

Roundtable on the National Security Implications of Climate Change

Hosted by Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson and Rep. Don Beyer

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I would like to thank Congresswoman Johnson and Congressman Beyer for convening this roundtable. Its subject, the national security implications of climate change, is of vital importance. I also personally appreciate the opportunity to participate on this panel.

Climate change certainly has direct implications for the security of the United States, which other participants are exploring this afternoon. But, we Americans must also be concerned about the security of our close diplomatic partners. If our partners' security is undermined, so too is our own, even if only indirectly. Here, I would like to look at Nigeria as a case study, where climate change is already having a negative impact on the security of a close partner of the United States.

Arguably, Nigeria is the African state of greatest strategic importance to the United States. It is home to about 20 percent of the people living in Africa south of the Sahara. It has a population of more than 200 hundred million, and it is already considerably larger than the Russian Federation. The population is growing rapidly. It has increased by 17.35 percent over the past five years, far faster than the growth of Nigeria's economy and the development of basic infrastructure. Some agencies estimate that by mid-century, Nigeria's population will be about 450 million,

displacing the United States as the third most populous country in the world.

Nigeria is Africa's largest economy by conventional measures. It is usually Africa's largest producer of oil and natural gas, producing about 2 million barrels of oil a day, if production is not disrupted by factors ranging from insurgencies to theft. While Nigeria is no longer a significant exporter of petroleum to the United States, its level of oil production is an important factor in the world price of energy.

Ostensibly a civilian democracy since the end of military rule in 1999, the opposition came to power through credible elections for the first time in 2015, when Muhammadu Buhari defeated incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan. Shared democratic values and aspirations have become an import bond between Nigeria and the United States.

A regional leader, Nigeria was one of the founders of the African Union and has been the linchpin of the Economic Community of West African States. It is also active in the United Nations system. In the past, its government contributed large numbers of troops to United Nations and other peacekeeping operations. More generally, Nigeria has long been a key American partner on issues of mutual concern in Africa, ranging from peacemaking and peacekeeping to responding to epidemics.

There is a long history of close diplomatic consultation and cooperation between Washington and Abuja. It is a two-way street. Notably, Nigeria played a crucial role in ending the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone and in ending a cycle of West African military coups. To demonstrate Nigeria's solidarity with the United States, then-president Olusegun Obasanjo was the first

African chief of state to visit Washington in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon.

But, Nigeria is currently under siege. Its security challenges include a radical, Islamist insurrection in the northeast of the country called Boko Haram, restiveness in the Niger Delta, the heartland of Nigeria's petroleum-based wealth, and ethnic and religious conflict centered in the middle belt but found elsewhere as well. Taken together, these are a serious challenge to the continuation of Nigeria as a democratic, secular state, and diplomatic and strategic partner of the United States. Already Nigeria plays a smaller role on the international stage than it did, so productively, in the past. Moreover, with its continent-wide influence in a host of areas, Nigeria's success as a democracy is in the fundamental interest of its African neighbors, the United States, and the international community. Nigeria's present security challenges are related, directly and indirectly, to the consequences of climate change.

Here, I want to talk about only two manifestations of climate change in Nigeria: desertification and rising sea levels. Both are the context for, and contribute to, the security challenges that undermine the Nigerian state and thereby challenge U.S. security interests in Africa.

Desertification is promoting economic and social instability in northern Nigeria. It already results in higher levels of impoverishment among herders and farmers, and thereby provides an opening for radical movements often hostile to the United States as well as to the secular government in Abuja. Since 1900, the Sahara has moved north and south a total of about 150

miles, and now covers an additional 3,750 square miles. Each year, Nigeria loses thousands of acres of agricultural and grazing land to the advancing desert and periodic drought. (According to the World Bank, average rainfall in Nigeria has decreased by 21% over the past five years.) Lake Chad and its basin had been a vital source of freshwater in the northeast and it once was the center of an important fishing industry. Between 1960 and 2000, however, its surface area was reduced by more than 90%. The reasons for this drastic reduction in the lake are multifaceted and complex, but a significant factor has been the need for ever larger amounts of water for irrigation to grow crops for an ever growing population. Over recent decades, more water was taken from Lake Chad than could be naturally replenished.

Less arable land, less water, and more people are a recipe for a cycle of violence. Herdsmen and farmers, usually of different and often rival ethnic groups and religions, compete for ever scarcer land and resources. To be more specific, desertification and drought drives Muslim herdsmen south in search of pasturage for their cattle where they collide with small Christian farmers of different ethnic groups. Attacks lead to counter attacks. “Ethnic cleansing” follows. Federal and state governments lack the capacity to maintain security, even with a significant pull-back from foreign peacekeeping commitments. That reality, in turn, undercuts popular support for the Nigerian state. Pervasive violence and deepening poverty encourage the rise of radical religious groups that seek to destroy Nigeria and are hostile to the United States, as was the case with Boko Haram.

Climate change contributes to too little water in the north and too much along Nigeria’s coast. According to the World Bank, almost one third of West Africa’s population, responsible for creating 56

percent of the region's GDP, lives along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. Because of global warming, sea levels around the world are likely to rise by more than thirty inches by the end of the century. Africa, the Gulf of Guinea in particular, is expected to be especially hard hit: the number of people in Africa living in areas subject to flooding is estimated to rise from 1 million a year in 1990 to 70 million a year by 2080.

Lagos is now one of the largest cities in the world, and its population is exploding; it grew from 5.3 million in 1991 to 16 million in 2006, and reached 21.3 million in 2015. (These figures are estimates only.) Much of the Lagos metropolitan area is only slightly above sea level and several neighborhoods consist entirely of shacks built on stilts in the lagoon. As sea levels rise, millions of inhabitants and millions of dollars in assets will be threatened by flooding.

Already in 2012, there was devastating river and coastal flooding, ultimately affecting 32 of Nigeria's 36 states. Flooding killed at least 432, directly affected some 7 million, and resulted in 2.1 million internally displaced persons. (These figures are estimates only.) The high level of casualties and property damage overwhelmed the official relief agencies, undermining popular confidence in the institutions of the Nigerian state.

The flooding in 2012 also had a serious economic impact. It disrupted petroleum production in the Niger Delta by about 500,000 barrels per day, causing a substantial loss in government revenue just when it was most needed for humanitarian relief.

Consideration of the social and political consequences of climate change are often based on future projections. In the case of Nigeria, however, the effects of climate change are already visible.

It is an important contributing factor in ethnic and religious conflict, quarrels over land use, and the disaffection of at least some Nigerians from their government. Moreover, because of our close partnership, the effects of climate change in Nigeria have important consequences for U.S. interests and security elsewhere in Africa.

Thank you.