Environmental Security

Climate change, energy, global health, and environmental security are often intertwined, and while not traditionally viewed as “threats” to US national security, they will affect Americans in major ways. The Intelligence Community has increased its focus on these three critical issues as a result of unprecedented developments in the last year.

Dennis C. Blair

Director of National Intelligence

12 February 2009
Syria civil war
> 220k deaths,
> 3.3 m refugees

Our latest candidate for a “climate war”

Unprecedented, widespread drought, massive relocation, severe deprivation preceded violent unrest
Over 70% of countries view climate change as a national security issue. Source: American Security Project (2013)

| What are the three most important foreign-policy issues facing the United States today? |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Global climate change                        | 40.96%               |
| 2. Armed conflict in Middle East                | 26.81%               |
| 3. Failed or failing states                     | 22.29%               |
| 4. China's rising military power                | 21.54%               |
| 5. Transnational terrorism                      | 21.23%               |
| 6. Renewed Russian assertiveness                | 17.47%               |
| 7. Global poverty                               | 16.42%               |
| 8. Global wealth disparities                    | 15.66%               |
| 9. China's economic influence                   | 15.51%               |
| 10. Proliferation of WMD                        | 14.01%               |
| 10. Transnational political violence            | 14.01%               |

[http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/03/top-twenty-five-schools-international-relations/]
Security Council begins holding debates on climate change in 2007
Human security will be progressively threatened as the climate changes (robust evidence, high agreement).

Adger et al., 2014 IPCC AR5 WG2 Chapter 12
What’s behind the convergence?
Evidence from many quarters that climate extremes make it harder to regulate violence

Larrick et al, 2011  HT Solomon
Hsiang
These are effects net of country circumstances.
This is very bad news

The climate stress that historically doubled conflict risk is now much more common.

McElroy and Baker 2012
Number of countries that are neither democratic nor autocratic is at all-time high.
Democratization trend, replotted as instability risk.
Risk of electoral process breaking down goes up as temperature goes up

Levy, 2014

Year-controlled results not significant below 30-year
Efforts to manage climate extremes can shift risk to others (security dilemma)
Tuareg in northern Mali affected by large-scale drought in 1970s/1980s

Government stole food aid

Many ended up in Libya

Tuareg kept moving as drought continued

Gaddafi radicalized, armed, trained, and deployed Tuareg

After Gaddafi deposed, many returned to Mali helped topple government

Today, Libya is key link in migration crisis
It is a bad time to be facing systemic risks.

Globalization and political fragmentation yield little resilience, few tools.
Shockingly, not everyone agrees
Fears of environmental determinism and racism

1) We went too far in rooting out objectionable views. Geography does matter!

2) This is not your father’s environmental determinism.
We thought things were going so well.
This is not a fad. The convergence is evidence-based.

Climate extremes make it hard to regulate violence.

Climate and governance trends are interacting perversely.

Many responses trigger more problems.

Globalization makes cascading breakdowns more likely.

The contexts are frightening.

Don’t shoot the messenger, join the search for solutions.

"You have a very silly statement in the draft summary that says that people who live in war-torn countries are more vulnerable to climate change."