



Research Article

NATO and Environmental Crime: A New Frontier of Collective Security?

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Abstract: Environmental crime is a rapidly growing global threat with far-reaching security implications. This article explores the potential for NATO, driven by its evolving comprehensive security approach, to play a role in combating environmental crime. It argues that NATO's unique capacities, including its Stability Policing mechanism, could complement existing efforts by organizations such as INTERPOL and the United Nations Environment Program. NATO's involvement aligns with its focus on countering terrorism, organized crime, and addressing human security concerns exacerbated by environmental crimes. However, potential challenges—such as mission creep and the blurring of police and military roles—must be carefully considered. This article proposes that a targeted and collaborative approach would be the most effective strategy for NATO's engagement in combating environmental crime.

Keywords: environmental crime, NATO, comprehensive security, stability policing.

Introduction

Environmental crimes are growing at 5–7 % annually. Now the third-largest criminal sector, they generate billions of dollars yearly.¹ Low risks and the potential for enormous profits make environmental crime especially appealing to organized crime networks, including those involved in terrorism. Environmental

¹ Christian Nellemann et al., eds., *The Rise of Environmental Crime: A Growing Threat to Natural Resources, Peace, Development and Security*, A UNEP-INTERPOL Rapid Response Assessment (Nairobi, Kenya: United Nations Environment Programme, 2016), https://www.interpol.int/content/download/5099/file/UNEP-INTERPOL_Report_The_Rise_of_Environmental_Crime.pdf.

crime is among the world's fastest-growing and most lucrative crimes, with impacts on biodiversity, security, and development.²

The term "environmental crime" (or "green crime") is highly controversial and does not have a universally accepted definition. Environmental crimes are complex in nature and are constantly linked to other types of crimes. Clifford and Edwards state that there are two definitions of environmental crime: a philosophical definition and a legal definition.³ Broadly, the term can be defined as "an act committed with the intent to harm the natural environment." From a narrower perspective, environmental crime is defined as:

an act committed with the intent to harm or with the potential to cause harm to ecological and/or biological systems, for the purpose of securing business and/or personal advantage, and in violation of state or federal statutes for which criminal sanctions apply.⁴

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) defines environmental crime as:

illegal activities harming the environment and aimed at benefiting individuals or groups or companies from the exploitation of, damage to, trade or theft of natural resources, including, but not limited to serious crimes and transnational organized crime.⁵

According to Europol, environmental crime offences include, but are not limited to: improper collection, transport, recovery, or disposal of waste; illegal operation of a plant in which a dangerous activity is carried out or in which dangerous substances or preparations are stored; killing, destruction, possession, or trade of protected wild animal or plant species; and the production, importation, exportation, marketing, or use of ozone-depleting substances.⁶

Great efforts have been put into practice to tackle environmental crimes since the 1970s. As an international law enforcement actor, INTERPOL warned against the criminal exploitation of the world's natural resources.⁷ In 2013, IN-

² "Organized Crime Groups Pushing Environmental Security to Tipping Point," INTERPOL, December 2, 2023, <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2023/Organized-crime-groups-pushing-environmental-security-to-tipping-point>.

³ Mary Clifford and Terry D. Edwards, *Environmental Crime* (Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2011), 5.

⁴ Clifford and Edwards, *Environmental Crime*, 32.

⁵ Marina Caparini, "Organized Environmental Crime: Why It Matters for Peace Operations," *Commentary*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, May 12, 2022, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-backgroundunder/2022/organized-environmental-crime-why-it-matters-peace-operations>.

⁶ "Environmental Crime," EUROPOL, accessed February 29, 2024, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas/environmental-crime>.

⁷ There are four global enforcement teams (Fisheries, Forestry, Pollution, and Wildlife). For further information, see "Our Response to Environmental Crime," INTERPOL,

TERPOL's Environmental Crime Program was transformed into the Environmental Security Sub-Directorate.⁸ At the national level, many countries worldwide have designed various institutional mechanisms to tackle environmental crimes. France's *Office Central de Lutte contre les Atteintes à l'Environnement et à la Santé Publique* (OCLAESP) can be cited as an example demonstrating how security institutions are reorganized to address environmental crimes.

The significance of the fight against environmental crime—both in addressing security threats, such as terrorism, and in protecting ecosystems—requires institutional efforts toward prevention at national and international levels. Within this context, should NATO prioritize combating environmental crime in its security strategy, given the links between environmental degradation and broader security risks? Does the fight against environmental crime contribute to NATO-led efforts for environmental protection and climate change? If so, what are the mechanisms, and how does this involvement take place? The research claims that environmental crimes are organically related to NATO-defined hybrid threats such as transnational organized crime and global terrorism.⁹ In line with NATO's transformation process toward a comprehensive security strategy, NATO has the potential to engage in the fight against environmental crimes. Therefore, the fight against environmental crime should be integrated into NATO's policies and mechanisms.

The research argues that NATO has the capacity to engage in the fight against environmental crime, potentially enhancing its comprehensive security approach and strengthening its efforts within the domains of gender and climate change. However, from a critical perspective, potential risks and limitations need careful consideration.

This study relies on an interpretative research design to analyze how NATO represents its (potential) engagement with environmental crime. Primary and secondary data will be used, focusing on documents from NATO in general and from the NATO Stability Policing Centre of Excellence (NSPCoE) from 2015 to 2024. The selection criteria will prioritize texts and training programs related to environmental crime. The analysis will focus on identifying evolving narratives or underlying values associated with NATO's stance on environmental crime. Additionally, policy documents outlining NATO's transformation process and its growing focus on gender and climate change will be analyzed to explore potential connections and how environmental crime might fit within this evolving security strategy.

accessed June 22, 2024, <https://www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/Environmental-crime/Our-response-to-environmental-crime>.

⁸ Lorraine Elliott, "The Securitization of Transnational Environmental Crime and the Militarization of Conservation," in *Handbook of Transnational Environmental Crime*, ed. Lorraine Elliott and William H. Schaedla (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016), 68-87.

⁹ "BI-SC Input for a New NATO Capstone Concept for the Military Contribution to Countering Hybrid Enclosure 1 to 1500/CPPCAM/FCR/10-270038 and 5000 FXX/0100/TT-0651/SER: NU0040," NATO, August 25, 2010.

This article is structured in four sections. The first section examines NATO's ongoing transformation and its evolving comprehensive approach to security. The second section explores the rationale for NATO's engagement in combating environmental crime. The third section identifies specific mechanisms NATO could employ and potential areas of influence. The final section analyzes the limitations and potential risks associated with NATO's involvement in this domain.

NATO's Transformation and Its Comprehensive Approach

There is an ongoing debate regarding NATO's role as a traditional defence alliance versus a modern security organization. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has undergone a transformation process. With its 1991 Strategic Concept, NATO acknowledged that "security and stability have political, social, economic, and environmental elements." However, all these dimensions were considered complementary to the defense dimension. In 1999, NATO issued another Strategic Concept, reaffirming the primacy of the defense dimension.¹⁰

Since its mission in the Afghanistan war, NATO has reshaped its role to adopt a more comprehensive approach to security. The comprehensive approach, first introduced within NATO policy circles through a Danish initiative in 2004, recognizes the importance of addressing underlying causes of instability, such as poverty, weak governance, and environmental degradation.¹¹ This could involve supporting development projects or promoting human rights.¹² The third post-Cold War strategic concept, declared in 2010, reemphasized NATO's core tasks in collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security. The same strategic concept placed special emphasis on global security rather than solely on the security of NATO members and highlighted the significance of global environmental problems such as climate change, water scarcity, and global warming.¹³ Accordingly, NATO has recognized that traditional military threats are no longer the only security concerns. Issues like cyberattacks, climate change, and energy security have gained increasing importance.¹⁴

¹⁰ Clare Hutchinson, "NATO and Human Security: Political and Strategic Developments," in *Evolving Human Security: Frameworks and Considerations for Canada's Military*, ed. Shannon Lewis-Simpson and Sarah Jane Meharg (Kingston, Ontario: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2023), 95-115, 96, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2023/mdn-dnd/D2-645-2023-eng.pdf.

¹¹ Friis Arne Petersen and Hans Binnendijk, "The Comprehensive Approach Initiative: Future Operations for NATO," *Defense Horizons*, no. 58 (2007): 1-5, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1008473/the-comprehensive-approach-initiative-future-options-for-nato/>.

¹² Stijn Pz. van Weezel, "NATO's Comprehensive Approach: CIMIC Branch Focuses on Civilian-Military Cooperation," *Per Concordiam* 1, no. 4 (2020): 62-63. www.marshallcenter.org/sites/default/files/files/2020-11/pC_V1N4_en_van_Weezel.pdf.

¹³ Hutchinson, "NATO and Human Security."

¹⁴ Arita Holmberg, "The Changing Role of NATO: Exploring the Implications for Security Governance and Legitimacy," *European Security* 20, no. 4 (2011): 529-546, 531, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2011.625929>.

The evolving security environment, particularly since 2014, has significantly impacted NATO's comprehensive approach to security and prompted a certain degree of return to its core functions. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the terrorist attacks in Paris the following year pushed NATO to reconsider its engagement with comprehensive security and shift focus toward its primary task of collective defense. However, the persistent threat of terrorism, instability in the Middle East and North Africa, and the refugee crisis have underscored the importance of projecting global stability. This has reaffirmed NATO's engagement with comprehensive security and prompted the Alliance to focus on crisis management.¹⁵

The term "comprehensive security" is highly controversial and lacks a universally accepted definition. This article relies on a broader definition of the comprehensive approach. Accordingly, it argues that NATO requires new partners, new domains, enhanced civil-military coordination, and an adaptive governance model to address emerging threats and act in the name of international security from a comprehensive security perspective.¹⁶ A comprehensive approach calls for a combination of political, civilian, and military instruments.¹⁷ Aligning with the literature on the concept of a comprehensive approach to security, the next section will investigate why and how environmental crime should be incorporated into NATO policies and mechanisms.

Why Should NATO Tackle Environmental Crime?

NATO's involvement in combating environmental crime is essential for several reasons. Firstly, environmental crime directly contributes to environmental degradation, exacerbating issues such as resource scarcity, pollution, and habitat loss. As highlighted by Homer-Dixon in 1994, such environmental scarcities can fuel social unrest and even ignite violent conflict.¹⁸ Therefore, addressing environmental crime is crucial for promoting long-term peace and security. By safeguarding the environment, NATO can create a safer world for future generations and ecosystems.¹⁹

¹⁵ Rebecca R. Moore and Damon Coletta, eds., *NATO's Return to Europe: Engaging Ukraine, Russia, and Beyond* (Georgetown University Press, 2017).

¹⁶ Van Weezel, "NATO's Comprehensive Approach."

¹⁷ Peter Viggo Jakobsen, "NATO's Comprehensive Approach to Crisis Response Operations: A Work in Slow Progress," *DIIS Report 15* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2008), www.diis.dk/files/media/publications/import_efter1114/report_2008-15_nato_comprehensive_approach_crisis_response_operations.pdf.

¹⁸ Thomas Homer-Dixon, "Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict: Evidence from Cases," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994): 5-40, <https://homerdixon.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Environmental-Scarcities-and-Violent-Conflict-Evidence-from-Cases.pdf>.

¹⁹ Matt McDonald, "Climate Change, Security and the Institutional Prospects for Ecological Security," *Geoforum* 155, no. 6 (October 2024), 104096, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2024.104096>.

Secondly, NATO's commitment to a comprehensive global security perspective necessitates addressing environmental crime. Environmental crime is intrinsically linked to other security threats, such as terrorism and organized crime, which exploit it as a source of funding and a means to create instability. By combating environmental crime, NATO can disrupt these illicit networks and contribute to a safer and more secure world.

Although NATO has only relatively recently addressed environmental problems in a formal manner, its engagement with environmental matters dates back to the 1960s. In November 1969, NATO established the Committee on Challenges of Modern Society (CCMS). This marked the introduction of NATO's "third" societal dimension, intended to address the environmental problems of member states. With the establishment of CCMS, "NATO member countries began to look beyond the immediate economic and political problems of the post-war world and to examine ways to improve the quality of life of their citizens and protect the environment."²⁰ Thus, NATO has a traditional mission to protect the environment, a role that has become even more prominent with its recent emphasis on climate change. In 2021, NATO adopted a Climate Change and Security Action Plan,²¹ and NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept defines climate change as a challenge to be addressed.²²

NATO's transformation toward a more climate-sensitive security agenda requires ensuring environmental protection and tackling environmental crime. Addressing environmental crimes is key to mitigating and adapting to climate change. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), during the 28th session of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), emphasized the linkage between biodiversity and climate change.²³ The 2014 Wales Summit Declaration notes that environmental constraints—including health risks, climate change, water scarcity, and increasing energy demands—will increasingly shape the future security environment in areas relevant to NATO. These factors have the potential to significantly impact NATO's

²⁰ Janusz Ślusarczyk, "Environmental Protection in NATO Policy," *Scientific Journal of the Military University of Land Forces* 208, no. 2 (2023): 91-103, <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0053.7268>.

²¹ "Environment, Climate Change and Security," NATO, accessed October 7, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_91048.htm.

²² "NATO 2022 Strategic Concept Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Madrid," NATO, June 29, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_210907.htm.

²³ "Crimes That Affect the Environment Worsen Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss, Says UNODC at UN Climate Change Conference, Dubai, 30 November 2023," *Press Release*, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2023/November/crimes-that-affect-the-environment-worsen-climate-change-and-biodiversity-loss--says-unodc-at-un-climate-change-conference.html>.

planning and operations.²⁴ Environmental crimes often worsen the effects of climate change, a key focus area for NATO. Such crimes can threaten resources vital to nations and their militaries. Water scarcity, deforestation, and illegal fishing can destabilize regions and affect the military capabilities of NATO countries.

From an indirect perspective, NATO recognizes that environmental crimes can exacerbate instability and act as threat multipliers. There is increased discussion within NATO and associated bodies about the linkage between environmental crime and other security threats. Specific initiatives are starting to address some dimensions of environmental crime. For example, the NATO Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme has projects and activities addressing crime-related concerns, such as fighting illegal trafficking.²⁵ INTERPOL and UNEP surveyed close to 70 countries for their joint report, *Environment, Peace and Security? A Convergence of Threats*, released in 2016. The report focuses on the links between global environmental crime—valued at USD 91–258 billion annually—and other criminal activities, including organized crime and terrorism.²⁶ Similarly, Europol underlines that proceeds from environmental crime activities are used to finance terrorism.

From a scholarly perspective, numerous studies have explored the relationship between terrorist groups, transnational environmental crime, and illegal financing.²⁷ Bergen and Knight²⁸ emphasized the illicit financing role of environmental crime and, to underline the organic relationship between terrorism and environmental crime, coined the concept of “green terror.” The United Nations reported that the Islamic State’s largest revenue stream came from the organization’s illegal oil trade. In East Africa, al-Qaeda-linked al-Shabaab obtains millions of dollars annually from the illicit charcoal trade. In South America, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) profits from illegal mining, while in South Asia, the Xaysavang network drives the lucrative illegal ivory trade, endangering elephants and rhinos. Additionally, the link between environmental crimes and organized criminal groups has been highlighted.²⁹ In this light, environmental crime is a geostrategic issue with serious implications for national and

²⁴ Stefano Bergonzini, “Is There a Role for NATO Stability Policing in Environmental Protection,” *The CoEspu Magazine*, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.32048/Coespumagazine1.21.4>.

²⁵ “NATO Operations and Missions,” NATO, accessed October 20, 2024, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52060.htm.

²⁶ “Environmental Crime Threatening Peace and Security, Finds New INTERPOL-UN Environment Report,” UN Environment Programme, December 8, 2016, www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/environmental-crime-threatening-peace-and-security-finds-new.

²⁷ Elliott, “The Securitization of Transnational Environmental Crime.”

²⁸ Johan Bergen and Ariella Knight, “Green Terror: Environmental Crime and Illicit Financing,” *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 35, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 2015): 119–131, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/sais.2015.0004>.

²⁹ Bergonzini, “Is There a Role for NATO Stability Policing in Environmental Protection.”

international security.³⁰ Thus, within NATO's comprehensive approach to security—particularly its emphasis on threats such as terrorism and organized crime—environmental crime appears as an undeniable challenge to be prevented.

From the perspective of crisis management, a comprehensive approach aims to achieve both security and development. As Frunzeti highlights, this approach emphasizes coherent goals and multifaceted strategies within a mission.³¹ Environmental crime often escalates during and after conflicts. From a historical perspective, the environment has often been victimized by enemy forces during war.³² Therefore, preventing and addressing environmental crime becomes crucial for both the immediate security and long-term development of conflict-affected areas. To effectively integrate environmental concerns into crisis management, NATO needs to strengthen its civilian capacities, as these are essential for addressing the root causes of environmental crime and fostering sustainable solutions. NATO's involvement in combating environmental crime can enhance collaboration between civilian and military actors, facilitating a more holistic and effective response. Furthermore, by addressing environmental crime, NATO can help prevent the exploitation of environmental resources for hostile purposes, thereby contributing to security and stability in the long run.

To fully implement a comprehensive security approach, NATO needs a broader perspective that encompasses not just traditional threats but also human security and the factors that endanger human lives. Environmental crime, such as the illegal exploitation of gold and minerals, directly impacts human security.³³ For example, Operation Aurum highlighted that forced labor, notably child labor, was commonplace at mining sites, with most illegal miners either recruited or coerced to work, aged between 12 and 16 years old.³⁴ Thus, NATO's potential involvement in tackling environmental crime is an opportunity to integrate a humanitarian perspective into many security policy areas in accordance with a comprehensive security approach.

Similarly, environmental crimes are unique in their far-reaching consequences. They not only inflict immediate damage but also impose significant costs on the environment and future generations. Activities like deforestation and unsustainable fishing practices deplete essential ecosystem services. These services—such as clean water, clean air, and food security—are vital for human health and well-being.

³⁰ Bergen and Knight, "Green Terror: Environmental Crime and Illicit Financing."

³¹ Teodor Frunzeti, "Comprehensive Approach in Crisis Management," *Strategic Impact* 44, no. 3 (2012): 6-16, 7, https://cssas.unap.ro/en/pdf_periodicals/si44.pdf.

³² Ali Mohamed Al-Damkhi, "Kuwait's Oil Well Fires, 1991: Environmental Crime and War," *International Journal of Environmental Studies* 64, no. 1 (2007): 31-44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207230601125036>.

³³ Nellesmann et al., eds., *The Rise of Environmental Crime*, 7.

³⁴ "Organized Crime Groups Pushing Environmental Security to Tipping Point."

Thus, the prevention of environmental crime relates to NATO's increasing emphasis on human security, as reflected in the Strategic Concept released in 2022, which stated that the protection of civilians and civilian harm mitigation are central to NATO's approach to crisis prevention and management.³⁵

Moreover, a NATO-led comprehensive approach necessitates collaboration with other international organizations. Within UN working groups, there is an ongoing discussion on how the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) could be used to tackle crimes that affect the environment. Accordingly, working groups recommend that states share information on the links between environmental crimes and other forms of organized crime. Through a resolution, states have been asked to provide views on a new UNTOC protocol dedicated to illicit trafficking in wildlife.³⁶ Thus, the fight against environmental crime can become a topic for collaboration between NATO and the United Nations, so that a collective effort can be put into practice to prevent transnational environmental crimes.

Which Mechanism Should NATO Use for Tackling Environmental Crime?

Environmental crime, while fundamentally a law enforcement issue, often intersects with broader security threats such as organized crime and terrorism. Since NATO, a primarily military alliance, is a key actor in addressing environmental crime, effective action requires a hybrid approach. This could involve joint units of police and defense personnel or the creation of new organizations that blend police and military capabilities.

NATO's comprehensive approach to security requires increased civilian-military cooperation. NATO has developed hybrid mechanisms that operate within the blurred boundary between civilian and military capacities. Since 1998, NATO has *de facto* maintained a Stability Policing (SP) mechanism. As a concept, SP was developed in 1997 by the Italian Carabinieri and applied one year later through the first Multinational Specialized Unit (MSU) within the NATO Stabilization Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina (SFOR).³⁷ The Allied Joint Doctrine AJP-3.22 of 2016 officially introduced the term SP. SP refers to activities aimed at improving the

³⁵ José Antonio Lorenzo Quiroz, "Stability Policing: A Valuable Tool for NATO's Human Security Approach," in *Stability Policing: A Golden Opportunity for NATO, The Blue Lens Perspective: An Anthology on Our Efforts in the Last Years 2020-2023* (NATO Stability Policing Centre of Excellence, 2023): 53-67, https://www.nspcoe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Book_Stability_Policing_A_golden_opportunity_for_NATO.pdf.

³⁶ Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, "Resolution 31/1: Strengthening the International Legal Framework for International Cooperation to Prevent and Combat Illicit Trafficking in Wildlife," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, May 2022, https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CCPCJ/Crime_Resolutions/2020-2029/2022/Resolution_31_1_CCPCJ.pdf.

³⁷ "History of SP COE," NATO Stability Policing Center of Excellence (NSPCOE), accessed March 5, 2024, <https://www.nspcoe.org/about-us/history/>.

capacity and capabilities of law enforcement agencies within a host nation and/or policing its population temporarily until they or a follow-on force can assume that responsibility. By moving beyond a combat-only approach to crisis response, SP expands the reach of the military instrument into the policing remit.

NATO SP operates within the blurred boundaries between war and crime. By addressing this overlap, SP seeks to fight the enemy through other means. As one NATO commander stated: “SP fights the enemy with other means, addressing the overlap between war and crime, and complementing the traditional war-fighting instrument.”³⁸ Since terrorism and counterinsurgency both have crime-related dimensions, and environmental crime serves as a funding mechanism for such activities, NATO should move beyond the rigid war-crime division and instead act across the crime-security nexus.

Moreover, many NATO countries have hybrid security institutions specialized in environmental crime. Whereas France tasks OCLAESF with combating environmental crime, the Turkish gendarmerie has created special teams for environmental protection. In this regard, SP appears as an exclusive mechanism, and paramilitary-type police forces are more competent than civilian police with regard to environmental crimes.

Furthermore, the NATO SP initiative aims to assume a significant role in environmental protection. Commanders within NATO SP assert that specialized environmental protection teams can be integrated into NATO SP Units. These teams, with a wealth of domestic and international experience, are uniquely positioned to investigate environmental offences. By doing so, they identify and protect vital natural and environmental areas, contributing to the preservation of biodiversity and ecological security. These teams can gather intelligence and prevent crime. They can proactively collect information about environmental threats and criminal activities, enabling the implementation of preventive measures and facilitating investigations. Their expertise includes a comprehensive understanding of international and national legal frameworks, coupled with a deep-rooted commitment to environmental protection.³⁹

Thus, combining police and military resources allows for a multi-layered response, leveraging the specific skills and powers of each. This type of hybrid approach provides access to a wider range of tools, training, and intelligence capabilities, crucial for tackling the complex nature of environmental crime. Hybrid organizations can adapt to the diverse challenges posed by environmental crime, from investigating illegal logging to combating wildlife trafficking and disrupting the financial networks behind these criminal activities.

³⁸ Giuseppe De Magistris, “Stability Policing in Collective Defence,” *The CoESPU Magazine*, no. 4 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.32048/Coespumagazine4.20.1>.

³⁹ Bergonzini, “Is There a Role for NATO Stability Policing in Environmental Protection.”

Limitations and Risks

NATO still lacks an explicit emphasis and a roadmap on environmental crimes. NATO should direct its attention toward the role of environmental crime in financing terrorism and organized crime. Additionally, NATO should strengthen its SP mechanism within the domain of environmental crime and position itself as an influential actor in tackling it. NATO may also emphasize the war-crime overlap, prioritize the fight against environmental crime in post-conflict settings, and accentuate the linkage between environmental crime and human security.

NATO's imprecise position between a traditional defense organization and a comprehensive security actor prevents it from establishing clear-cut policy options within the domain of environmental crime. On the one hand, the transformation of the international security environment since 2014, particularly recent developments in the Middle East and the Russia-Ukraine War, renders addressing issues like environmental crime a mere declaratory policy. On the other hand, NATO continues to demonstrate its ambition to become a global actor in environmental protection.

Aligning with this concern, a scope creep within the domain of environmental crime may emerge. The concept refers to the tendency for a project or initiative to grow beyond its initial goals and boundaries. In this case, the concern is that expanding NATO's mandate to include environmental crime could dilute its core focus. As environmental crime is linked to organized crime, terrorism, and resource scarcity, addressing it comprehensively might require venturing beyond traditional military activities.

Another risk lies in the potential blurring of roles between police and military forces.⁴⁰ Overall, maintaining a clear distinction between the two is vital for upholding the rule of law, protecting civil rights, and ensuring public safety.⁴¹ Within this context, the division of labor remains the foundational assumption

⁴⁰ Scholarly debate regarding this issue has intensified with the post-Cold War transformation of security threats. While some scholars warn of the dangers of this blurring, others argue that the lines between internal and external security have always been fluid. Blurring the lines between police and military roles poses a serious threat to democratic societies. It can lead to the erosion of civil liberties as police adopt military tactics and equipment, treating citizens as enemies. The use of military-grade force can escalate violence, further eroding public trust and hindering cooperation with law enforcement. Additionally, when military personnel are deployed domestically, there is an increasing concern as their role expands beyond its intended purpose, leading to the militarization of society. The differing rules of engagement and accountability structures between military and police can also create challenges in investigating and prosecuting cases of misconduct. David P. Succi Jr., "Violence and Moral Exclusion: Legitimizing Domestic Military Operations in Brazil," *Armed Forces & Society* 48, no. 3 (2022): 634-656, 637, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X20988106>.

⁴¹ Marleen Easton et al., eds., *Blurring Military and Police Roles* (The Hague: Eleven International Publishing, 2010), <https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/1123425>.

in works on domestic military missions,⁴² and many scholars have warned against using military forces inside national borders. NATO's engagement in environmental crime through its SP mechanism—a hybrid approach—adds another layer to this debate on the international stage. Similarly, the fight against environmental crime can trigger new tensions within civil-military relations. If NATO wishes to undertake such a role, it must ensure that civil-military interoperability⁴³ is guaranteed through precise definitions of roles and division of labor.

Concluding Remarks and Suggestions

This article calls on NATO to develop a clear strategy and integrate the fight against environmental crime into its operational planning. The main argument is that NATO's transformation toward a comprehensive security approach creates a unique opportunity to address environmental crime. Tackling environmental crime, in turn, may contribute to NATO's understanding of security from a comprehensive perspective. However, key questions remain about how NATO can best add value without overreaching or duplicating the work of existing organizations. Thus, although NATO's contribution to addressing environmental crime provides opportunities, whether NATO should fully engage in the fight against environmental crime remains a topic of debate. NATO may adopt a targeted and selective approach. Put differently, NATO may focus more on environmental crimes directly linked to conflict and instability rather than on a broad environmental protection mandate. Moreover, NATO may demand a cooperative perspective with regard to environmental crimes. This means that NATO will likely work in close collaboration with existing organizations specialized in environmental crime, providing its unique capabilities where they add value.

While the potential benefits of NATO's engagement in combating environmental crime are compelling, a critical perspective is essential. The Alliance must carefully weigh the potential benefits of expanding into this field, as such a move could raise questions of legitimacy – particularly given its military structure. Additionally, the complex nexus between crime, conflict, and environmental degradation requires a comprehensive approach that likely extends beyond NATO's traditional capabilities. Future research should investigate the feasibility of long-term NATO involvement and its specific value proposition within the existing network of international actors. Ultimately, a cautious and collaborative path may prove most successful in addressing this critical global challenge.

⁴² Tomáš Weiss, "The Blurring Border Between the Police and the Military: A Debate Without Foundations," *Cooperation and Conflict* 46, no. 3 (2011): 396-405, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836711416961>.

⁴³ Olivian Stănică, "Interoperability – The Key to Success in Achieving NATO's Goals," *Romanian Military Thinking*, no. 3 (2015): 49-63, https://en-gmr.mapn.ro/webroot/files/lib/upload/files/revista_3_rmt_2015.pdf.

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