

[Heiss on Turchetti, 'Greening the Alliance: The Diplomacy of NATO's Science and Environmental Initiatives'](#)

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Simone Turchetti. *Greening the Alliance: The Diplomacy of NATO's Science and Environmental Initiatives.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018. Illustrations. 256 pp. \$37.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-226-59579-5; \$112.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-59565-8.

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Khaki and Emerald: NATO and the Environment

Toward the end of the Second World War, Winston Churchill declared that the “only ... thing worse than fighting with allies ... [was] fighting without them.” If this sentiment summed up his experience as part of the often-fractious wartime Grand Alliance, it is also applicable to the postwar North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which has weathered a variety of internal storms since its founding in 1949. Simone Turchetti’s dense yet concise *Greening the Alliance: The Diplomacy of NATO’s Science and Environmental Initiatives* demonstrates that the alliance’s periodic forays into scientific research were inextricably linked to many of those storms. In fact, the volume’s seven substantive chapters (bookended by an introduction and an epilogue) convincingly argue that NATO’s scientific research initiatives owed more to a desire to mitigate divisions among its members than to scientific need—and that they periodically fell victim to the very divisions they were designed to ameliorate. They were, in other words, an attempt at intra-alliance diplomacy that ultimately fell short. Conflict, as Turchetti makes clear, was always a central element of the alliance’s science and environmental work.

Not surprisingly, NATO’s early scientific research programs, undertaken under the auspices of its Science Committee, were directly tied to defense. New technology, such as planes and early warning and other surveillance systems, was important for the alliance from the start. But because understanding how the weather and atmosphere affected defense efforts also had strategic implications, the alliance moved in those areas as well. The greatest push for NATO scientific collaboration came from Britain and the United States, with the Western Europeans often dragging their feet. The 1957 shock of Sputnik spurred calls for more concerted NATO scientific collaboration on defense-related programs, particularly from US officials, who saw alliance-directed research as the only way to prevent the Europeans from independently developing their own nuclear deterrents. That effort might have succeeded, but NATO’s early science diplomacy ran aground on other problems. Alliance military leaders failed to buy into it. British and French officials grew increasingly uneasy with increased science budgets. And less-developed members, such as Turkey, sought to tie alliance science research to their own developmental needs. In other words, rather than bringing the alliance’s members together, NATO’s early scientific research contributed to the fissures that rent it apart by the late 1960s.

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In an effort to lessen those tensions, the alliance reoriented its science research toward the environment. The abysmal response to the sinking of the tanker SS *Torrey Canyon* in 1967 demonstrated the need for the NATO nations to undertake environmental research. Richard M. Nixon made that cause his own after assuming the presidency in 1969, pushing for new US environmental initiatives as well as greater NATO attention to that area. In November of that year, NATO established the Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society (CCMS) with an explicitly environmental mandate. Although the CCMS got its start contemporaneously with grassroots environmental efforts, it diverged from more radical groups, such as Greenpeace, in being primarily designed to ameliorate intra-alliance tensions rather than actually dealing with tangible environmental problems. As Turchetti characterizes this contrast, although “the alliance continued to be a major contributor to contemporary debates on environmental protection,... it cast its role as very different—alternative even—to that of those nongovernmental organizations devoted to nature conservation that by then had become more prominent in NATO countries” (p. 103). In practical terms, this meant that NATO proved unable to see—or deal with—the pollution its own military activities generated. Moreover, because NATO’s environmental initiatives were designed primarily with an eye toward how they could contribute to member cohesion, projects that did not meet that goal were scrapped, regardless of their scientific merit. At the same time, the inflation of the 1970s had devastating consequences for NATO’s environmentalism, especially for the United States, which grew increasingly disillusioned with the ineffectual CCMS. Ultimately, the alliance’s environmental initiatives proved no more successful in assuaging internal differences than its first generation of scientific research.

NATO revisited environmentalism in the late 1980s and 1990s. The consequences of the end of the Cold War constituted one area of concern, the challenges of climate change the other. When it came to the former, the focus was on the environmental impact of the now-abandoned Soviet military installations and weapons stockpiles in Eastern Europe, particularly potential radioactive contamination. Although the scientific aspects of containing contaminants were important, Turchetti argues that NATO’s efforts in this area were also designed to woo the former Soviet satellites at a critical time in global history. If those initiatives, dubbed the “Science for Stability” program, were largely successful, NATO’s climate change work was not. The problem here was the scientific disagreement that permeated early research in that area as well as uncertainty about how climate change research could be used as a vehicle for uniting the alliance. Again, discord rather than concord was the norm.

At its heart, *Greening the Alliance* is a study of NATO as an organization rather than a military alliance, with a specific focus on how science and environmental research were used in service to the goal of keeping the organization together. Much of the impetus for NATO’s scientific program came from its most powerful individual member, the United States, which had a significant vested interest in keeping its partners working together. But various factors came together to thwart US plans, and Turchetti thus demonstrates the agency that weaker NATO members exerted on the organization.

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