can affect the planet and security, creating social injustices, risks, as well as human rights violations. Moreover, the role of investing in gas infrastructure leads to dependencies and continuous usage of fossil fuel infrastructure. These dependencies, including the case of mineral resources for renewable energy technology particularly from China, have to be taken into consideration according to Radostina. She urged the need for a more consistent strategy to decarbonize at the EU-level, to ensure both energy and climate security.

Thank you and wrap-up

Following an interactive discussion among the participants, **Dr. Benedetta Berti**, thanked the speakers and participants for all their valuable insights and suggestions with Ron Kingham adding that in follow-up to this event EDRC will propose to the civil society organisations participating in the BDCD and to other NGOs and think tanks the setting up of a temporary informal **North-Atlantic Civil-Society Working-Group on Environment and Security (NCWES)** to exchange ideas and produce a report addressed to the NATO Secretary General with observations and specific recommendations to strengthen NATO's political dimension for the next decade and beyond from a climate and security perspective.

Rapporteur: Julia Bosshard, EDRC