



The Climate-Security Nexus: Implications for the Military

- Installations, Operations and Personnel -

On 24 October 2019, the European Organisation of Military Associations and Trade Unions ([EUROMIL](#)), together with the Environment & Development Resource Centre ([EDRC](#)) and in association with the Brussels Dialogue on Climate Change ([BDCC](#)) and the Global Military Advisory Council on Climate Change ([GMACCC](#)) with the kind support of the [EESC](#) and the [Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs](#), organised a conference on "The Climate-Security Nexus: Implications for the Military – Installations, Operations and Personnel".

The conference brought together about 75 stakeholders from different institutions (EU, NATO, SHAPE, UN, OSCE, national departments of defence, foreign ministries and embassies, military trade unions and professional associations, academia, think tanks and NGOs) to

- Raise awareness about the ways in which climate change impacts security challenges.
- Exchange views of different stakeholders on what needs to be done to understand and address how the climate-security nexus affects military personnel.
- Develop ideas on how to further work on these issues in a coordinated way.

Session 1: Opening and Welcoming Remarks

EUROMIL President **Emmanuel Jacob** opened the meeting and welcomed the participants to the conference. He highlighted the fact that the idea of looking at the implications of the climate-security nexus on military personnel was born in the preparation of a EUROMIL Presidium Meeting one year ago. At a first meeting in Budapest in October 2018, EUROMIL member associations explored how climate changes can and will impact the security situation and how this in turn will affect the very nature of the military profession due to changed tasks and missions, environments and equipment. He made it clear that EUROMIL's focus lies on the implications of these changes on the men and women in uniform who deliver our security: the soldiers.



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Martin Siecker, Member of the European Economic and Social Committee, welcomed the participants in the premises of the EESC. He remarked that when he was growing up, there was a strict divide between police forces delivering internal security and armed forces being engaged in external security efforts. Today, also due to global challenges like climate change, the lines between internal and external security are blurring. While the EESC has no competence when it comes to the military as such, climate change and civil society cooperation to prevent negative effects of climate change are an area of great interest to the EESC.

Yvan Keckeis, Senior Policy Officer at the Directorate of Political Affairs of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, started off by reflecting on the recent elections in Switzerland, in which the green parties made considerable gains. With their commitment to climate action, we may see a further emphasis on substantial mitigation. This is important, as mitigation is the best way of reducing climate risks. He highlighted various Swiss efforts aimed at mainstreaming climate and security activities and overcoming silos, i.e. encouraging the humanitarian, development, military and climate communities to work closer together. He mentioned that Switzerland is a candidate for a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council for the term 2023/24. The topic of climate change and security is considered a cornerstone of the Swiss candidature. This focus shall also secure the continuity of efforts of recent non-permanent members in the UN Security Council.

Session 2: Keynote Addresses

Céline Charveriat, Executive Director of the Institute for European Environmental Policy, confirmed that silos still exist but urgently need to be overcome if one is to tackle the climate-security nexus in a meaningful way. From an environmental perspective, a holistic and prevention-oriented and conflict-sensitive approach is urgently needed. Especially given the intertwined nature of risks and challenges and the many areas which are affected (trade, geopolitics, environment, military etc.) horizon scanning and early warning are essential: While human beings yearn for simplicity, in the area of climate change we need to embrace complexity.

Jamie Shea, Secretary General of GMACCC, highlighted a few of the extreme weather events the world witnessed in the last months and observed that there is a contradiction between the growing awareness of the urgency to act against climate change and rising emission levels at the same time. Climate change also needs to be acknowledged by the military community and be put on top of national security issues. Most importantly, besides the responsibility to protect, he advocated for the notion of a responsibility to prepare – not only because prevention, preparedness and resilience are often cheaper than reaction. When it comes to reaction, especially military forces should make sure that the side effects are controlled, and interventions do not do more harm than good. Finally, he concluded that landscapes which are changing due to climate change might impact the geopolitical situation and need close monitoring.

Session 3: The Climate-Security Nexus: Reviewing the State of Play

Alexander Verbeek, Policy Director of the EDRC and Founder of the Institute for Planetary Security kicked-off the panel by stating that the signs and impacts of climate change are accelerating. While there are many different facets of the issue, focusing on military personnel is good and important.

Neil Morisetti, retired Rear Admiral and Honorary Professor and Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Engineering Sciences of the University College of London stated that climate is a security issue, but there is no security solution to the problem. As the involvement of the security and military community is crucial, a whole of government and whole of society approach is needed. Energy efficiency of the military is becoming an increasingly important issue. Military planners need to realize that this issue has a cost efficiency aspect as well as a mission effectiveness aspect, meaning that it does not only make sense from a “green logic” point of view but also from an operational point of view. Three aspects are key when addressing the climate-security nexus: The link-up across the government, the language needs to be right and leadership must be involved at all levels.

Nicolas Regaud, Special Representative to the Indo-Pacific (DGRIS – French MoD) presented the achievements and projects of the French Ministry of the armed forces in the area of climate and security. The ministry has been engaged in “green defence” (mitigation, eco-design, compliance with environmental standards) since the early 2000’s and in a comprehensive adaptation policy since 2015. For example, the project “eco-camp 2025” looks at how military camps abroad can reduce their energy and water supply dependence, while comprehensive studies are initiated in order to foresee the impact of climate change on the resilience of military bases in metropolitan France and overseas. French overseas territories are particularly vulnerable to extreme climate events, whose intensity is increasing due to climate change, and the French MoD is supporting scientific research projects in order to better anticipate these events. The French MoD is actively engaged with partner countries in the Indo-Pacific in joint studies on the impact of climate change on defence and security, which result in common roadmaps for action in the fields of knowledge & anticipation, protection and prevention. A key instrument used for both national and international policy is the Observatory on Climate and Defence, created in 2016 by the MoD, which conducts studies ordered by all interested departments, thus developing awareness and ownership within the defence community.

Esra Buttanri, Senior Adviser on Sustainable Development, Office of the Co-ordinator of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, shared information on how climate change is addressed in the context of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which is the world’s largest regional security organization. The OSCE’s environmental activities build on the two-way relationship between environment and security: namely environmental challenges as possible source of tensions; and environmental co-operation as a tool for good neighbourly relations, conflict

prevention and confidence building. She underlined that climate change is addressed in the context of environmental activities, and gave examples of OSCE's work in this field, including the participatory assessment of potential security implications of climate change in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the South Caucasus that was conducted within the framework of the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative. The OSCE will continue to raise awareness and strengthen national capacities in addressing potential security risks stemming from climate change in the OSCE region.

Session 4: Looking Beyond Europe and Learning from Partners

Ronald A. Kingham, Executive Director of the EDRC, Coordinator of GMACCC and Co-Coordinator of the BDCD, chaired the panel and opened by remarking how crucial it is to look beyond Europe and as is learning from international partners.

ANM Muniruzzaman, retired Major General and Chairman of GMACCC and President of the Bangladesh Institute for Peace and Security Studies elaborated on the challenges posed by the sea-level rise in many parts of the world, which is affecting water and food security, energy security as well as contributing to a loss of habitat. Taken together, it constitutes an existential threat to mankind which will destabilize regional and international security. In sum, retrained and retooled military forces are needed, and climate change effects need to be integrated into military strategic planning.

Ashley McIlvain Moran, Director of the State Fragility Initiative at the Robert Strauss Center for International Security and Law, University of Texas at Austin, highlighted that state fragility combined with climate risks can be extremely dangerous for the countries in question. Fragility is key to understanding how climate vulnerabilities can be made worse by a government's inability to address climate risks and the follow-on social and economic process that can lead to greater civil unrest or instability. Her team's research clearly shows that, in states with high climate and fragility risks, poor state legitimacy contributes even more to overall fragility than poor state capacity does. Resilience initiatives are thus key to reducing both climate risks and the legitimacy deficits that contribute to fragility in those countries in Africa and Asia which are facing this double risk of fragility and climate change. Efforts to support the resilience building in these states and societies are therefore urgently needed.

Session 5: Effects of the Changing Security Landscape for Military Installations, Operations and Personnel

Richard Brewin, International Capability Development & Sustainability Fellow at the UK Ministry of Defence, kicked-off the panel by remarking that climate change is a security risk multiplier: It has an influence on increasingly stressed environments and capabilities as well as supply chains and contributes to a circle of insecurities. As military forces need to train for combat, a continued effort is

needed to factor energy and environment aspects into defence planning, equipment and training.

Dirk Dubois, Head of the European Security and Defence College, remarked that predicting the future is extremely complicated and the cost of getting it wrong is increasingly high. This is one of the reasons why the need to remain open-minded and flexible should be part of every military training effort. Additionally, as climate change does not stop at national borders, the need to train and prepare together is of growing importance. While originally “interoperability” mainly meant that different weapon systems can be used together, today, the interoperability of staff, i.e. the capacity to work closely together with the armed forces of different EU member states becomes increasingly important. Although Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) aims mostly to streamline defence efforts of the 25 participating EU member states through legally binding commitments, the more tangible projects include some aspects related to climate change.

Rene Heise, Atmosphere Physicist, Head of Section Geo Support – Fight Systems, Air Operations Command - Geoinformation Centre German Air Force, elaborated that earth observation is key. The monitoring of actual observations as well as the prediction of tipping points and worst-case scenarios is of importance when it comes to the preparation of air, land and maritime operations. Climate change is a threat multiplier, which is why it is important to integrate all available climate and geographical data into capability packages to get an accurate view of the operational theatre. Here, big data and artificial intelligence can be used much more efficiently in the future.

Pieter Wit, Director and Owner of Syzygy – consultancy on Conservation-cum-Development, pointed out that from his experience, there is no security without ecological security and no stability without sustainability. In every theatre of operations, it is therefore crucial to identify the resource base, assess the resource management and work towards an adaptive management of scarce resources. An instruction card for military personnel deployed on the ground can support military personnel in taking environmental factors into account when engaging with the local population.

Béla Galgóczi, Senior Researcher at the European Trade Union Institute, presented the possible mitigation and adaptation challenges for trade unions when it comes to climate change. He highlighted that the effects of climate change on workers in all sectors but also the livelihoods of people are very heterogeneous and at the same time intertwined. Often, the most vulnerable groups of societies are affected the most by climate change risks. Therefore, trade unions are advocating for a just transition. This concept encompasses the need to prepare for a just labour market transition with possibilities of training and reskilling of workers on the one hand and tackling the distributional effects of mitigation policies, on the other. While adaptation efforts have a clear job creation effect, workload and pressure on employees, in particular in public services (as e.g. health care, water management, emergency services including fire-fighters and military personnel), are already growing and will thus need appropriate funding and attention. While trade unions can play a crucial role in

the just transition, an additional challenge for military personnel in a lot of European countries is that they are not enjoying the right of association and in many cases do not have professional associations or trade unions representing their professional interests.

Closing Remarks

In their closing remarks, the organisers thanked the speakers and participants for the interesting exchange of views and lively discussions on this important topic. EUROMIL President Jacob highlighted that the focus of his organisation lies on military personnel, which should not only be used just because it is easily available, but rather properly trained and equipped for challenging tasks. He echoed Mr. Galgóczi in expressing an urgent need for the right of association for soldiers everywhere in Europe.

EDRC Executive Director Kingham and EDRC Policy Director Verbeek reiterated the seriousness of the threats to security posed by a changing climate and echoed Rear Admiral Neil Morisetti's point that an all-of-government, all-of-society approach is needed in response. The conference very well highlighted the value of different sectors working together to address the issues and in a fair and just way. The conference also made clear how much more work is needed to fully understand, and to prepare for, the security implications of climate change.