



BRUSSELS  
DIALOGUE  
ON  
CLIMATE  
DIPLOMACY



# Climate Security Challenges for NATO

*12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Brussels Dialogue on Climate Diplomacy*

**Thursday, 17 September 2020 - NATO-HQ**

Keynote Presentation: **“Climate-Related Security Challenges for the Military”**  
(Speaking Notes)

**Rear Admiral RN (Ret.) Neil Morisetti**, *Vice Dean (Public Policy), Faculty Engineering Sciences at University College London / Member, Global Military Advisory Council on Climate Change (GMACCC)*

- Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for invitation to join this session of the BDCD and to deliver the keynote.
- Asked to speak about Climate related security challenges for the military, or
- Perhaps more specifically, why NATO needs to be fully engaged.
- Very much own views but, as heard, based on experience last 10 years plus, both in government and wider.
- Perhaps because I have been looking at issues for so long I have a degree of frustration at lack of progress in acknowledging and understanding how a changing climate will impact on geopolitics and security environment
- In one sense understandable – pace of activity and lack of capacity to absorb more.
- But at same time there is increasing and compelling evidence of why we need to act.
- For this reason, my words this morning will focus on **Why** members of NATO need to address the threat posed by cc to our prosperity and well-being, both as individual nations and as members of the alliance.
- I will touch on the **What** needs to be done and the **How** but much of this is logical as flows from a comprehensive understanding of the problem, and draws upon tried and tested processes.
- Hope I will start a conversation for the rest of the morning.  
=====
- We all know that we are living in challenging times with many threats to national security.

- Some are well known and fall into the category of traditional threats, either state on state or intra state, frequently with a military component. Include here risks posed by resurgent Russia and China's military activity in China Seas.
- At same time, we are seeing an increase in non-traditional threats to our prosperity and wellbeing.
- Frequently trans boundary in nature and without any military origin.
- In this category I would include cyber threats, transnational organised crime, people trafficking.
- Most well-known is the one we are living through at the moment; Covid 19 pandemic.
- But the one that poses greatest challenges over an extended period is the consequences of a changing climate, especially where it impacts on the availability of key natural resources (F/W/L).
- Whilst general consensus today is that physical changes alone, either as result onset long term trends or due to extreme weather events are unlikely to be direct cause of conflict, the second and third order consequences, loss of land or livelihood, have already contributed to increased instability and risk of conflict.
- Headline examples include Arab Spring and Syria
- Looking ahead, already signs of problems in Sahel and other agrarian economies, including in Asia.
- Happening in countries that face many challenges already (*list*) and lack capacity or resilience to deal with another issue.
- There will be more. Reality is that if crop yields reduced due high temps or water scarcity (as result imbalance half the world will face water shortages by 2035), at time of rising populations with greater aspirations, then have a problem.
- If you lose your home, your livelihood or ability to feed your family you will look for alternatives.
- Some move, most in own country but about 10% go further, often a lot further as saw in 2015.
- Some cannot move, the trapped populations. Still need to feed family.
- Susceptible to recruiting into serious crime or VEO.
- Why some describe climate change as a recruiting sergeant for VEOs.
- Add to instability in country/region but also globally; live in joined up world.
- Disruption to supply chains and loss of markets.
- Seen what pandemic can do in disrupting just enough just in time supply chains.

- Also seeing a rise in tension in regions, for example the rush for minerals in the melting Arctic is causing tension between nations
- Plus, there are indirect effects - the Northern Sea route  
=====
- At the same time, the action that nations take to reduce the impact of climate change and reduce GHG emissions will, if not well managed, be very likely to create security tensions and risk of conflict.
- This is especially so where nations that are economically dependent upon hydrocarbon production, for example Russia and ME states, and also areas of interest for NATO, start to feel the economic consequences of the transition to low carbon economy.
- Also need to understand economic impact of events in member state; wildfires/floods (viz 2%)
- It is going to affect all of us and potentially will alter the balance of power globally.
- Today cc seen as a threat multiplier, in future potentially seen as causing a geopolitical tipping point.  
=====
- ALL of what I have described needs to be factored into any analysis of the future security environment.
- Cannot dine a la carte on threats. If not comprehensive it is flawed!
- UNSC and EU engaged, NATO needs to be fully engaged.
- As well as the Political reasons why we should act, there are social and legal.
- This matters to the many of society and bound by national and international legislation.
- It is an opportunity for NATO to demonstrate relevance.  
=====
- BUT, most importantly, need to act because NATO functions on understanding it's operating environment.
- Need to have such a comprehensive understanding in order to know:
  - Where you are going to be operating - where are the risks?
  - What are you going to be doing – the Missions and tasks?
  - Who are you going to be operating with – both within the alliance and beyond with partner nations?
  - With what – what capabilities are required and what bearing will the physical environment have?
  - At what Readiness?
  - What does it mean for training and inter-operability?

- What does it mean for future capabilities – lessons learned from previous campaigns re energy?
- Would do this for any other threat, why not for the impact of a changing climate.
- Agree do not have 100% certainty but do not have that for any other risk and do have more for cc than many other threats.
- Also agree that because of the non-military nature of the threat will have to develop new partnerships, not least to help better understand what is going on and develop effective I and W.
- But nothing new there, NATO has been evolving for years (NM 1976 – 2012).
- Nor is it new to look at an issue from a wider security lens than just the military.
- Many nations are starting to consider climate change as a security issue; Berlin Climate Security Conference, horizon scanning reports such as DCDC GST 6, and UK MOD NetZero by 2050 work by General Richard Nugee to name but a few.
- However, the very fact that I am giving this keynote address indicates that there is more to do.
- Need sustained focus and leadership
- The impact of a changing climate needs to be reflected in all plans.
- There may be no security solution to climate change but there is most definitely a greater risk of instability if do not act, and that includes the military.
- Must acknowledge that changing climate will impact on and accentuate many of the existing threats that we face.
- I accept that what I have described is a more complex challenge than some are comfortable with, but it is not complicated.
- NATO has the tools and expertise to conduct the necessary analysis.
- Analysis that needs to be done today for NATO 2030, not left until the Warning Order arrives.
- =====
- Finally, the analysis needs to be supported by the narrative, which should include the benefits and opportunities, not just the challenges.
- In a language that the audience can understand and relates to.
- Forget 'greening the military' this is about OC, Risk, Resources, Relevance and Resilience.
- Core business for military.
- Core business for NATO!

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you.