



## NATO'S APPROACH TO CLIMATE CHANGE

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### Introduction

On November 8, 2022, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated during a COP27 virtual event that “Russia’s weaponisation of food and energy as part of its illegal war in Ukraine underlines the need to increase resilience, diversify energy supplies and sources, and accelerate the transition to cleaner, greener economies”. Humanity as we know it is currently facing a myriad of climate-related phenomena that threaten our existence. This is an issue that concerns individuals, societies, governments and international organizations, this including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The threat of climate change has been a priority area for the Alliance for many years —since 1969 specifically, when it established the Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society (CCMS)— and it has devoted resources and efforts to contribute to climate security and protect the environment, which have been translated into guidelines and policies for member states. This article aims to highlight some of the main issues pinpointed by NATO, as well as the initiatives underway, to palliate the much negative effects of climate change.

## Climate security: mitigating and adapting

Climate security goes far beyond environmental protection *per se*, and includes managing the negative consequences of climatic disasters, including the destruction of livelihoods and ecosystems, large-scale migratory movements, and in the most extreme case, mass extinctions. That is why NATO "participates in civil preparedness and emergency response to environmental catastrophes" (NATO, 2022). Without a need to stress the very important interconnection between research, science and technology, and climate change, the CCMS merged with the NATO Science Committee to form the Science for Peace and Security Program in 2006; and the NATO Science and Technology Organization (STO) also has programs on the subject.

NATO has made efforts to contribute to climate security and to be a greener organization. These two paths are a result of the recognition by the Alliance of the dangers that lie in wait for humanity as the environment we inhabit degrades. NATO did so for the first time in the 2010 Strategic Concept, and has reinforced this in 2019 with its NATO 2030 Agenda and in 2022 with the recently-adopted Madrid Strategic Concept. I would like to point out two areas where this is especially critical for a security organization like NATO.



The first of them is the melting of Arctic Sea ice. The world is already much aware of the consequences this will have, with such icecaps estimated to be decreasing at a rate of 13% every decade. Not only is the loss of ice accelerating, but also the geopolitical dynamics among the Arctic powers due to the commercial—including the Northeast and Northwest routes, but also a potential Central route—, strategic and natural resource opportunities resulting from the melting of the ice. Out of the eight Arctic powers, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Norway and the United States are already NATO members, and Finland and Sweden are a few steps away from becoming so. The remaining power in the region, Russia, is more than willing to exercise fierce competition there. And China, without being an Arctic state, has begun to claim certain rights—even proposing a "Polar Silk Road" project. The Arctic has been a quiet region so far, dominated almost entirely by the Alliance. It now finds in Russia and China two destabilizing actors that can make an already dangerous climatic situation even worse on a geostrategic level.

The second is the increasingly hostile operative scenarios in which NATO missions will have to be conducted due to climate change. This comprises aspects ranging from weather conditions or complicated terrains, to the growing scarcity of energy resources needed for the military equipment to function correctly.

### Becoming greener

Aware of the climate factor, the Alliance has sought to counteract its impact, and thus in 2003 the NATO Military Committee established a series of Military Principles and Policies for the Protection of the Environment. The Environmental Protection Working Group has been working on them, contributing to their updating back in 2011. The Specialist Team on Energy Efficiency and Environmental Protection stands out regarding energy issues; and the Smart Energy Initiative was published in 2011 too for greater sustainability of the organization. NATO has also urged member countries to train their armed forces in environmental protection and energy efficiency — a training complemented by the Alliance itself.

Along these lines, NATO's efforts to transform into an increasingly sustainable organization are evident. One can highlight the Action Plan on Climate Change and Security that NATO leaders signed at the 2021 Summit in Brussels; which was later published in June 2022 just before the beginning of the Madrid Summit. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced then the ambitious measure NATO intended to implement to protect the planet: reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 45% before 2030, aiming at reaching net-zero emissions by 2050.

On a more informal side, NATO has been launching a set of initiatives to be adopted at the organization's headquarters in Brussels. The Alliance has installed up to four beehives that contribute to pollination and the protection of biodiversity in the ecosystem — and produce honey that is then gifted to NATO ambassadors or sold in the headquarter's charity bazar. More recently, in April 2022, the Alliance opted to plant a meadow with native flowers and plants to attract butterflies and birds to the area.



### Conclusions

In short, NATO has positioned itself as an actor committed to both mitigating and adapting to climate change, preventing the current situation from deteriorating further and introducing changes to

coexist with the impact of such a phenomenon. The Alliance has not ceased to implement, at the micro and macro level, on paper and in practice, a range of projects to protect the space we inhabit; nor to collaborate with the European Union, OSCE, UNDP, UNEP and others to multiply its efforts. Reaching a tipping point of no climate return is not a viable option for an organization whose priority is the security of nearly a billion people.

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