

# Groen op straat: between militarization of society and symbiosis

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## “Groen op straat” - between militarization of society and symbiosis

### The distant front

We, in the West, have grown weary of the visual presence of the military within our society. *Green on the street* - *Groen op straat* - is being perceived as a militarization of society and triggers emotional reactions in the civilian population. *Green on the street* is seen as alterity, as an element belonging to an external environment that is just passing through the fixed characteristics of urban life. It represents someone who very likely temporarily returned home from a mission in a distant place and only temporarily is present in its current form in the urban environment. For settling, the green is expected to be shed. This positioning or reaction is not a form of restriction or rejection. It is part of the expectations that we – perhaps unconsciously – have internalised about how we perceive the militaries and their core activity – defence and combat: as activities projected to faraway places.

We, in the West, have long had the mental projection of war being something very distant, and us choosing to take part in distant *just wars*, as defenders of the values we embrace at home. In this purpose we practice our defence capabilities and train our military in faraway combat theatres, while at home we see it as self-explanatory that our military trains within enclosed perimeters, often away from the public gaze. The latter is not a rejection of the military activity, but a manifestation of the former – the perception that war is detached from our society and is a product of export, for which some members of our society choose to prepare as part of their professional career, which is seen as any other career choice.

For a long time we have perceived defence as a product or activity mainly meant for export, to which we contribute in financial terms as one form of multidomain international partnerships.

We are accustomed to *deploying* to war zones, not to preparing for war on our own soil.

We publicly praise the successes and acts of heroism of those who come back and tell their stories and find comfort in knowing that we – as a society - had delegates that represented us and the values we stand for in conflict struck places where those values are under threat. We acknowledge the social costs of this deployment and spread it across a wider network for better



support. We embrace our young deploying for missions abroad and entrust them in the care of their seniors and the organisation itself, relying on the fact that through numbers comes strength, that training has prepared them for the challenges ahead and that technology comes to their aid.

## The home front

In a country fighting a long war of survival, temporary presence of military in urban environments is often the case. Some military are permanently stationed in urban areas, but many military come temporarily in urban settings during leave to reunite with family and friends, or to do whatever needed to be done and had to be postponed for being on the frontline.

And the next front line or the next safe house is never far away.

Because this is not a projected combat, this is an existential combat. Which nations do on their own soil, thus most often in enclosed borders, and on familiar ground. Perhaps this is the advantage of waging war at home, if one dares to use that word:

the front is never too far away, family and friends are never too far away – if they decided to stay - home or what was home is never too far away. They might be out of reach, but they are not far.

Green on the street becomes in time a natural element, still visual noticeable – it does stand out in its uniqueness and in what it represents. The mind makes that association between the visual clue and the representation of the function in the split of a second. In time, the function overtakes the visual indicator in primacy:

it is no longer *a* military on the street, on the train or in a public building. It is the army, it is the fight that is still being fought, for years, in all places and at all times, without bounding to a place, without enclosed protective spaces and without a schedule.

Green on the street in a country at war can also mark fault lines and hidden tensions within society, between those who choose the green and those who chose differently. It is a reminder that somewhere outside the city, in points along a long contact line, many man and women in green are fighting a very different fight that the one being fought in the city, with different means.



I have previously addressed the symbiosis of the military and civilian parts of society within an environment struck by a long all-out war such as the one in Ukraine (Popa, 2026). In Ukraine, the symbiosis of the civilian with the military is observed in the openness of broadcasting via public televised media of military specific information by military personnel (thus “in green”). This includes developments from the front lines, video footage from drone strikes on enemy targets in different environments, weapon handling (assembling and disassembling, shooting), comparison of weapons features and interviews with military on the front line of back from the front line. Most often there is no filtering of images, and no observed phasing of content in time intervals according to levels of violence or disturbing content. Immersion in the military experience is thus mediated and military experience updated or exchanged.

We do not have to reach this symbiosis by experiencing a war for existential survival. Conscious campaigns of increasing national resilience slowly aid in making the population feel at ease towards the presence of the military in everyday life. Similarities between campaigns of recruitment in the military can be observed between public campaigns in Ukraine and the Netherlands, often referring to sense of purpose, daring and courage. Differences are noted as well. The question of mobilization in an all-out war is self-explanatory and bears no detailing. But the sense of moral weight of alternative choices is underlined in recruitment campaigns in Ukraine:

*If you are not in the military when the country is at war, what are you doing that is serving the country better?*

seems to be the underlying message.

It boils down to the question: *Who and what is the military at its core?*

## References

Popa, D. (2026). *Forward facing approach to consolidating and integrating resilience capabilities*. Red Sky 4. Available at: <https://redsky4.nl/reports-and-publications/>



**Popa, Diana (2026).** *Groen op straat: between militarization of society and symbiosis.*

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**About the author.**

Diana Popa has over 17 years of experience in research and academia and has authored numerous reports and scientific articles. Recent research and analysis focus on resilience as part of defence programmes, emerging disruptive technologies, in particular Artificial Intelligence in high risk areas, including defence.

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