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Climate Security Challenges for NATO

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“Climate Change and Peacebuilding & Stabilization Operations”:

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Presentation Summary

There is a 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.