

## 6.5 WHY CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT DON'T MATTER

Lieutenant Colonel Shannon Beebe



Yes, I did just get out of Angola. I have to be careful saying that, because I am referring to Angola the country, not Angola the maximum-security prison in Louisiana. Let me tell a funny story before I start. Angola the country is a very tough place. Anyone

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who has been to Angola knows it is a very difficult working environment from a professional perspective. It is one of the few places left in Africa where Russian and Cuban forces still maintain a presence. It is very difficult from a personal perspective as well.

A year ago, I had been in Germany attending a conference and was just getting ready to return to Angola. On the way to Germany, the airline had lost my luggage, so I had been in Germany for about 10 days with the same set of clothes. I was looking pretty scraggly. So I was sitting at the bar at the Frankfurt airport finishing my last beer before getting back on the plane to go back to Angola.

About that time, Chatty Cathy and her browbeaten husband with about 10 bags comes walking up to me and taps me on the shoulder and says, "Excuse me, is this place taken?" I said, "No ma'am. You can sit there." So she starts talking to me. They had just finished a great vacation in the Greek Isles and it was wonderful. "Had I been there?" After some time, she looks at me and asks, "So where are you from in this great big world?"

Before I knew what I was saying, I said, "Well, right now I'm doing time in Angola." There was just this gasp of silence. I thought briefly about correcting myself but then decided, you know, that silence is a beautiful thing. So around that time they announced my flight to Rwanda. I got up and I said, "Ma'am, it is time for me to get back." She grabs me and says, "I just want you to know I think everyone deserves a second chance." And I said, "Ma'am, I sure as hell hope so." So anyway, this could possibly be my second chance.

What I would like to talk with you about today is sort of conceptually threading together a lot of what you have heard. If there is one takeaway I would give you, it is this: We can only achieve that for which we have words. Now, if I had to entitle the presentation, I would take a slightly different angle and say why climate change and environment will never matter to national security.

Now, how do I go about this? First, I would like to talk a bit about how I started working with human security in the Chief of Staff's Office. Then, I plan to talk a little bit about climate change and its impact on Africa, which has been highlighted. I am not

going to go too very far into that, however. Finally, I hope to have the opportunity to do what every West Point grad dreams of doing, and that is to tell the Navy what to do and where to go.

So that being said, a little background about how I got started. About 4 or 5 years ago, I was working with the Army Chief of Staff's Office and had the opportunity to brief the entire Army staff on Africa. I started off with three points on Africa. First, Africa is a continent; it is not a country. Second, Africa is a security enabler, although it may be positive or negative depending on how we handle it and depending on how we see it and work with it. Finally, I said that there is a reason that Africa is shaped like a question mark; it is because we really do not understand what security is in African terms.

As I said, that was 4 or 5 years ago. We have moved a great way since then. The Chief of Staff was fairly intrigued by this. So he tasked me to go out and to talk with Africans. I had the opportunity to go to about 14 or 15 different African countries and to canvas various African leaders, ministers, politicians, and business owners, all the way down to a few taxicab drivers—Somali taxicab drivers in Washington, DC—asking them how they viewed security in Africa.

The four things that they came back with, with about a 90% correlation, were as follows: first, poverty; second, health; third, security sector reform, but security sector reform by an African standard; and, finally, climate change. As a well-intentioned staff officer, I had to find a way to brief this back to the Chief of Staff. This was going to be pretty tough to do because, with the exception of security sector reform, none of those topics is in our definition of security.

What we came back with was that, although our strategic security narrative is necessary, the military mission of the military will always be to protect and defend the interests of the United States. We then went on to argue that this approach provided an insufficient basis for addressing the needs of Africans. African security, as Colonel Welton mentioned, is very much conditions based. Although we are still very focused on ground forces, air forces, and

naval forces, Africans and African nations tend to look first at the forces of nature. And, there, they tend to see vulnerabilities rather than threats.

One of the previous speakers mentioned that our bureaucracies are ill prepared to deal with these types of conditions, these creeping vulnerabilities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, because conditions such as climate change, lack of water, health concerns, and poverty tend to arise along the strategic seams of our national security institutions. So that is all well and good. I went back and I briefed the Chief of Staff: "Sir, it sucks."

Now, there is more to it than that. We tried to understand the basic narrative that we should be using, one developed around the concept of human security. Many of our ideas came from a 1994 report, "The United Nations Development Program," which basically said that as the tide of the Cold War rolls back, what we are going to see is that security never really was about state-on-state conflict. [1] It really was about the instabilities and the insecurities of populations.

Unfortunately, we did not really take a very serious look at this at the time. We were still too busy high-fiving ourselves for winning the Cold War. At my graduation at West Point, George Bush gave the "Thousand Points of Light" speech. While we were down in the Balkans, we thought: "Man, there are 1000 points of light out out there." Actually, it turned out that there were lots of busted light bulbs. So we started seeing that something had systemically changed.

What is the nature of the change that would require a need for a shift in our security paradigm? I would argue that it is three things: one political, one economic, and one information related. Although we have discussed them to some extent, I will go through them briefly.

First, politically we have shifted from a bipolar world to a multipolar world. As a result, the stability of the system starts to shake a little bit. Economically, we have moved from our traditional state-based economy to globalization. And, because globalization has

been fairly uneven, we do not yet understand all the ramifications. We do know that it introduces more instability in the system.

From an information perspective, we have moved from where the state could control information to basically the individual having that power. How do you get a 23-year-old girl from Belgium over to Iraq to blow herself up? That is a good question. How is it that we have one of the largest Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) cases in the United States in Minneapolis, Minnesota, because of linkages to Somalia terrorism? That is a good question.

What you see is that the defense architecture that was designed to protect the system has been untethered. What you have now seems to resemble a kid's soccer match during which all the players go after the ball simultaneously. It seems as though there is a new challenge almost every few months in Africa. Over the last few years, we have gone from Sudan being the challenge to Zimbabwe being the challenge to Congo being the challenge. The essential security narrative for Africa has yet to be created. We simply do not have the words to encapsulate the challenges.

In the case of human security, we need to recognize that there is an inextricable link between development and defense. We cannot break those apart. I know that especially within the beltway there are a lot of Faberge rice bowls out there. Fortunately, there has been a lot of rice. As the U.S. African Command (USAFRICOM) was standing up, we heard numerous arguments that the command was going to be seen as an invasion of humanitarian space. USAFRICOM was going to be banging swords into plowshares. I think that we have to shift our thinking so that we understand that the definition of security for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is going to be far different than it has been in the past.

Now, why is it that climate change will never matter to national security? Because until that narrative changes, until it is seen truly as an element of security and not as something totally separate, we will continue to look at it on the fringes. We need to shift our focus to overall human security and allow some of the nontraditional actors, such as the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), to play a larger role.

Colonel Welton made an important point along those lines. Department of Defense (DoD) has more in common with some of these things than we have ever imagined. How is it that the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) is very willing to work with USAFRICOM and very willing to work with our other commands on environmental issues? It is because the WWF understands the nexus between environment and conflict. I was able to see this first hand in Virunga National Park, where illegal charcoaling operations have led to the killing of the silverback gorillas. How is it that Greenpeace is willing to work with the U.S. military? Because they are slowly beginning to understand that we have more in common and by pooling resources, by creating synergy, we can do far more.

I go to a lot of conferences and I hear a lot of the NGOs and even other organizations say, "We are not doing enough in Africa. We should do more in Africa." I tend to be the skunk at the party by standing up and saying, "Well, is it that we are not doing enough in Africa? Or is it that perhaps that we are not doing enough together in Africa?" Now, having had the opportunity to visit some 20 odd countries in Africa, I would contend that it is the latter. A lot of the time no one knows what is going on, how much duplicative effort is happening with a perfect opportunity to seize on those initiatives.

Turning back to problems that may be exacerbated by climate change, we have talked a lot about the youth bulge. Three of the world's five largest cities in 2025 will be in Africa. Folks, this is not a stable continent. Populations are migrating towards the coasts. Most of the climate models forecast the very real possibility for typhoons, hurricanes, call them what you want, to begin to spring up on the west coast of Africa.

As I recall, one of our earlier speakers mentioned the west coast of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea and the need to protect the oil production facilities there. But what happens when that capacity, not just for our oil security, or our energy security, what happens when that capacity goes offline for world security, for international security? And how are we thinking about those kinds of things?

These are things that we can think about now or we can think about later. Until we shift the narrative to a point at which this is understandable, not just by military terms, we are going to continue to talk around each other. We need to arrive at a common language that we all understand.

I go to the exact same conferences and say the exact same things to the NGOs. I tell them that they need to understand what the military is trying to do and in the process convince themselves that it is not the evil invasion of humanitarian space. We all have a vested interest in making things work. We are on the same ship and it is burning right now. Until we are able to do that, we are going to continue to marginalize the security threats, the security challenges, to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

At this point in my presentation, it is time for West Point to tell the Navy what to do. As Admiral Ulrich pointed out, most African countries lack meteorological services, and thus have no way of forecasting weather and thus getting advance warning about major storms or floods. If we are concerned about what is going on there, not only just for the climate change, but environmental shocks in general—floods, famines, all of those kinds of things—why aren't we helping to provide them with meteorological services? Doing so would be nonconfrontational. It is not something that is militaristic in nature, but it is something that very much impacts the security of those populations.

Had we known more about this in Mozambique in the 1990s, we could have prevented some of the flooding deaths that occurred there. Of course, this is more than just a U.S. issue. The international community has a role to play as well.

A lot of Africans explain away their continent's significant corruption problem as being a result of neocolonialism and this new rush for resources. I have been on the continent enough that I would argue that it is not neocolonialism, but it is more like neomedievalism. In other words, it is like the concept in medieval times that you have a king and if you needed anything you paid homage to the king; you paid fees to the courts. And that is how you got things done. Africa essentially works that way today. Only now the

king is called the Prime Minister or the President. The members of his court are now called the ministers. The king's castle is now usually called the capitol. Very little happens outside there unless it is related to resources.

So again, it is a matter of understanding the context in which we are working. And folks, it is what it is. That is actually one of my favorite sayings about Africa. "It is what it is." It is not what you want it to be, it is merely what it is. And we have to deal with it in those terms. We can talk a little bit more about this in the question-and-answer session if you wish. With China, why is it that China has had so much success in Africa? Well, because they go in with their checkbook and say it is what it is. What do we want to do together? They do not try to preach to the Africans about democracy and transparency in government. Now, is that important? Absolutely, it is. But the question is: Can you get more done from the inside or from the outside? Those are the kinds of questions that we have to answer.

Second, we talk about blue water navies. We talk about brown water navies. In Africa, how about just clean water? The number-one killer of kids under 5 years of age is diarrheal types of infections. A significant fraction of kids, somewhere between 1 in 3 and 2 in 5, do not make it to their fifth birthday. What does that mean? For parents it often means a real fear regarding the potential loss of labor and future income, and that fear seems to translate into having more and more and more children. So, once again we see how seemingly disparate factors combine to make the overall situation worse.

Now, the basic reason that I think that climate change is just one of the many variables that will affect Africa's future is because African security is not an algebra problem. We cannot solve for one variable. It is a lot like a house of cards. You do not know which one of the cards will cause the house to collapse until you pull on it. You do not know if it is poverty, health, or climate change. You do not know which one of those cards is the deciding factor until it gets pulled out.

But what you can guarantee is that when that card gets pulled out, what happens? The house falls. You do not know how fast it is going to fall. You do not know which way it is going to fall. But it is going to fall. So we have to take a more holistic approach and open the aperture a little bit more and understand that climate change is just one variable. But it will have linkages to health and it will have linkages to poverty.

So instead of arguing over our Faberge rice bowls, what is it that we are doing to come together to solve the problem? How do we solve it? We cannot argue that climate change will be the sole cause of disaster and Armageddon for 2025. Climate change will be just one of several variables affecting African security. How do we come together and address those broader issues? I think that is going to be one of the greatest challenges that we face. I think that is what USAFRICOM is saddled with. That is what USSOUTHCOM is going to be saddled with in the not-too-distant future. With that being said, I will stop.

## REFERENCE

1. United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report 1994*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr1994/chapters/>.