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# Be careful what you wish for

While it can seem tempting to push for climate issues and progressive policies within NATO, it may not be in the Greens' best interests

Now that it has been confirmed that Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte will succeed Jens Stoltenberg as NATO secretary general, some Greens might be asking themselves whether Rutte's appointment is desirable from a climate point of view. Will the new secretary general bring to life the words of his predecessor, who stated at COP28: 'combating climate change is a matter of interest for NATO'?

To answer this question, however, a first, more pertinent question should be raised: Is NATO's involvement in European countries' climate policies desirable at all? Over the past years, several Green parties across Europe have urged the military alliance to address the climate emergency. But maybe they should be cautious about what they wish for.

## A departure from traditional positions

European Green parties, many of which have pacifist roots, have traditionally adopted a cautious stance towards the military defence alliance. However, in the wake of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, most of them, in an apparent departure from their historic positions, are no longer actively challenging NATO membership.

A recent study by the Green European Foundation looked at the positions of green and progressive parties towards NATO in several countries, including the Nordic region, Germany and France, and found that eight of the 10 parties interviewed were supportive of NATO membership. Some of them changed their stances from opposition to acceptance of NATO after Russia's invasion.

*With defence high on the EU's list of priorities for the next five years, it is*

Indeed, the Swedish Green Party's spokesperson Daniel Helldén recently proposed expanding NATO's scope to address the climate crisis, and this view is echoed by the Finnish and Belgian

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Greens, among others.

With defence high on the European Union's list of priorities for the next five years, it is only natural that green actors would strive to influence NATO and steer it in a more progressive direction. It would be unwise to let conservative and militarist voices be the only ones to be heard within an alliance that is considered one of the most important actors in EU security today. Plus, pressing issues such as nuclear disarmament, stopping the exemption of NATO members from war crime tribunals, peaceful conflict resolution and reducing military emissions are natural candidates for the Greens' advocacy.

However, these parties should also be cautious about over-extending NATO's mandate. Expanding its remit to encompass climate and democratic issues might appeal to those who view security beyond traditional military lines. Yet, the risks are significant.

## Cooperation > competition

The climate crisis undeniably affects both human security and military operations, which also contribute significantly to emissions. But would the adoption of a military framework for climate action be consistent with the goals of effective emissions reduction strategies?

Reducing emissions requires countries to work closely together. This is partly the reason why UN Climate Summits (COPs) are still championed by many environmentalists and partly why the EU continues to develop cooperation programmes on climate change with China while pursuing a competitive strategy in other areas.

A military approach, often characterised by competitiveness and strategic dominance, could skew the focus away from collaborative environmental preservation to geopolitical manoeuvring, thereby side-lining diplomatic efforts. As the saying goes, everything looks like a nail when all you have is a hammer.

*Formulating climate policies might prove more appropriate within the EU*

NATO-led green technology initiatives have the potential to become geopolitical contests rather than collaborative efforts for emission reduction. This trend is already visible in the

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competitive pursuit of the minerals required to develop sustainable technologies, a race involving major players like the EU, US, Russia and China.

Addressing climate and social issues through a security lens could overshadow the need for innovative social and political solutions. If the discussion is dominated by a military narrative, strategies might prioritise geopolitical stability over environmental sustainability.

Finally, the US has an influential role within NATO. Are European Greens ready for US military policies and a US-influenced broadening of security issues? Instead, and despite their imperfections, formulating climate policies might prove more appropriate within the EU or within the UN framework, which include a wider range of countries and allow for a global perspective on international security.

While it is positive that the Greens seek to steer NATO in a more progressive direction, expanding the alliance's mission could inadvertently lead to NATO influencing European climate policies, rather than the other way around. Therefore, any NATO engagement on climate issues must be approached with the utmost caution and strategic foresight. Although pushing for climate issues within NATO may be tempting, it might not be in the Greens' best interests.

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