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**Military Legitimation Strategies in the Epoch of
Climate Change**

A Research Paper

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List of Acronyms

C02	Carbon Dioxide
DU	Depleted Uranium
COP	Conference of Parties
EU	European Union
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
ICCP	International Panel on Climate Change
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
tCO2e	Tonnes of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent
The Alliance	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
UN	United Nations
UNCOP	United Nation’s Conference of Parties
US	United States of America
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
GWOT	Global War on Terror

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Abstract

The environment has long been victim to militarism – in armed conflict, pollution during so-called peace time from the archipelago of Western military bases across the globe, and post-conflict all see unimaginable destruction. In the age of climate change, excessive Carbon Dioxide emission is now front and center, Western militaries fare no better in this regard. This has not stopped NATO, the largest military alliance in the world, from presenting themselves as positive actors in climate action. The Alliance goes beyond mere greenwashing, they offer themselves as an essential entity in a climate changed world. I trace how this contradiction and ask how the world's worst polluter transforms to climate champion. I investigate the discourse put forward by NATO, its affiliate organizations, and sponsored programs through the theory of legitimation. With this theoretical backing, I parse out three overriding themes the organization uses to legitimize in the age of climate change, threat construct, response to the threat, and utilization of diverse voices and their audiences. This research allows me to shed light onto the contradictory discourse of NATO as arbiters of climate action and peace, and their discourse of increased threat which, in turn, creates a rapid acceleration of military spending and subsequent rising CO2 levels.

Relevance to Development Studies

This Research Paper contributes to the body of conflict and peace studies' engagement with development studies. It adds a social justice perspective by addressing the neglected study of militarism's unparalleled contribution to climate change and human suffering. This neglect gives an unrealistic perspective on the global reach of militarism and the environmental consequences that this entails – with dire consequences for people and the planet.

Keywords

Climate change, legitimation, NATO, climate security, climate justice, military, militarism, power, production, peace

Positionality

The chickens have come home to roost. Experience tells me this popular idiom holds true. The United States of America's imperial adventures have ravaged my country physically, economically, and spiritually leaving a traumatized populous grasping at fairy tales of their society's unique benevolence and virtue. When reality is too unpleasant, one cannot blame a population with such a lack of meaning for retreating into fantasy. I grew up in a community devastated by drug use, poverty, patriarchal violence and in my own home, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. My sister's father, a Vietnam veteran, spent most of his days sleeping after binging on methamphetamine the night before – when his waking hours did align with ours, he spent his time terrorizing us kids. While I do not believe that my childhood was a harmed as children who experience war first-hand, I do think I have something in common with them – we are left to deal with the consequences of circumstance not of our making.

Powerful men and increasingly women call for violence in the name of democracy and human rights which inevitably results in violence that they themselves will not be touched by. Increasingly, the US and its Allies fight high tech wars with little to no casualties on their end, leaving the consequences, like the state terror brought home by veteran which I experienced, as abstract faraway notions. Other people's problems. Still the ills fester, militarized police, decaying infrastructure, mass shootings, homelessness, and fentanyl overdoses daily lay waste to much of the US. This leaves a confused public searching for someone to blame, but this villain is a shapeshifter, dependent on your political

persuasion, and somehow the actual perpetrators the arms industry, the lobbying groups, and the politician who profit from this destruction go unscathed. As these consequences accelerate so too does the reaction from what could turn out to be the military's most vehement critic yet, planet earth. As the world's largest emitter of Carbon Dioxide (CO₂), the climate chaos that will ensue because of elite military adventurism will surely bring the logic of war making 'to the dock.' But as I write, this certainly is not the case.

Military budgets are skyrocketing while money for basic human needs, including dealing with all-ready-with-us climate change and its soon-to-accelerate consequences, as it has been for my entire adult life when it comes to human flourishing governments are somehow hard pressed to find the cash needed. This includes the 100 billion US dollars a year promised to countries who are the most vulnerable and least responsible for climate change, somehow the money is just not there. It is with the conviction that this should not be and that however naïve it might be, these circumstances could change that I approach my research. It is likewise with first-hand experience that war ruins not only the lives of those involved in combat but of generations to come that informs my thinking. These experiences along with the subsequent academic path I have chosen, give my research a social justice lens, this can be a virtue, but it comes also with limitations. As my standpoint is that militarism is a net bad for people and the planet, my research will see the rationality of the continued existence of armed forces on a global scale as inherently destructive. My approach then is limited in that reform to militarism is not something I see as positive; instead, I agree with Dubravka Zarkov when she calls for a demilitarization not just in conflict zones but of the whole of the global economy (2015). This could be seen as bias or a necessary moral stance in the face of such injustice – I will leave that for the reader to decide.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“The environment has long been a silent casualty of war and armed conflict. From the contamination of land and the destruction of forests to the plunder of natural resources and the collapse of management systems, the environmental consequences of war are often widespread and devastating” (Ki-Moon, UN Secretary General 2014)

1.1 Earth’s greatest foe

The case against the environmental devastation wrought on by the military is unequivocal. This is despite the secrecy that typifies certain activities of warfare. What follows is a short review of some of the most glaring examples of damage to people and the planet by militaries in conflict and peacetime. This is by no means a comprehensive overview of environmental consequences of militarism, such analysis is beyond the scope of this paper. That being said in this is a short overview, many casualties will not be addressed but are of equal importance to those that are present in the text. Likewise, while militarism is indeed a worldwide phenomenon, when it comes to arms and armed forces Western militaries are at the center of the problem, with NATO in particular bringing “...together the countries with the biggest greenhouse gas emissions per capita and the largest global arms exports, responsible for more than half of all military expenditure in the world” (Dunlap 2022, p. 179). The point of these few examples is to put forward the argument that Western militarism is unequivocally bad for people and the planet. Here are a few of the Western militaries’ climate crimes.

The United States decades long war in Vietnam is one of the famous cases of environmental destruction in the ‘scorched earth’ campaign which inherited the biggest chemical dumping in history. At the climax of the war, about 74 million liters of defoliants (Agent Orange herbicides) were sprayed in by the US Air Force in Operation Ranch Hand, by 1967 1.7 million acres of Vietnam and Laos were sprayed with the chemical (Medicine, Populations, Board on the Health of Select and Exposure, Committee on Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans and Agent Orange, 2011). The prolonged chemical attacked

caused a whole host of health problems from miscarriages, birth defects, and health issues passed on from breast feeding, further, damage was caused to the forest, animal population, and farmlands which in turn entered the food system of the Vietnamese people (Nguyen 2009, p. 10). What was damaged are the foundations of a livable life – reproduction, food, water, animals, and land were all victims of this war.

Another glaring example is the Iraq War that started in 2003, where “radioactive material like depleted uranium from US munitions has contaminated the soil” causing an “exponential” rise in cancer rates and birth defects in the affected areas (Guarasci 2017, p. 4). The toxicity of depleted uranium is so high that the contaminated soil must be removed and treated as radioactive waste (Picard and Beigi 2022, p. 50). The breathable particles created by DU munitions leave a fine dust in the environment with a “decay chain lasting 4.5 billion years” leaving the landscape dangers for an unimaginable timeframe (Inhorn 2021, pp. 148-149).

Further, the war saw oil contamination to the water supplies, as well as air pollution including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, hydrocarbons, and sulfur dioxide damaging the health of civilians and service members (Crawford 2019). It is what Kali Rabaii means when she asserts “war makes atmosphere” that is the left behind contamination to land, water, air, and bodies (Yildirim 2023, p. 87). These two examples show the level of toxicity involved in armed conflict and the disregard for the people involved (including military personnel employed from the West) and the environment.

1.2 NATO environmental destruction

While the above examples of industrial levels of pollution, ecological damage from the use of chemical weapons, and the subsequent harms to civilian and combat troops mainly implicate the United States military they are by no means the only ‘bad actor’ on the world stage, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the largest military alliance on the planet, too, has track record of harms to ecology and humans. NATO created a deadly landscape with airstrikes on former Yugoslavia, which saw the use of cluster bombs, a notorious type of munition with a high civilian causality rate due to the lack of detonation the submunitions live on far past active combat leaving the land littered with

unexploded “de facto” landmines, leaving the landscape extremely treacherous for post-conflict life (Docherty 2010, p. 2). In areas with heavy bombing from NATO the populations of the targeted areas have been found to have high levels of heavy metals in their blood (Al-Sabbak, et al. 2012, p. 938).

Beyond the use of these controversial weapons, the which are easy to condemn, further damage was seen, according to U.S. Army intelligence analyst William Arkin of Human Rights Watch, who led the post-conflict research team found NATO strikes deliberately attacking civilian infrastructure “...hitting petroleum refineries and factories, whether they do or do not have any relationship to what is going on in the war.” (Graham, 2000). Arkin claimed civilian infrastructure was targeted regardless of its value to the on the ground conflict effort (Ibid). Likewise, Phillip Frazer asserts NATO targeted a fertilizer plant releasing large amounts of toxic chemicals such as hydro-chloric acid, toxic phosgene, and chlorine gases – causing the former Yugoslav government to accuse NATO of "ecocide" (Frazer 2000, p. 124). The then Ministry for the Environment declared, “NATO violated just about every existing environmental treaty, including the Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development” (Frazer 2000, p. 128). The targeting of civilian infrastructure, chemical poisoning, and a landscape littered by deadly weapons for years to come are the legacies of this conflict.

In an essay entitled, Syria: Cities Reduced to Toxic Rubble, Wim Zwijnenburg and Kristine te Pas with the organization Pax for Peace give an overview of some of the destruction wrought on the people of Syria which saw the destruction of industrial areas, water, sewage, and electric systems (2015). As title indicates cities have been reduced to rubble with a December 2013 report determining that 1.2 million houses—or one-third of all homes in Syria had been damaged or destroyed (Zwijnenburg 2015, p. 149). Rubble from conflict areas is particularly harmful. Studies show toxic chemicals in rubble are higher than normal demolition and have serious health consequences during conflict as well as in post-conflict disposal exposure (Zwijnenburg 2015, pp. 148-149). Indeed, in general, “Post-war conditions include intense pollution, UXO, damaged and destroyed infrastructure, degraded landscapes and ecosystem services, socioeconomic disruption, refugee populations, and long-term illness” (Machlis, 2008, p. 730). Dunlap emphasizes, these are not byproducts of conflict but are

“often the intended consequence of warfare to eliminate resistance, destroy livelihoods, and subjugate people to political and economic regimes” (2022, pp. 163-164). In this sense, war can be seen through lens of intentionality of destruction as a means to an end.

Through the above examples I have shown that the US and NATO have acted in a way that leaves no doubt, with disregard for the health of people and the ecology and infrastructure that they depend on for a livable life. The military adventures of the West have left in its wake a host of health problems that are felt by generations. The repeated use of damaging tactics in conflict shows not only a pattern of disregard for humans and the planet but one can only conclude that these are not byproducts of war but in fact are the nature of war itself.

1.3 NATO, peace time pollution

The cases thus far are examples of conflict and the aftermath toll on people and the planet but the ‘beforemath’ also has its harms. It is not just in conflict that damage is wrought by militarism; it has its peace time victims as well. In a 2012 essay, Helen Jaccard of Veterans for Peace revealed in Italy’s Sardinia Island, NATO bases occupy about one-third of the island's acres. “High rates of cancer and birth deformities are found near the firing ranges where soldiers launch artillery rockets, drones and laser-guided precision bombs (some of which contain depleted uranium, asbestos, and white phosphorus)” (2012, pp. 130-131). NATO’s Decimomannu airbase contaminated land and water with fuel “containing carcinogenic xylene, benzene, and lead in February 2011, Mayor Louis Porceddu was forced to prohibit the use of water drawn from local wells” (Ibid). This reckless militarism creates an environmental scenario for civilians living in peace time that is like that experienced in war, exposing the nature of militarism at its core – an environmental catastrophe.

1.4 Military resource damage and emissions: a vicious cycle CO2

The kind of immediate and long-term environmental damage to people and the planet described above is deplorable, but in the age of climate change the slow burning issue of greenhouse gas (GHG) due to fossil fuel consumption has become the most salient issue of our time. Western militaries track record in this regard is equally shocking. Unfortunately, getting accurate accounts of military

fossil fuel consumption has proven to be a difficult task. While the Paris agreement saw the implementation of regular reporting on emission and implementation effort,¹ unfortunately the word ‘military’ does not appear in the agreement (Buxton 2015). This leaves the task of military emissions tracking outside of the structure of the landmark international agreement. The omission is a dangerous one, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists the United States military alone uses 100 million tons of oil each year. Making it the single biggest consumer of fossil fuels (2014).

The consequences of this consumption are vast amounts of CO₂ emissions, shown in the Cost of War project research exposing the US Department of Defense spewing; “593 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent from 2010 to 2018, an average of about 66 million metric tons per year in this period, ...roughly equivalent to the 15 percent of total GHG emissions of the residential sector of the United States” (Crawford 2019, p. 14). While the US military is the largest consumer and therefore polluter its close partners, the European Union too is guilty of prominent levels of military emissions. Wendela de Vries asserts, “...conservative estimate of the EU’s military carbon footprint, ... researchers calculated that in 2019, military emissions of the six largest EU countries amounted to approximately 25 billion tCO₂e—equivalent to the annual CO₂ emissions of about 14 million cars” (Parkinson and Cottrell 2021, in de Vries 2022, p. 185). Indeed, the rampant consumption of Western militaries totals the byproduct of CO₂ emissions equal to an industrialised European country (Ibid). Indeed, warfare in all its facets is extremely carbon intensive with “...moving troops and carrying out missions, account for 70% of the U.S. military’s energy consumption. Just one of the military’s jets, the B-52 Stratocruiser, consumes about as much fuel in an hour as the average car driver uses in seven years” (Steichen, 2022).

Despite the above evidence, NATO, the largest military alliance in the world, is presenting itself as a force for good – a positive actor in the realm of climate change, committing to mitigation, adaptation, humanitarian assistance to civilian populations, and a hub for green innovation, in short climate champions (NATO 2023). This obscures the fact that militaries and the fossil fuel economy

are deeply intertwined, and violence not humanitarian aid is central to militaries (Buxton 2016). In reality, a large portion of the polluting activities militaries do are in relation to securing oil, creating a circular effect of consumption and violence to secure this consumption. With researching willing to claim, "...the sum total of the political effects generated by the oil industry make it a leading cause of war in the modern era" (Colgan 2013, p. 148). Indeed, the military is not only the single largest consumer of fossil fuels Mark Akkerman asserts, "...its primary purpose in recent decades has been to secure the supply and transport of fossil fuels – and to a lesser extent ensure the smooth operation of a consumer-based, high-carbon-emitting globalised economy" (Buxton and Hayes 2016, p. 155). In this way, the relationship of war-making to resource extraction and consumption is illuminated, creating culpability for the current environmental crisis fall in large part on the logic of Western militaries.

In the above examples, the spatial and temporal realities of militarism consequences extend far beyond active combat. The record shows intrinsic institutional pollution exposing a pattern of environmental and human destruction, from the use of chemical weapons in Vietnam to the poisoning of the civilian populations near NATO bases in Italy, showing even those far from combat can experience health and environmental ramifications. The aftermath of combat zones too shows the rampant harms to the environmental harms and people, whether that is landscapes littered with unexploded munitions or loss of critical infrastructure – the material and social reality of militarism is laid to bare. The realities of environmental damage have not stopped military voices from promising the impossible – greening the military. With the urgency of climate change the military's contribution to rising CO₂ levels comes into focus – creating a pressing need to make drastic cuts. With this rising consciousness, NATO has responded to the challenge of greening the military by proposing large cuts to fossil fuel consumption and to be a driving force for climate action.

1.5 Case study: NATO's green proposals

"Some have expressed some scepticism that can we have effective green battle tanks and I strongly believe in the future the most effective military capabilities will be environmentally friendly" – Jens Stoltenberg (NATO 2022, COP 27).

Under the leadership of Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg NATO has promised, GHG emission-reduction targets of 45% by 2023 and ‘net zero’ by 2050, while this may seem like large cuts to military emissions this only applies to NATO, the 30 (and expanding) member states’ armed forces are not within the purview of NATO and would thus be up to them to set their own targets (Akkerman et al. 2022, p. 24). The effect of this is a false impression of large military emissions reductions. Likewise, the Secretary has promised to develop a system for measuring NATO emissions but has refused to share the methodology, leaving true accountability and transparency impossible (Ibid). NATO members emissions reduction plans too can only be qualified as greenwashing – defined by the UN as deliberately misleading the public into believing an entity is doing more than it is to protect the environment, creating false solutions to the issue of climate change (United Nations 2023).

France for example, claims to have reduced fuel consumption by 22% on its military bases, which sounds like a lot until it is revealed that they have no plans to reduce the bulk of their fuel consumption which happens not on bases but in operation fuel consumption accounting for 75% of consumption (climate collateral, p. 24). Indeed, when it comes to defense aviation, is responsible for around two-thirds of all fuel use (Crawford 2019). Another factor that is largely ignored are weapons systems that are newly developed are more polluting not less such as the “F-35A fighter jets which consume about 5,600 litres of oil per hour of flight, compared to 3,500 litres for the F-16 engine” the lifespan of these military equipment is “30 to 40 years” creating a new generation of highly polluting systems for years to come (Akkerman et al. 2022, p. 26).

Other ‘green’ proposals have presented biofuel as the golden solution to military emission. Environmentalist have rejected this on the grounds that the large amount of arable land needed for mass production of biofuel is unsustainable (Bigger, 2017) Other unrealistic proposals for greening aviation reference technologies that have yet to be developed include synthetic kerosene and electric planes, which even if developed these technologies are unlikely to meet the heavy nature and demand for rapid speeds of military equipment leaving a gap that is unlikely to be filled (de Vries 2022, p. 187).

Solutions that include lighter systems such as drones, but this comes with ethical issues with 90% of so called 'precision strikes' being unintended civilian casualties, as was revealed by the whistle blower Daniel Hale (Scahill 2021). Further, on a purely environmental level there is no guarantee that these new systems will limit resource consumption and emissions as they may "...include more energy-efficient technologies but still not reduce emissions or mining" (de Vries 2022, p. 188). This is what Dunlap has described as 'fossil fuel +,' a description he argues is more fitting as renewable energy as we know it does not exist, and the reality, instead requires huge amount of extraction and infrastructural development all processes that require large amounts of fossil fuels (Dunlap, 2021). Despite the evidence to the contrary, Jens Stoltenberg has gone so far as to claim that in the future planes, ships, and military vehicles will "not emit" (COP 26). The Secretary General claims are contrary to NATO's plans for an increase in military spending by a majority of its members.

1.6 NATO, increased pollution: more not less, greenwashing and 2%

Rather than reduce the trend of fossil fuel guzzling NATO is putting in place policies that will increase emission exponentially as a recent report by the Transnational Institute. Currently, if NATO were a country its emissions would surpass that of Qatar the world's largest exporter of liquified nature gas (LNG) (Lin, H.C., et al. 2023, p. 16). NATO's current proposal for its members to raise all member state's military budget to 2% of GDP with 20% of military expenditure spent on equipment, would result in "...a similar amount of GHG emissions as putting more than 7 million extra cars on the road in a single year" (Lin, H.C. 2023, p. 16). If these targets are met, by 2028, 21 member states will increase their annual military carbon footprint by more than 50% (Lin, H.C., et al. 2023, p. 19). Alarmingly, US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien boasted that the 2% on GDP target is becoming a "benchmark" and a "golden standard" for military spending all over the world, in other words creating a global arms race with disastrous consequences for the planet (Lin, H.C., et al. 2023, p. 24).

In conclusion, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has made commitments for NATO to make large cuts to their GHG emissions. Going so far as to claim that in the future military equipment will be environmentally

friendly. A quick look at the reality of aviation, one fossil fuel heavy aspect of the military, shows the reality of aviation is far from being green, with new generations of fighter jets currently coming out that have decades long lifespans. Further, the benchmark goal of 2% of allies GDP going to military spending will increase carbon emissions in some cases as over 50% of the current footprint from member states. It is possible then to conclude that NATO is green washing. Still, how they achieve status as positive actors on climate change must be uncovered.

Chapter 2: Context and Theory

2.1 NATO: climate change alliance

The title of an article in the NATO Review², sums it up *NATO: An unexpected driver of climate action?*. In the article the authors open with scenes outside the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, of thousands of youth activists demanding more from world leaders. The authors use this scene to introduce NATO as a unique organization in the fight for climate action, with its multilateral structure, partnerships with the international community, its buying power and influence on the market makes it a trend setter for the “societal change” beyond the military (Goodman and Kertysova, 2022). While this may seem strange for a military organization to mention climate protests and the green transition in the last couple of years, it has adopted the habit of doing just that.

Beyond the simple nod to climate activism, NATO has given a platform to the youth climate activists themselves, in programs like *Climate Security in my Backyard: Youth recommendations for NATO*, a video series with a notable amateur quality, produced by youth from around the world telling their stories about climate change effects and their desired future actions in response to the crisis (The International Military Council on Climate and Security 2022). In the Protect the Future program, NATO hosted climate activists at numerous events. The Alliance has released its first ever graphic novel with platforming hip young artists who illustrated surreal scenes to accompany NATO’s narration of climate change, with apropos of working together to overcome monumental challenges (NATO, 2023b). And even an interactive podcast where they bring listeners behind the scenes and invites young content creators and to ask questions to NATO experts with one “climate communicator” from Harvard University asking: “*How would you like to see youth voices and communicators celebrate NATO’s sustainability progress, while simultaneously holding it accountable for its ambitious promises?*” (Nalwimba, 2023). These examples lead to the conclusion that NATO is going

² “What is published in NATO Review does not constitute the official policy of NATO or member governments.” It is instead a publication platform created and run by NATO that “seeks to inform and promote debate on security issues.” For more see: <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/index.html>

beyond a merely greenwashing their military activities, they are framing themselves as champions of climate action. How does an organization go from horrible polluters to climate champions?

2.2 Theory of legitimation

I move forward with the assumption that NATO is engaging with climate change discourse for a reason, the theory of legitimation presumes legitimization as, "...a principal discourse goal sought by political actors" (Cap 2008, p. 39). In the case of NATO, the organization is described as the "world's leading political and military Alliance"³ with this it is possible to claim that military and political speech are not easily separated with this organization. Consequently, I claim, like other political speech, NATO engages with climate change discourse for the purpose of legitimizing its action and, while beyond the scope of this paper, delegitimizing the action of others. Further, any system of authority (NATO being one), "...attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its legitimacy," Van Leeuwen quotes Max Weber and asserts "Language is without doubt the most important vehicle for these attempts" (Van Leeuwen 2008, p. 105). It is through language that taken for granted social practices are legitimized that is justification is "...discursively constructed, in order to explain why social practices, exist and why they take the forms they do" (Van Leeuwen 2008, p. 125).

In the case of NATO, the world's largest military Alliance, the structure and practices are divided into two realms, the "...interplay between hard (military, economic) and soft (symbolic) power ... between the politics of territory, guns or money and the language of narrating the world in coherent and persuasive stories" (Chouliaraki 2005, p. 2) The interplay of the material consequences and their symbolic justifications creates an urgent need to uncovering the naturalized social structures, I purpose to do this with the theory of legitimation.

Van Leeuwen suggests four categories to analysis the process of legitimation through: *Authorization*, (reference to tradition, custom, law, and/or persons with

³ https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/nato-otan/centre-excellence.aspx?lang=eng

institutional authority), *Moral evaluation*, (reference to value systems, often not expressed in a direct way), *Rationalization*, (reference to institutionalized social action and to the knowledges validated by society), *Mythopoesis*, (conveyed through narratives to both reward legitimate actions and punish nonlegitimate actions) (Van Leeuwen Theo, 2008). For Van Leeuwen something as taken for granted as sending a child to their first day of school involves this elaborate legitimation process and includes a group diverse of social actors that make the process into what is considered ‘common sense’ (2008).

In Western culture, particularly in the US but by no means exclusive to it, militarism, after generations of discursive grooming have experienced an ongoing attempt create a “militarised public consciousness” (Graham and Allan 2005, p. 19). Creating military structures and practices as kind of ‘common sense.’ In this way; “Just as contemporary wars seem to have no clearly demarcated end, so militarism has no discernible edge; it increasingly seeps into every corner of the world, every aspect of social life...” (Gusterson and Besteman 2019, p. S4). But as the theory suggests, even taken for granted, naturalized practices need to be justified. Therefore, the act of legitimation while not always explicit “...implies an attempt to justify action or no action or an ideological position on a specific issue” (Reyes Antonio, 2011). So, even something as entrenched in Western society as militarism still must be justified.

In the case of NATO, while the existence of the Alliance is legitimized through the construct of a ‘threat,’ they simultaneously claim to spread a system of values (more on the history of NATO to follow). The combination of values and threats does not exhaust the list of justifications of NATO, but I argue they are central. In parsing out how these strategies manifest in the epoch of climate I will look to Antonio Reyes’ theory of legitimation, consisting of five strategies built off the Van Leeuwen’s four strategies:

- (1) *emotions*, (particularly fear), often used by social actors “...to skew the opinion of their interlocutors” often creating ‘us-group’ and ‘them-group’ categories (2011, p. 785).

- (2) *hypothetical future*, “pose a threat in the future that requires our imminent action in the present” (2011, p. 786)
- (3) *rationality*, “action-based process” where decisions are made after a “heeded, evaluated and thoughtful procedure” (2011, p. 186)
- (4) *voices of expertise*, achieved through institutional authority that the speaker holds due to their identity (i.e., a climate scientist) or reference to other authority voices to strengthen their position (2011, p. 800)
- (5) *altruism* (refers to a system of values), put forward the idea that the action wanted by the speaker are taken not for their own benefit but for the benefit of others, particularly the marginalized, in mind (2011, p. 182)

While there is clear overlap in the two theorist’s categories in my study I will look to Reyes as the context in which he utilized these categories was the political speech by two US presidents to legitimize the War on Terror, as the context of NATO legitimation while not identical, utilizes similar tropes to rationalize militarism. That being said, Reyes formation of the theory of legitimation lacks accounting for legitimation through appeals broad based appeals to morality and instead focuses only on moral appeals expressed through altruistic discourse, this leaves gaps in Reyes’s theory that I purpose to fill by utilizing Leeuwen’s ‘moral evaluation’ (oblique reference to value systems) when the analysis calls for the additional category (Van Leeuwen 2008).

My guiding question is: in the epoch of climate change how is the NATO Alliance, with a track record of environmental destruction, using climate change to legitimize their existence? First, I will digress to give a quick overview and of the historical context of NATO, as the organization has shifting greatly in focus post-Cold War, this description will give the reader an idea how the alliance has legitimated itself pre its shiny new green veneer.

2.3 Historical Context: NATO, multilateralism, cosmopolitan

How should the North Atlantic Treaty Organization be described? In the aftermath of the Cold War any organization that defined itself as defensive surely would have dissolved after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of the

‘enemy’ (Tunander 2008, pp. 167-168). How does an organization defend itself from a threat that does not exist? In 1999 Ola Tunander asserted the United States was the driving force behind NATO policy and used the organization as a central instrument for asserting influence over Europe, quoting Madeleine Albright (1997), NATO is “the principal mechanism for American involvement in Europe” (Tunander 1999). In this sense United States’ desire to continue to have sway over its European counterparts is at least in part the reason the organization survived at all after the disappearance of the stated enemy. While Madeleine Albright’s statements were more than 20 years ago US hegemony still holds in NATO, but the way in which NATO presents itself is far from the ham-fisted American brand of militarism.

2.4 NATO, militarism with a human face

NATO was quick to embrace the new role of ‘humanitarian’ intervention starting in mid-1990s soon after the loss of the Soviet threat, the events of 9/11, and the subsequent Global War on Terror (GWOT) began the even larger frame of NATO’s global involvement. These two framings (fighting terrorism and humanitarian intervention) were used repeatedly with “...NATO interventions in Bosnia (1992–1995), Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001–2021), Iraq (2004–2011), enforcing a no-fly zone in Libya (2011), and counter-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa (2009–2016)” (Lin, H.C., et al. 2023, pp. 6-7). Beyond the framing of benevolent military involvement there is a decidedly cultural element to NATO membership as is evident in its expansion into former Soviet countries. Indeed, in terms of its European involvement, the project was framed in cultural terms as it was military with NATO enlargement into central Europe’s post-Soviet states was framed as a “return to Europe” – joining an exclusively ‘Western’ club (Michta 2009; Kuus 2009).

In this sense the rhetoric of the cultural West, and for the post-Soviet states particularly ‘joining Europe,’ while this expansion was inextricably linking NATO membership goals to a cultural transformation for the newly joined states. This European style of militarism uses cultural cachet to project “...globalist spatial imaginaries to frame military approaches to political problems as enlightened and good (as well as necessary)” (Kuus 2009, p. 545).

This cultural framing that NATO utilizes is described by Kuus as “cosmopolitan militarism,”

The trope of cosmopolitanism is central to this enterprise. NATO's militarism works by promising cosmopolitan subjectivity. It produces a teleological narrative of a natural progression in which political actors gradually transcend their national contexts and come to see NATO as well as themselves as promoters of cosmopolitan peace (2009, p. 549).

With this, Kuus asserts that NATO projects an image that does not act against ‘threats’ per se but for “... ‘Euroatlantic values’ of “...freedom and security, cooperation and solidarity, just and lasting peace, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law” (2009, p. 545). This framing is not inconsequential as it brands NATO not as a military organization that primarily hold the threat of use of violence as central but as multilateral institution in which elevated thinking and thinkers can engage in the exchange ideas (Kuus Merje, 2009). Ideas and values encompassed in ‘cosmopolitan militarism’ then could be broadly attributed to what could be called ‘cultural NATO’ that works in tandem with military expansion creating an ideological framing of benevolence that is ready to legitimate military action and expansion based on a value system that must be both propagated and protected lest it be under threat. In this sense it is legitimation through moral superiority that the Alliance values most. I argue while NATO certainly continues to legitimate itself through ideas of ‘cosmopolitan militarism’ the concept of threat (to ways of life and values) is heavily interwoven in the discourse it puts forward on climate change – as I will show NATO combines concepts, of humanitarian interventionism, with a threat discourse to create a unique legitimation process in the era of climate change.

2.5 Cosmopolitanism to climate NATO

At the Brussels summit in 2021, NATO Heads of State and Government agreed that NATO should become the leading international organization on the nexus between climate change and security (NATO 2022). They have since introduced a plethora of media as well as two official policy documents all centered on climate change and security. The use of climate change by the organization has become prevalent enough to assert that it is now at least in part a legitimation strategy for the organization. In my analysis to follow, I argue two strands of

the Alliance are at work in climate change politics one is what Kuus calls 'cosmopolitan militarism:' "the framing of a military alliance in terms of cosmopolitan spaces that transcend national borders and ideological blocks to unite the whole globe" (2009, p. 546), the other are strategies of legitimation utilized by NATO create climate change as a security threat and therefore justify their involvement in climate change politics and action.

In conclusion, since the end of the Cold War NATO has developed a unique legitimation strategy, when the reason for its existence dissolved the Alliance took on what Merje Kuus describes as a cosmopolitan form of militarism. By utilizing the tropes of Western superiority, the organization presented central European states with the prospects of 'joining the West' enabling expansion by instrumentalizing the discourse of Western values of peace, democracy, and rule of law for its own political and military gain. While the United States undoubtedly still holds major sway over the organization as I have shown in terms of their 'branding' and structure NATO is a force onto itself. In this way their engagement with climate change politics will reveal a particular kind of climate change discourse. By laying out the historical legitimation strategies of the organization, I can now build on them to illuminate the process of legitimation in the current context of climate change.

Chapter 3: Method

3.1 We are all green now

These texts are situated in the epoch of climate change, what Nancy Fraser has described as the ubiquitous nature ‘eco-politics,’ that is when it comes to climate change “...*every* political actor must take a stand” (Fraser 2021). Even within the military milieu, the so called ‘greening’ of their organizations is not a new phenomenon and is not unique to NATO. The United States Department of Defense for example has engaged with climate politics now for decades, framing the issue as one a ‘national security issue’ while also toting climate action with media spectacles such as the ‘Great Green Fleet’⁴ (Chambers and Yetiv, 2011). I focus on the Alliance not because of the time the organization has spent involved with the issue, but the nature of the Alliance. That is the discourse they deploy to position themselves as unique actors – ‘trend setters’ in the global community. Above all the structure of NATO goes beyond the mere nation state, with this the organization embraces the opportunity to present themselves as a premier multilateral institution which in turn will produce a particular climate change discourse. In this unique position NATO fits into the wider discourse of globalization and the trend to portray the concepts of state sovereignty as old fashion and cumbersome, I argue in the era of climate change these already popular trends are accelerating (Mouffe 2005). In this sense, NATO positions itself as apt to deal with climate change. In this sense the discourse on climate change as presented by NATO becomes an important vehicle for analyzing legitimation strategies for Western militaries in the epoch of climate change.

3.2 Green and strong NATO’s climate discourse

My initial interest in NATO’s climate change engagement came after reading that Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg had been invited to the UNCOP 26 meeting. In the interview Stoltenberg was presented as an expert on climate, the presents of a military official at the COP and the extension of climate expertise

⁴ The US Navy used 10% biofuel, the environmental benefits were non-existent, but the action gained significant attention * check this

to the military came as a shock; I then began to research what other NATO climate change discourse was out there. The NATO website offers a resource page where I was able to access op-eds, public forums, transcripts of COP appearances, and official NATO policy documents on climate change.

The text preference criteria is as follows: *reference*: to climate change, *temporality*: the most recent engagements with climate change, post- 2021 after NATO declared its desire to be the leading institute for climate change and security concerns, *audience*: for example, COP meetings reach a wide audience, *policy*: NATO's stated plans for climate change action, *collaboration*: NATO's interaction with activists, diverse media, and their audiences. With the above criteria, I could account for formal NATO discourse in the form of policy. With this I could see how NATO framed climate change when putting forward official documents. The COP addresses accounts for language used in a formal setting where NATO is the guest and is engaging in high level climate talks. This accounts for discourse used in a non-military setting. Likewise, it can be assumed while there will be overlap in those that engage with NATO summits and COP, still, this discourse will reach a wider climate audience who may not engage with NATO at all. Collaboration was also given importance as the discourse and audience are diverse. With the above selection criteria preference was given to the following documents and programs hosted by NATO:

- The Secretary General's Report: NATO Climate Change and Security Impact Assessment, First Edition 2022, and Second Edition 2023
- Secretary General Jen's Stoltenberg's remarks at UNCOP 27
- Introduction to Navigating a Global Crisis: Climate Change and NATO 2023 from The NATO Association of Canada
- Protect the Future Campaign launched by NATO in Spring of 2022:
two participants Instagram Climate activist one: The Madrid Summit,
Climate activist two: interaction with military infrastructure
(elaboration of both to follow)

Further, the inclusion of media created by climate activists was inspired by the discovery, that the Dutch branch of the activist group Extinction Rebellion, invited a Tom Middendorp, an ex-general of the Dutch Armed forces and contributor to the NATO affiliated think tank, International Military Council on

Climate and Security (IMCCS), was invited to contribute to their climate change handbook (de Vries, 2022). This sparked my interest further in the collaboration between climate activists and NATO. In lieu of interviews with climate activists, I chose to utilize the presents of climate activists in the aforementioned Protect the Future program, as they were producing discourse for NATO in their own words. Accounting for those who claim to hold power to account, in this case climate activists, collaborating with not the marginalized but those who have a disproportionate amount of power. Through these documents I manually coded reoccurring themes throughout each of the documents. After numerous close readings, the most prevalent themes that emerged are as follows:

- Threat Multiplier: conflict, migration, resource competition
- Use of climate science
- A people centered approach, humanitarian action, and references to the most vulnerable
- The inclusion of liberal discourse such as gender justice or Indigenous struggles
- Climate action, NATO's commitments
- Diverse actors and audiences
- Multilateralism

To condense these codes into a coherent theory, I analyzed them through the theory of legitimation. I first looked for overlaps in appeal and processes within the codes. I found the central theme of threat creation, reaction to the threat, within these two categories diverse use of strategies is utilized which I will describe further in the below section.

Chapter 4: Findings

I begin by analyzing documents that have climate change as a central theme. This includes both diverse media endorsed and/or produced by NATO. The question is how has NATO used climate change as legitimation strategy, despite its terrible environmental track record? The important question is not whether NATO is truly invested in climate action but in how it uses climate change to legitimize militarism. I will start with the concept of the threat multiplier then move to NATO's reaction to climate change, and finally move to the diverse social actors it deploys.

4.1 The threat multiplier

By far the most salient theme in the documents is the concept of the threat or crisis multiplier (used interchangeably). The threat multiplier I assert that it is central to NATO's justification for military involvement in climate change politics and action. The concept ties security and climate together through diverse legitimation strategies. The threat multiplier like other threat formations is central to military legitimation. The evidence for the military need for some kind of threat formulation is well established, for NATO, whether it be the Cold War Soviet threat, the later threat of, "rogue states, global terrorism, axis of evil, militant Islam," and, more recently, "enemies of democracy" are used as justification for the Alliance, who creatively shifts from one role to the next (Hosseini-Zadeh 2006, p. 76). The concept of the threat multiplier takes on contemporary threat themes, which are often expressed by NATO in vague terms such as strategic interests, or as I show below in concrete terms such as migration, terrorism, resource competition. In the below analysis I show through the theory of legitimation, how these contemporary threats are shaped by climate change discourse and accelerated by the multiplier framing, increasing the threats to an endless degree.

In building his theory of legitimation, Reyes neatly separates legitimation into five categories, but when analyzing legitimation strategies, it is important to keep in mind that "...strategies of legitimation are not mutually exclusive..." and often act in concert with each other to reinforce a certain action or lack thereof

(Van Leeuwen 2008, p. 106). In NATO documents, the concept of the threat multiplier often weaves legitimization strategies together as I demonstrate. One such example is in the case of fear, the most common emotion for legitimization. According to Reyes, this strategy evokes an emotional response by demonizing the enemy, attributing negative moral attitudes and potential atrocities to them (2011, p. 790). As climate change is what is described as an ‘actorless’ threat to attribute negative feelings toward this threat, as an abstract actor, concepts of immoral behavior or unjust action do not figure into the picture, instead fear is evoked by coupling climate change with the destruction it causes in the future. In this sense when it comes to climate change legitimization through fear must be coupled with the strategy of a hypothetical future.

According to Reyes, hypothetical future is achieved by presenting knowledge of past experiences, the need for present action, to give rise to a potential future (Reyes 2011, p. 793). In terms of the legitimization of NATO in climate politics this is attempted by Jens Stoltenberg in his statements at COP 27 I argue, plays on past threat constructs and compounds them with an emotional appeal to fear through the bleak climate future he projects, to then justify NATO involvement in climate change.

4.1a) Legitimation through emotion and hypothetical futures

In this segment of Stoltenberg’s address at the COP, he confronts the audience with his formulation of climate change, its abilities, and its projected future.

Climate change is a crisis multiplier. It increases competition over scarce resources, water, food, land. It forces millions of people to flee. So, climate change creates conflicts. It exacerbates conflicts. And since climate change matters for security, climate change matters for NATO. We need to fully understand that link because we need to understand the different threats we are faced with (COP 27).

In Stoltenberg’s formulation climate change has power beyond the merely environmental, it ‘increases’ and ‘exacerbates’ ‘conflict, migration and competition,’ all issues that NATO currently engages with as seen, for example, with their collaboration with Frontex on the EU border or their role in policing trade routes, present security concerns are seamlessly connected the to the future climate security issues (Belgium, et al. 2016). A potentially obvious yet important factor is the venue itself, the representative of the military alliance has been

invited to speak at the premier climate conference, which suggests that the military is a natural social actor in the future climate changed world, therefore, military discourse and proposed future action on climate change is further, legitimized by the authority the institution holds. Additionally, Stoltenberg uses the threat multiplier formulation to illuminate a future of the scarcity of resources fundamental to life, mass migration and conflict all proliferate. For a Western audience, particularly Europeans, the ‘millions’ forced to ‘flea’ evokes imagery of the ‘migration crisis’ of 2015 where large numbers of Syrian refugees and migrants were apprehended and forced to stop at the EU border, resulting in political polarization which in turn led to national border closers (Chouliaraki 2017, p. 1163).

It is through NATO’s discourse of the threat multiplier, that Stoltenberg triggers past experiences of the ‘migration crisis’ to naturalize their involvement in climate change responses in the future. Stoltenberg creates a hypothetical future, with reference to past security issues such as the familiar ‘migration crisis,’ he then rounds his formulation off by using this framing as the reason it, ‘matters for NATO,’ seamlessly presenting the Alliance as the solution to the hypothetical future he has described. He ends with his formulation by emphasizing the imperative to understand ‘the threats we are faces with’ the threats described are not climate change itself it is the subjects of climate change, I will show in the following sections, these threat subjects are non-Western.

4.1b) Legitimation through emotions continued: sympathy and fear

An important aspect to NATO legitimation is the aforementioned ‘cosmopolitan militarism.’ As they weave their military aspirations with the discourse of Western values and human rights. So, while constructing the threat subjects created by climate change it is necessary to deploy cosmopolitan discourse based on respect for global peace, therefore, the construct of the ‘other’ as shown below is built not in terms of a pure threat, as this would compromise the humanistic framing, the subject is instead created on a paradigm of emotional appeals to persons to have both sympathy for and to fear.

As a threat multiplier, climate change can also be an aggravating factor for conflict, instability and terrorism, as in the crisis-stricken Lake Chad region where resource

scarcity and livelihood insecurity has made local communities more vulnerable for recruitment by Boko Haram. (NATO 2023, p. 16)

In example above, NATO further plays on an emotional appeal to fear this time with an elaboration of the threat multiplier formulation with the discursive construct of a climate terrorist. This identity formation is central to the fear construct as climate change transforms from environmental destruction to a force that fuels terrorism, a highly weaponized category (Chouliaraki 2017). But while the climate change subject is vulnerable to becoming a terrorist, it is attributed to ‘livelihood insecurity’ and ‘resource scarcity.’ Thus, in this strategy of fear and sympathy, NATO conflates the concepts of ‘human security’ that is the “...general deterioration of living conditions of poor populations mainly due to resource scarcity and an increase in extreme weather events” and ‘national security’ “...direct threats to the territorial integrity of states and the increase in violent conflicts” which are seamlessly connected, simultaneously creating victims of climate change as also threats to national security (von Lucke 2020, p. 2). The conflation of these two security concepts, and their subsequent subject, is at the heart of the rhetorical achievement of the ‘threat multiplier’ – the reality that climate change will destroy livelihoods is well understood, this reality of the poor and suffering is quickly transforms the vulnerable into threats creating an appeal to both sympathy and fear. In the next example, I will further elaborate on the construct of the threat of the ‘other’ through an example of NATO’s use of moral evaluation.

4.1c) Legitimation through moral evaluation

The Alliance uses reference to value systems as one of its key reasons to exist. This is called moral evaluation, a legitimation strategy that references value systems often indirectly. In order to interpret the presents of a value system the analyst must rely on their own knowledge of what is “common sense” in the given culture (Van Leeuwen 2008, p. 110). So, while the below example the discursive construct of climate migrants continues to play on the emotional appeals of sympathy and fear, I assert, the construct of the ‘other’ is elaborated through deep-seated Orientalist discourse.

Increasing rates of irregular and forced migration, caused by a variety of factors including population growth, poverty and poor governance and a lack of rule of law,

could be further exacerbated by climate change. ...The destabilizing effect of these tensions raises security risks along NATO's Southern Flank. (NATO 2023, p. 16)

The above example is a further elaboration of the threat multiplier, this time the subject of the formulation goes beyond climate change consequences such as resource scarcity, they move to problems created by a society – issues of poor governance and population growth – shifting the blame from climate change vulnerabilities to factors to non-Western governments and people. The implicit assertion is that the populations in question are unable to govern themselves. NATO describes this inability as manifesting in overpopulation and lawlessness which will eventually morph into threats at the ‘Southern Flank.’

While the tropes put forward in this example are not void of emotional appeals the core of the construct of the ‘other’ is elaborated through Orientalist discourse. NATO is building on the identity of the imperial West using moral evaluation. It is through this system that an ideology of difference is created one is which “... ‘the West’ = developed = good = desirable: ‘non-West’ = underdeveloped = bad = undesirable” (Schech 2002, p. 57). As the theory of moral evaluation shows, the formulation used by NATO is not innovative on their part but a familiar trope, “Victimhood and threat are, in fact, tactically interchangeable moral claims that variously configure the humanity of refugees across time and space” (Chouliaraki 2017, p. 1165). It is in this way, through mobility, that a group can go from suffering from poverty to a threat that needs to be managed. In this sense the trope of victim-threat is easily propagated as it is relatable to Western audiences. It is through moral evaluation by evoking the concept of unruly poorly managed people and places that climate change as a threat multiplier takes full form. It is the threat of the ‘other,’ not climate change in itself – its emergence is the through the construct of climate migration and in the above example a climate terrorist.

In the above examples the discourse of backward places and people become central to the threat multiplier, while constructing the Western subject (in the example NATO) as the necessary manager of a mismanaged situation. The idea of ‘scarce resources, water, food, land’ are not described as internal issues to the member states but instead are external issues to its territory – the consequences

of ‘poor governance’ by non-Western actors. In NATO’s formulation these problems will end up at their border creating a threat and the need to intervene in that threat. NATO utilizes Orientalist tropes in the elements of threat multiplier, notably the problems described above arise, not in Europe or North America, but in their assessment in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Sahel. In this way they use the cultural underpinnings of Western imaginaries through moral evaluation, in tandem with fear and sympathy of the ‘other.’ Lastly, the formulation of the threat multiplier works with past experiences to build justification for NATO involvement in climate change threats, as it creates and proliferates violent non-state actors and millions of desperate people.

In the process of building legitimacy, an element of expertise is often present, one way this is established through the writer or speaker’s status, another is through the use of the status of others, in the following example quoting climate science builds NATO’s legitimacy in its claims of the threat multiplier (Reyes 2011). The utilization of climate science is crucial as climate change discourse is often expressed through reference to climate science, with even a theorist as critical as postcolonial theorist such as Dipesh Chakrabarty, asserting one cannot understand the how the climate system works without Earth systems science (Pauls et al. 2022, p. 708). Further, I argue, the legitimation strategy of expertise is coupled with the strategy of rationality, that is legitimation by reference to the process of “...heeded, evaluated and thoughtful procedure” (Reyes 2011, p. 797). Importantly, rationality while seemingly universal, this process of legitimation is culturally specific to and based on a particular value system of any given group (Reyes 2011, pp. 797-798). With this in mind, NATO seeks legitimacy for its role in climate change from a majority Western audience, as it is their governments who are the majority of members. Western culture valorizes experts, any reference to expertise gives the discourse the clout of a rational argument as I will show below (Fairclough 2010).

4.1d) Legitimation through voice of expertise and rationality

The Alliance has released two Impact Assessment to date, both utilizing the voice of expertise through referencing climate scientists, not exclusively sourced from military thinkers/think tanks, but by trusted international bodies like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Consequently, this gives

the NATO reports an air of neutrality that scientific documents carry. Below is the opening statement of the 2022 Impact Assessment:

Climate change is the overarching challenge of our time. The scope, scale and intensity of climate change effects are projected to increase, ramping up considerably after 2040, as assessed by the July 2021 Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). These conditions represent a 'threat multiplier' that has significant security implications for NATO on a tactical, operational and strategic level. (NATO 2022, p. 1)

The above example starts with the inclusive 'our time' gives the reader a sense of NATO's universalist framing, reflecting the ethos of the wider discourse on climate change, which emphasizes that no one is immune to the effects of this planetary problem. The second line uses the voice of expertise, by utilizing the voice of climate scientists who assert that climate change effects are highly likely to accelerate. It is through the voice of expertise that the Alliance uses the predicted increase in intensity and frequency of climate change effects by the IPCC, to conclude that this constitutes a threat multiplier.

NATO then moves to legitimize through rationality, by using the IPCC to demonstrate a process of evaluation on their part, by drawing the conclusion that the assertions by the climate scientist represent 'security implications' for the Alliance. While the implications laid out by them are in military jargon 'operational and strategic' suggests an expansion in size and scope, as military 'operations' and 'strategic interests' are already part of militarism's global reach. The expert voice of the climate scientists then is used as a tool to justify the 'threat multiplier' framing through resulting in the overarching assertion that climate change is a security issue for NATO and therefore they are rationally reacting to all climate change threats.

When constructing the discourse of the threat multiplier, NATO uses diverse strategies of legitimation, such as appeal to emotions through fear and sympathy, hypothetical future by evoking disastrous climate outcomes, moral evaluation with oblique references to Western superiority, and finally voice of expertise and rationality both by utilizing climate science. Ultimately, the threat multiplier is a concept that puts forward the idea that climate change comes with secondary consequences beyond environmental changes, that of resource

competition, increased conflict, and mass migration. Climate scientists have asserted that the world's poor are indeed the most vulnerable to experiencing climate change effects that are highly likely to expose them to even greater experiences of precarity (IPCC 2023). The Alliance grabs onto this scientific prediction and frames the outcomes of vulnerability as threats. It then uses language of the universal dangers of climate change and intertwines that with the discourse of the 'other' who are portrayed and both victims of climate change and threats to be managed. Through this discourse. The Alliance uses the concept of the threat multiplier and its subsequent security risks to conclude that they are an essential organization in a climate changed world. As climate change is predicted to increase the secondary consequences the organization describes will too, creating geographies of disaster and destruction, NATO discursively legitimates its global reach through this framing. What I have shown thus far is the threat multiplier is less about climate change and more about the subjects of climate change, those in conflict, with limited resources migrants, and terrorist.

4.2 NATO climate action: threat construction to threat response

In the process of creating a discourse on climate, NATO does not rely solely on the construct of a threat, they also cultivate an image of 'gallant savior.' Through this image they present themselves as a humanitarian organization who is fit for the challenge due to its multilateral structure and global network, where expertise and exchange are central (Goodman and Kertysova, 2022). In relation to these dynamic and altruistic concepts is the framing of 'cosmopolitan militarism' I discussed previously, presented by Kuus who argues the trope is central to NATO legitimation, where by evoking "...allegiance to the worldwide community of humans" which is achieved by "...cosmopolitan rhetoric and imagery, the alliance casts itself as an agent of global peace" (Kuus 2009, p. 550). This is as true as it was when Kuus wrote it in 2009, at the most recent COP Jens Stoltenberg "...NATO's core and main task is to prevent war, preserve peace. Our task is not to provoke conflict, but it's actually prevent the conflict. We do that by standing together, protecting each other and for more than 70 years that has preserved peace in Europe" (NATO 2022, COP 27).

Therefore, by being a member or partner of NATO individual states become part of a 'Western' system of values, which my utilizing cosmopolitan

rhetoric of peace and security create a universalism that transcends selfish endeavors of individual nation states (Kuus 2009). In a similar vein to Kuus, Reyes's strategy of altruism where social actors present themselves not as taking action on behalf of themselves but for the benefit of others, particularly the marginalized complements the concept of cosmopolitan militarism (Reyes Antonio, 2011). While Kuus theorized the framing that NATO used in its process of enlargement by absorbing former Soviet states into its military apparatus, as I will show below, the Alliance utilizes tropes of altruism in the epoch of climate change, creating discursive expansion to a global scale.

4.2a) Legitimation through altruism

NATO Association of Canada a member of the Atlantic Treaty Association (ATA)⁵, a NATO affiliated Non-Governmental Organization whose stated mission is “promote peace, prosperity, and security through knowledge and understanding of the importance of NATO” (NATO Association of Canada n.d.). The stated task then of ATA is to legitimate NATO through discourse. In the introduction to a collection of essays from the editor, Christopher Maternowski, presents the “centrality of multilateralism” in the era of climate change with a special emphasis on “intergovernmental institutions like NATO” the text goes continues:

...a climate-related episode outside of NATO's territorial boundaries and ostensibly far removed from member states can potentially have implications for them. ...the international exchanges and transnational initiatives that multilateral institutions facilitate become critical in dealing with the universal nature of climate change and its effects. As one external observer comments, “success depends on everyone playing their full part,” including NATO (Maternowski 2023, p. 2)

In above segment, the issue of climate change as a universal problem is presented. With this problem the editor gives a panacea, the structure of institutions that go beyond the nation state those that ‘facilitate’ ‘exchanges’ are

⁵ The Atlantic Treaty Association (ATA) is an independent organisation designed to support the values enshrined in the North Atlantic Treaty. Created on 18 June 1954, it is an umbrella organisation for the separate national associations, voluntary organisations and non-governmental organisations that formed to uphold the values of the Alliance after its creation in 1949. The Youth Atlantic Treaty Association (YATA) is the youth branch of the ATA and was formed in 1996. From NATO page: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69053.htm

central to climate change solutions. With this he presents NATO as part of this ‘multilateral’ mosaic of institutions. The erasure of asymmetrical power dynamics that the world’s largest military alliance holds over other states, is replaced by the above altruistic frame. The aforementioned threat multiplier (migration, conflict, terrorism, etcetera), a central theme in NATO’s climate change future, is not present, as it is not fitting for the selfless organization that is presented. It is not threats to the Alliance that the organization is responding to here but a universal challenge of climate change. With this NATO’s necessary role in climate change futures is legitimized by the nature of climate change itself. In this sense, rather than merely a military alliance, the organization is an international institution where the exchange ideas on hard to crack problems are facilitated or in, “The Economist's (2006) characterization of NATO as United Nations in military uniform” (quoted in Kuus 2009, pp. 559-558). Like the discursive framing of cosmopolitan militarism was utilized to expand into central Europe, NATO uses climate change to legitimate expansion to a truly global level through the altruistic frame of multilateralism.

Legitimation through altruism continues in the example below. Irene Fellin, NATO Secretary General’s Special Representative for Women, Peace, and Security, lays out a humanitarian framing of NATO, while continuing the expansionary undertone present in the previous example:

The compounding risks of gender inequality, conflict and climate change for women and girls underscore the urgent need for integrating gender perspectives in climate change and security policies and actions. NATO’s commitment to addressing these interconnected challenges reflects the Alliance’s recognition that a comprehensive and people-centered approach is essential for effective and sustainable responses to global threats in today’s world. (NATO, 2023a)

The above example reintroduced the discourse of ‘global threat’ this time with the stated victims being ‘women and girls.’ With this threat construct Fellin presents a savior. NATO is a selfless actor in addressing the ‘risks’ of these inequalities, with its ‘people-centered approach.’ Expansion through a selfless response to a global problem again is presented through the discourse of climate change and its secondary factors, in this iteration these factors have victims and NATO steps in as the savior.

In this last example of legitimation through altruism, NATO presents armed forces as natural actors in the response to the projected increase in natural disasters, again, making their involvement in climate change as selflessly acting for others – they will assist in traditionally civilian roles of ‘humanitarian’ action.

As climate change-induced natural disasters increase in severity and frequency, armed forces will increasingly be called upon to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. (NATO 2023a, p. 3)

This framing makes them indispensable in a climate changed world as by all estimates natural disasters are and will continue to increase in the coming decades (IPPC, 2023). In this sense they present themselves, as they did in the above two examples, not as a military organization but as an organization of first responders ready for any role they need to play. The reader is to take for granted that any ‘armed’ group but particularly the military is presented as a viable option for natural disaster response. Further, like in the use of climate science NATO employs popular rhetoric of climate change in the use of ‘climate change-induced’ shows that the organization is not a climate change denier – it attributes the increase in natural disaster events to climate change, by doing this they subtly align themselves with those who are calling for climate action, while presenting themselves as selfless first responders.

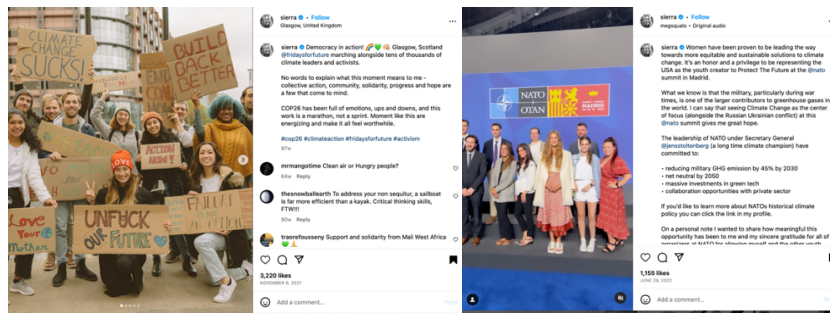
In the above analysis the concept of cosmopolitan militarism is reintroduced to complement the legitimation strategy of altruism. With this added theory of legitimation, I can incorporate NATO’s historical framing as an agent of global peace. In NATO’s current iteration of this framing their expansion under guise of a response to climate change. This is achieved on the one hand, through the lens of climate change as a universal threat creating a sense of urgency in the size and scope and togetherness in the response to a whole of humanity problem. On the other, NATO frames itself not in military terms but as humanitarian responders, who through a people-centered approach help the most vulnerable, and at the same time are a multilateral institution where exchange and collaboration are central to the issue of climate change. In both cases the benefit is framed not for the Alliance and its expansionary goals but for those effected by climate change, using both frames to present NATO as an altruistic organization, therefore legitimating its role in the age of climate change.

4.3 Diverse actors and audiences

In the process of legitimization, the Alliance utilizes the voice of others to cultivate their image as positive actors on climate change, and essential actors in a climate changed world. In Spring of 2022 NATO launched the Protect the Future campaign, in which they recruited: "...youth and young content creators across the Alliance to allow them to discover the role that NATO plays in protecting their future. Helping them go behind the scenes, meet the experts and discover what NATO does, the Alliance has been giving young people a voice in telling NATO's story in their own way" (NATO, 2023b). In this group of content creators are what are popularly known as 'influencers:' "A social media influencer has been defined as a social media user who has established credibility in a specific industry through their activity in the media, or as third-party endorsers who are able to shape their audience's attitudes through social media communications" (Brown and Hayes, 2008; Freberg et al., 2011; cited in Engström, 2022). The participant I engage in my analysis fits both facets of this definition of an influencer. On the Protect the Future website, all participants' Instagram handles are posted, allowing one to visit their personal social media pages. The participants were involved in an array of different activities coordinated by the Alliance, such as visiting the NATO Head Quarters or as they like to call it NATO HQ, attending the Madrid NATO summit in July 2022, or a red carpet style event for the release of their first ever Graphic Novel, a NATO produced podcast series, and trips to different bases to take hop on board fighter jets and see inside their reconnaissance vessels. All these experiences are then relayed back to the influencers' followers who consume the media through what the Alliance has described as "digital storytelling" in which the influencers are "telling NATO's story in their own way" (NATO, 2023b).

The young participants in the program had a broad range of identities, that they conveyed on social media, some of which were, Chemists and Biological Science researchers who document their PhD journey on Instagram, aerospace engineers, and climate activists. Below I will focus on two participants who self-identify as climate activists. This choice is informed by the assumption that they would be the most influential voices on climate change of the participants and, therefore, I assume that most of their followers look to them for leadership on climate change.

□ Climate activist one



Above are two Instagram posts from the influencer Sierra she is a self-described ‘athlete and imperfect environmentalist.’ She has 123k followers on this site alone. On the left is a photo of her participation in protest outside of the COP26 in Glasgow with the group the Fridays for Future, a youth climate movement group who mobilized over a million protestors in 2019 (de Moor *et al.*, 2021). On the right is a group of Protect the Future participants at the 2022 NATO summit in Madrid, with Sierra in the center. From the Protect the Future page, it is evident that she also participated in a visit, along with other influencers, to the NATO HQ. On her Instagram page she narrates her experience at the NATO Madrid summit and relays information about the climate action that NATO plans to take. Below I will analyze the social media posts by Sierra and then move to the second activist utilizing the theory of legitimation described above.

4.3a) Legitimation through voice of expertise

In the assessment by Reyes, legitimation through voice of expertise is achieved in two ways, one by bringing voices of experts into their own speech by way of quotation or direct reference, the other, is achieved implicitly by political speaker due to their status, in what he refers to as “institutional authority” (2011, p. 801). In my analysis, I found the need to stretch the category of expertise beyond what Reyes describes. That is, expertise is in part built on by the credibility of the speaker, experts are looked to for information because of their deep involvement and/or study of an issue, with this in mind, I extend the category of the expert to the influencers in the below example. I move forward with the assumption that the followers of high-profile climate activists would look to them as a

trusted source for climate politics and action, treating them with the reverence an expert receives. Further, an influencer holds status as a public orator, in the case of this influencer, the complex issue of climate change, often expressed in scientific jargon is clearly articulate to her followers. Further, the voice of the climate activist gives the audience that she cultivates online a sense that she is an expert in holding the powerful accountable on climate issues.

Indeed, earlier posts show Sierra promoting the UN Sustainable Development goals, advocating for the reduction in plastic use, and sustainable fashion, participating in climate protests, all of which establishes her credibility as a trusted voice on climate change. In turn, her high-profile climate activist 'brand' and has cultivated a large follower base, who are likely to consume the posts from her participation with NATO. The below statements are from her post after attending the Madrid NATO summit.

What we know is that the military, particularly during war times, is one of the larger contributors to greenhouse gases in the world. I can say that seeing Climate Change as the center of focus (alongside the Russian Ukrainian conflict) at this [@nato](#) summit gives me great hope (Quitiquit 2022).

In the first line of the above example, the reader is presented with an authoritative voice that puts forward the facts on military pollution. As the influencer attends a high-level military summit a sense of trust is built through the assertion, the second sentence, starts with a personal assertion 'I can say,' utilizing the trust that was just built from the truthfulness of the previous sentence, to assert that NATO has made climate change a 'center of focus.' The message conveyed to the followers of the activist is NATO has invested heavily in climate action, that is, it is 'center of focus.' Additionally, the fact that this gives a climate activist 'great hope' further solidifies the trust in the NATO commitments. With this a discursive unity is achieved, combining the activists voice with that of the military, creating an air of positive contribution by the military alliance. A notable change is present from the discourse NATO themselves discussed above, in that, there is no mention of threats, instead this audience is given a rosy picture of a climate focused alliance. The post goes on:

The leadership of NATO under Secretary General [@jensstoltenberg](#) (a long time climate champion) have committed to: reducing military GHG emission by 45% by

2030, net neutral by 2050, massive investments in green tech, collaboration opportunities with private sector (2022).

In the above excerpt, the legitimization process continues with the previous example's combination of climate and military expertise. This time climate expertise is extended to NATO, via Sierra's assertion that Jens Stoltenberg is 'a long-time climate champion' who holds military authority through his identity as Secretary General of NATO. Through reference to Stoltenberg, the influencer goes on to use typical climate action jargon like 'net neutral,' 'green tech,' and 'private/public collaborations' as NATO's purported action on climate change. While vague, these initiatives are articulated through what has been established as an expert voice on climate and military giving credibility to the idea of NATO's commitment to climate action.

Additionally, the level of cuts to GHG '45%' and the 'massive investments in green tech' gives the follower the false impression that the 'military' (the social actor stated in the previous example) is making move to greening its activities, but, NATO is a military alliance and therefore the cuts (even if made) would be for NATO not individual members. In this sense, the proposed cuts are minuscule compared to the larger GHG of its member states militaries. Which, in turn, muddies the water, as NATO's green proposals work as a general greenwashing for Western militaries. In this way, the influencer, through the voice of expertise, given by her status, the use of Stoltenberg, and the NATO event, all lead credibility to NATO as a positive climate actor.

4.3b) Legitimation through altruism

In the last excerpt from the activist's post the legitimization strategy of altruism is utilized through the narration of the influencer's personal experience.

I am humbled to have a voice at the table and I see my representation not only for the USA but for all climate activists worldwide and especially those living in the global south, marginalized communities and in particular conflict zones. I stand as an ally to all of those who will be effected by climate change (2022).

The reader is presented with the familiar trope of a selfless messenger. The influencer presents her attendance at the NATO summit as an act of solidarity to 'marginalized communities.' Her ally-ship is expressed in her 'representation'

at the NATO summit, framing her presents at the summit as something that would benefit climate activist in the ‘global south’ and ‘conflict zones.’ The ‘marginalized communities’ she purports to represent are passive social actors, who are spoken for, it is be taken for granted that some of these groups may in fact through military violence carried out by NATO itself. In this way, the influencer’s post turns the concept of climate justice on its head, by giving weight to the public relations trope that NATO is an organization that exists to preserve peace, rather than party to some of these ‘conflict zones’ that the activist describes, as she takes the liberty of presenting her actions as beneficial to the marginalized.

Through both the use of the voice of expertise and altruism, the influencer legitimates NATO through the discourse of climate action. It is with the slightest of hand that she erases the acts of violence, aggression, and planetary damage that NATO has committed and instead builds their credibility as a positive actor on the world stage – breathing life into the organization for years to come as ‘climate champions.’

□ **Climate activist two:**

Caroline has 190k followers on Instagram and describes herself as a ‘Ski mountaineer and activist’ (Gleich 2022). The excerpts below are from her reflections on receiving the invitation to join the Protect the Future program and her experience on a US Carrier on the Adriatic Sea. A notable difference in theme is present from Sierra’s experience with the program to Caroline’s interaction, with the former partaking in high level talks at a NATO summit, where the latter interacts with actual military equipment and personnel, showing its use in a playful way to her followers as the ‘marvels’ of military aviation. The photograph below is from Caroline’s Instagram post about her NATO experience.

[How a Climate Activist Ended up on a US Carrier under NATO Control](#)

November 14th, 2022

How did I, a ski mountaineer and climate activist, end up on a US Carrier in the middle of the Adriatic Sea with NATO, watching F-18s take off and land from a flight deck?



A glimpse of the interior of the C-2 Greyhound we took to land on the aircraft carrier.

4.3c) Legitimation through moral evaluation

As discussed above, moral evaluation is used in the process of legitimation by reference to value systems in an oblique way, as they are these moral systems are not made explicit it is up to the analyst to "... "recognize" them, on the basis of our commonsense cultural knowledge" (Van Leeuwen 2008, p. 110). In this case the activist leans into her identity as an American, in familiar cultural tropes.

As I've grown as an activist, I've learned that social and environmental issues are interlinked and that democracies, as we have in the US, while not perfect, are precious forms of governance, because people are free to be the best versions of themselves (Gleich 2022).

In the above example Caroline centers, her identity as a climate activist when narrating her journey, displaying her growth as a person who inevitably comes to a mature position on consequential issues. This gives the reader a relatable story, it is what can be called the 'journey of life' metaphor where she goes from a naive activist to one that understands the hard facts of life. In this narration, the influencer references the superior governmental system she is party to. Van Leeuwen describes moral evaluation as having the ability "... trigger intertextual references to the discourses of moral values that underpin them" (2008, p. 126). In Caroline's case she uses a central trope to the identity of Americans, that they live in 'the land of the free' and even if not explicitly laid out still triggers a sense of moral superiority of their political system to those who do not live in so called free countries.

4.3d) Legitimation through altruism

We need to continue holding our government and military accountable for spending and carbon emissions. We are allowed to criticize our government, military and NATO because we live in a free country. Our freedom is because of the sacrifice of those who serve (Gleich 2022).

In the above example, the central argument that militaries put forward themselves, that their global structure of ‘deterrence’ is a precondition for civilian ‘freedom.’ With this assertion the apparatus of militarism is a selfless structure, that is, their actions are motivated not by global domination but in service of others. The influencer compounds this formulation further, by adding her support of the military, is simply the support of ‘those who serve’ framing her choice to promote militarism as a selfless act of recognition. Further, militarism is conflated with the ‘sacrifice of those who serve’ not with the reality of death and destruction I described in the opening chapter, softening the image of this deadly structure. Lastly, the argument put forward by the activist is circular – without the military one would not be able to exercise the right to criticize the military, it is through this logic one needs to support militarism lest they lose their rights.

4.3e) Legitimation through hypothetical future, fear, and rationality

In my heart, I am a pacifist. Like most people, I despise war. But with ever increasing threats from foreign adversaries, we have a choice for our future between democracy and authoritarian regimes (Gleich 2022).

In this short excerpt above, the influencer combines the legitimation strategies hypothetical future, an emotional appeal to fear, and rationality. To begin with, the activist displays a sense of deliberation by laying out the justification of her choice to support militarism despite her pacifist nature. The hard choice is ultimately because of ‘increasing threats’ which could engulf the democratic world into authoritarianism. Therefore, it is through this “heeded” deliberation and appeals to fear (“increasing threats”) that she comes to her conclusion. She appeals to the reader by asserting that ‘we’ have a choice for ‘our future,’ appealing to the need for their support as well. The hypothetical future implied is if ‘we’ choose to demilitarize, ‘we’ risk giving up the protection that guarantees democracy and therefore acquiesce to live under an authoritarianism.

In this sense the activist pulls the reader full circle, where in the current state of things one can fight for the climate but taking an anti-military stance could lead to the loss of such an ability therefore pacifism is not a rational option. Notable, while the influencer does not build climate change as a threat but instead the threat of 'foreign adversaries' while at the same time centering her identity as a climate activist, as this identity has the potential to be one of the militaries fiercest critiques, her expressions of support to her followers after hard deliberation creates a strong case for the rational of the military.

The two climate activists interact with NATO in distinctly different ways, in turn their use of legitimation strategies varied. In the case of the first climate activist, Sierra, she does not employ emotional appeals to fear instead her style of narration is one of relaying facts, selfless action for the marginalized and putting forward a hopeful future. Her presents at such a high-level event as a NATO summit and her participation in advocacy for the UN gives her brand of climate activism an air of expertise on climate issues. Likewise, she uses her platform to express NATO's climate change commitments and Stoltenberg's role combining both military and climate expertise into one.

The second influencer, Caroline, engagement with NATO is through a visit to a reconnaissance vessel in the Adriatic Sea, her narration of the event is one of democracy and militarism and inextricably linked, rather than focus on climate issues she uses her identity as a climate activist to legitimate support of NATO and the US military, she does this through a series of legitimation strategies including, moral evaluation, rationality, hypothetical futures and fear. From a comparison of the two activist's posts, it becomes clear that Caroline is focused on justifying the need for militarism where Sierra focuses on advocacy for 'greening' the military. In both cases it can be assumed that an audience who is interested in climate activism was exposed to the legitimation process of NATO as an important actor in a climate changed world.

4.4 Concluding remarks on finding: NATO, an indispensable climate actor

I have shown that NATO has played an active role in creating an image as an indispensable actor on climate change. They have done this on one hand through the building of climate change as a threat multiplier that they are uniquely

positioned to handle. On the other hand, NATO has cultivated an image of as a positive force in a climate-changing world. In the former case, NATO built on already existing threats to legitimate through fear and hypothetical future. The latter is legitimation through altruism, which reinforces Kuus's theory of 'cosmopolitan militarism,' that explains NATO's role as less of a military alliance and more as a hub of innovation, change, values, and ideas (2009).

The Protect the Future campaign is particularly useful in this regard as it brings together trusted young influencers from diverse fields to disseminate NATO's message in "their own way" creating a new NATO discourse through the identities and narration of the influencers, while, simultaneously reaching an audience that would otherwise would not have in all likelihood engaged with NATO on this level. By utilizing this discourse NATO has a powerful tool to reinforce its image as an advocate for peace and cultivate a new image as 'climate champions.' As climate action is antithetical to their actual functioning this can be seen as a great success on their part in the process of legitimating themselves in the era of climate change.

In addition to their new green veneer, the other salient issue reinforces the concept of an existential threat to NATO and its allies. NATO uses the evidence that we are now living in a climate changed world and that these circumstances are soon to accelerate (IPCC 2023) to legitimize their future role as central actors in the future climate consequences, creating a scenario where a militarized climate response has already been legitimized. In sum, NATO creatively uses climate change as a legitimation strategy through a diverse set of discursive strategies and diverse actors, achieving both the status of selfless protector and a driver of climate action.

Chapter 5: Implications

5.1 Implications for theory

Through the theory of legitimation, I uncovered strategies utilized by NATO to justify their existence in the age of climate change. The theory is particularly powerful in analysing speech and policy documents put forward by the organization. Put plainly, an Alliance with an abundance of resources, comprised of some of the most powerful entities in the world, makes a clear case for analyzing strategies of justification by powerful social actors.

Where I found the theory, lacking was it did not account for what I have labelled diverse actors and audiences. That is the participants in the Protect the Future campaign, to quickly review, the Alliance gave "...young people a voice in telling NATO's story in their own way" in doing so the influencers displayed discourse that fit the strategies laid out by the theory of legitimation (NATO 2023b). But, while the theory was able to illuminate the strategies that the influencer deployed, it lacked the ability to account for the influencer's task of speaking *for* NATO. That is, decidedly less powerful social actors (the climate activists) legitimating for the powerful (NATO). In this sense, the presents of influencers in the legitimation process creates a gap in the theory which I purpose to fill by the edition of theorizing informational flow.

In theorizing 'flow,' Thorson and Wells present the concept of curated flow, that is curation is understood to encompasses the current media reality of, "many speakers; information overload; and the necessities of selectivity, choice, and filtering" (2016, p. 5). In this sense, social actors have an amount of agency not seen before in media consumption; within this new 'flow' system the authors "...conceptualize five sets of curating actors: *journalists, strategic communicators, individual media users (personal curators), social contacts, and algorithmic filters*" (2016, p. 6). In the case of the social media influencers, they occupy the identity both *strategic communicators* and *social contacts*. With the former being strategic actors who bypass traditional media to communicate directly with an audience and the latter, "...the information flow curated by one's social network" (Choi 2015, p. 699; Thorson and Wells 2016). The reality of social media gives rise to, "...opinion

leaders from the lay public” (Choi 2015, p. 707). That is people who do not traditionally hold sway over the public now have the opportunity to do so.

The climate activists created a unique discourse for NATO as they are indeed ‘opinion leaders’ in the realm of climate politics, when advocating for climate and militarism they legitimate the Alliance as not only necessary (in the case of climate activists one) but under the control of a ‘climate champion’ (climate activists two). It is through information flows that these social actors gain power and the discourse they create becomes relevant in the realm of legitimation. The largest military alliance in the world clearly saw the value in such influence and therefore utilized the ‘voice’ of the activists. Legitimation theory then needs to account for this iteration of powerful actors, adding the category of flows, and perhaps, what can be called legitimation through the ‘voice of influence.’

5.2 Wider implication: beyond green washing

Warning of the militarized response to climate change are vast. Two notable publications Nick Buxton and Ben Hayes’s *The Secure and the Dispossessed* (2016) and Alexander Dunlap Andrea Brock’s recent *Enforcing Ecocide* (2022) are well researched and damning cases against military environmental crimes, the rise of surveillance and policing, and the desire by the powerful for total control in a climate changed world. In the epoch of climate change, nothing less than totality, is expectable least their existence comes into question. The fear of losing power creates desperation, to hold onto this power Western militaries calling for what can be described as a “total war” they want to reach every portion of society in a climate changed world (Graham and Allan 2005, p. 20). Total war will be beyond Von Clausewitz’s formulation of a ‘continuation of politics by other means’ this behemoth will swallow up what is left of the political, keeping this anti-democratic structure at bay is essential.

Part of this task is contesting the structure in discourse. That is, “...the material base of militarism is connected with ideologies and discourses through which proliferating militarized infrastructures and rationalities are normalized, naturalized, and legitimized” (Gusterson and Besteman 2019, p. S4). While, presenting themselves as positive actors in the age of climate change is just one tactic in the arsenal of Western militaries, one that is easily debunked, but

nonetheless powerful, as I have shown in NATO's 'all of the above' strategy. It is up to those living in the imperial core to contest this apparatus, demilitarize our society, and while cliché come into 'right' relations with each other, the non-human, and the planet.

5.3 Policy implication

For climate activists to truly take on the issue climate change, they must not only center CO₂ emissions, but expand their politics – connecting ecological destruction, displacement of people, chemical and heavy metal pollution, to the climate crisis, in short, they must be anti-war. Greenwashing cannot cover up the crimes done by militarism to people and the planet if there is sufficient push back against this discourse, words must not be minced – there is no such thing as a green military. With this said, it would be wise for climate activists to move the locus of their politics from the realm of consumption to production, 'flight shaming' and 'lifestyle politics' miss the forest for the trees.

A central aspect to militarism, are Western nation's support of the production of arms and armaments, these arms flow from the imperial core to periphery, propping up authoritarian regimes, exacerbating conflict, human rights violation, and environmental destruction, all far the sight of the Westerner (Akkerman 2021). An actionable task is to protest the arms industry in climate activist's own backyard. These groups should combine forces with the peace/anti-arms trade and industry groups, creating an eco/anti-war alliance. They can look to the success of tactics by Palestinian Action, that while radical, have stopped the trade of hundreds of thousands of US dollars' worth of arms from Elbit Systems, halting untold harm to people and the planet (Guerrilla history 2023). Here in the Netherlands Stop Wapenhandel (stop the arms trade) is a notable example of bringing together the discourse of the climate crisis and anti-war movement, with consistent protests and organizing against war and so-called 'greening' of the arms trade (Stop Wapenhandel 2023). Creating a direct-action network in Western nations against a critical arm of the corporate-military industrial complex, with the explicit goal of stopping environmental and human harms, will do much to curb the climate crisis, and create discourse and action worthy of the name climate justice.

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