



Policy Brief “Translating the Climate-Security-Nexus”

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Background

This brief summarizes the results of a research workshop held at the George C. Marshall Center for European Security Studies from 24th to 28th July 2023. This workshop, organized by the Research and Policy Analysis Department of the Center, brought together 35 experts from 14 countries to scrutinize security implications of climate change on Europe’s Northern (High North/Arctic) and Southern Flank (MENA /West Africa).

Climate change is a planetary challenge with security policy implications and it requires immediate action. The ongoing processes, interrelations, and interdependencies are non-linear and hard to grasp for the human brain. Therefore, security professionals need to develop ways to divide the complexity of climate change into manageable tasks. One important outcome of the workshop is that the regionalization of the challenges is key to develop solutions. Physical change, like rising temperatures and changing precipitation patterns, has a direct influence on environmental conditions. These have an impact on the inhabitants of an ecosystem that includes humans. In addition to the effects on biodiversity in an ecosystem there are also effects on living and social conditions for humans which shape human behavior. Human actions not only change their direct social and natural surroundings but also influence the development of climate conditions in other regions and globally. This development is not circular. The changes are interrelated and might reinforce each other. Developments might not be easy to recognize until they reach a certain threshold or a tipping point. Some developments may be reversible, others are not.

Human reactions to changes are not predetermined. Changing living and social conditions influence individual and group decisions. This can lead to aggregated individual behavior, like migration or urbanization, or organized social behavior, like cooperation or conflict. Human security issues are not clearly separated from national and international security. The aggregation of multiple problems may not only challenge fragile states with weak governance, but also increase competition between regional and major powers. In either case, more crisis management will be called for at the state, regional, and global levels.



Impact of climate change on Europe's Northern and Southern Flank

While climate change impacts will affect all of Europe's flanks, governance differences in the North vis-à-vis the South will play a critical role in the success of planning and execution of climate-security related responses. That is, the High North enjoys inter-governmental forums and frameworks like the Arctic Council (7/8 members are NATO), albeit currently disrupted by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, multi-year efforts have helped the Arctic become a region of cooperation and mutual understanding. Comparatively, the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) exhibits high levels of political and social unrest, limiting the region's ability to broadly collaborate on regional issues, including climate change.

On Europe's less populated Northern Flank, the changing environmental conditions will influence the global dynamics of climate change, the navigability of new trade routes, and the availability of resources. Economic opportunities will increase human presence and interaction in the region. As such, this will have influence on the ecosystem and on the social conditions in the Arctic, opening chances for both conflict and cooperation. While international frameworks exist, the region is becoming increasingly congested (e.g., shipping, resource extraction), which could lead to conflict (intended and unintended). As congestion rises, so will demand for military support on humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR) missions, affecting the short-to-medium term role of security forces and their respective training (i.e., imperative to adapt to the nature of threats). Similarly, to capitalize on the changing economic landscape, this rapidly changing region will require investments in infrastructure and supply chain resiliency as well as improved access to energy and financing. Infrastructure resiliency will play an important role in enabling security operations in the region. Such regional transformations will impact lives and livelihoods of local Arctic communities, from potentially continuous marginalization and resulting higher social tensions, to obtaining more prominent roles in local government and security planning due to extensive operational knowledge of the region. Long-term political, economic, and social changes can exacerbate intra and inter-state governance challenges, however, in the short-term, the region appears to operate under principles that enable multi-domain collaboration.

In the MENA region and Africa with its quickly growing population the changing environmental conditions will exacerbate the scarcity of resources and health problems (heat related and epidemics), increase living costs, inflation, and the need for cooling and climate-resilient infrastructure. For the Southern Flank two pathways are possible. Firstly, the changing conditions can increase social tensions and unrest, as well as the stress on inefficient communal, national, and regional governance systems. Scarce resources could be weaponized as instruments of power on different levels (globally, international, in communities) to influence, blackmail, and coerce others. Other effects like brain drain, the drying out of trade routes like the Nile and the Suez Canal, and businesses moving out of the region could lead to a downward spiral for the region and a spill-over of conflict to adjacent regions like Europe. In the field of strategic competition, opponents like Russia and China could use strategic narratives highlighting the responsibility for the developments and the inaction of the West to deepen the divide between the West and the Global South. Secondly, decision makers on different levels could realize that the only way to manage the deteriorating conditions requires regional cooperation. This could reduce tensions and create win-win-situations. Cooperation could be fostered by sustainable transboundary pilot projects in the priority areas: water, food, energy, health, and climate-

resistant infrastructure. Such projects could feed into a cooperative narrative for the region. An entry point for further cooperation could be regional security cooperation with its existing lines of communication. Cooperation would also require adequate financial resources. It could foster regional and global knowledge development, sharing, and management (knowledge and technology as public good) as well as public-private-academic partnerships. However, if cooperation fails, there is an imminent threat of fragmentation. This could, for example, increase hostilities between North Africa and Europe and lead to a militarization of the Mediterranean.

Implications for EU and NATO

Northern Flank

- Enhancing Arctic all domain awareness, information sharing, and crisis management capabilities should be prioritized to ensure regional stability & human security.
- Security guarantees of supply chains and related assets in this increasingly congested region will be key to managing contested needs (e.g., potential territorial disputes, infrastructure vulnerabilities).
- The region is expected to exhibit lower inter-state tension in the near future. As such, the role of security providers in the Arctic is likely to be oriented towards humanitarian assistance and disaster response. Civil-military cooperation will be imperative in capability building.
- Climate change will likely influence geo-political and geo-economic dynamics (within and outside the Arctic Council). Reestablishing communications across the Arctic Council could reinforce existing international governance frameworks.
- Cold weather military capacity and capability training exercises should be prioritized, including adapting logistics and infrastructure, joint training and forces / systems interoperability.

Southern Flank

- A common vision / harmonized understanding about the climate-security nexus between Europe (the political west) and North Africa / Middle East partners is needed for effective management of both opportunities and risks. This also requires a re-definition of the existing partnership and includes real equality of the partners, the ownership of the developments in their region by regional actors, subsidiary support by the political West, and avoiding “green colonialism”.
- This goes hand in hand with crafting a joint narrative fostering regional collaboration and supporting this with successful and sustainable pilot projects.
- Environmental stresses will lead to population displacement and increased migration, both within countries and across borders, as people seek more habitable and resource-rich areas. EU economic support (e.g., via win-win agreements on renewable energy generation, food, water) plays a role in fostering relationships for mutual economic and human resiliency.

- Comprehensive understanding of the southern flank’s geo-economic map will be imperative to ensure appropriate strategic and operational horizon planning (e.g., the water-energy-food nexus is the meeting place between climate change and geo-politics and geo-economics).
- A climate-security network for the European southern flank could assist in building stronger EU/NATO and North Africa diplomatic and military ties (via shared capacity development, investments, infrastructure collaborations, climate information sharing) to address expected rise in migration and refugee crises management.
- EU / NATO C4ISR could play a role in planning and execution of border management as border intensity of potential migratory waves could overstretch current border security infrastructure.
- If collaboration fails and living conditions in the region drastically deteriorate, the EU and NATO need to consider possible spill-overs as a security threat (militarization of the Mediterranean) with implications for crisis management capabilities.

Ultimately, climate security can be a new vector of regional collaboration grounded on equal partnership status. Any response to this emerging threat landscape will necessitate a portfolio, whole-of-government, and whole-of-society approach, where regional collaboration is based on renewed governance systems (i.e., decision making & implementation that meaningfully involves all stakeholders, avoiding green colonialism). Similarly, this regional collaboration should ensure that narratives and multi-stakeholder education is prioritized as it will affect the speed and intensity of decarbonization efforts, guide joint training of security forces, and help shape local dialogues on all aspects of regional resiliency.

About the Authors

Dr. Katrin Bastian is a Lecturer of Security Studies at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies. Before joining the GCMC in autumn 2020, Dr. Bastian worked as the personal adviser to the Ambassador of the Principality of Liechtenstein in Berlin. During her sixteen years of service at the embassy, she also worked as lecturer of international relations and EU foreign policy at Humboldt University Berlin (2005-2008) and at the University of California at Berkeley (2009).

Carlos Cantafio Apitz is an experienced management consultant currently pursuing a Master of Global Affairs (University of Toronto) and completing an internship at GCMC's Research and Policy Analysis Department. Most recently, he was awarded a Canadian federal grant to conduct research on potential positive innovation externalities arising from establishing a "mission approach" to deliver on defense decarbonization in North America. He is also a Lupina-Innovation Policy Lab Fellow at the University of Toronto. Previously, he was a Manager at Deloitte Canada leading multi-disciplinary teams in delivering global enterprise transformation programs across the public, private, and non-profit sectors.

Lt. Col. Falk Tettweiler works at the Research and Policy Analysis Department of the College of International and Security Studies at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies. He has extensive expertise in European and German Security Policy which he gained during his work in the German Federal Ministry of Defense, the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), and the Federal Academy for Security Policy (BAKS). Falk has had many touchpoints with the Far East. Besides travelling the region both as part of official delegations and on his own, he has been dealing with Chinese philosophy and strategic thought for many years.

Dr. Frank Hagemann is Commander of the German Element, Deputy Dean Research and Head of Research and Policy Analysis Department of the College of International and Security Studies (CISS). His areas of Expertise's are European Security and Defense Policy, The Transatlantic Relationship and German Military History. He has, among other positions, been Assistant Military Representative to the Military Committees in Brussels, where he gained in-depth experience with regard to the military-political environment of the EU and NATO. Colonel Dr. Hagemann has also had two assignments to the German Ministry of Defense in Bonn and Berlin.

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