

CLIMATE CHANGE AND EU SECURITY POLICY: AN UNMET CHALLENGE

RICHARD YOUNGS

Climate change plays an increasingly important role in European security debates. The European Union (EU) has begun to develop “climate security” strategies that address the strategic and political impacts of climate change. But policymakers are uncertain about how to shape immediate policy responses, and efforts to address various climate-related threats have fallen short. The EU needs to develop a more comprehensive strategy that responds to and prepares for climate-induced geopolitical instability.

Key Themes

- In speeches and policy documents, EU leaders have prioritized climate security. Yet practical follow-through has been limited, in part because Europe has been preoccupied with shorter-term crises that garner more attention.
- Although the EU has committed to a climate security policy based on international cooperation, some member states show signs of being tempted by a logic of isolationist self-reliance.
- Policymakers agree that climate change increases the risk of conflict but have done relatively little to integrate environmental factors into EU conflict-prevention policies.
- Climate concerns are largely absent from European migration policies, including from current trends toward more restrictive immigration regulations.
- European militaries have attempted to address narrow climate-security objectives, such as improving disaster response and reducing their energy consumption.
- Climate change affects Europe’s economic security and brings questions of food security and access to resources to the fore.

Recommendations for EU Policymakers

Address climate challenges through cooperation. European states should avoid the temptation to prioritize self-preservation in the face of scarce resources and instead strengthen their commitment to cooperation-based, collective security.

Integrate climate concerns into conflict prevention. The EU should incorporate climate-related factors into initiatives designed to predict and prevent conflicts, including by improving governance in resource-stressed states.

Adopt a forward-looking response to climate migration. Europe needs a strategy to address climate-induced migration that anticipates migratory flows and potential security risks.

Broaden militaries’ engagement with climate security. European militaries must better understand how defense requirements are connected to the effects of climate change and engage with a broader range of climate-related challenges.

Develop a systematic approach to the geoeconomics of climate change. The EU must balance its commitment to free trade and its desire to access resources and renewables while avoiding mercantilist policies.

Incorporate climate concerns into foreign policy. The EU should integrate climate security considerations into all aspects of its foreign policies to move beyond the current focus on short-term climate crisis management.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Youngs is a senior associate in the Carnegie Endowment’s Democracy and Rule of Law Program based at Carnegie Europe. He is an expert on the foreign policy of the European Union, in particular on questions of democracy support.

CONTACT

Christine Lynch
Senior Communications Manager
+32 2 209 29 93
clynch@ceip.org

CarnegieEurope.eu

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