

# **Forum On Earth Observations IV™**

## **Climate, Energy, and National Security: Meeting the Environmental Information Challenge**

**Hyatt Regency Washington**

**Washington, DC**

**June 9, 2010**

### **“A European Perspective”**

*Luncheon Keynote Remarks by Wouter J. Veening, President, Institute for Environmental Security (The Hague, Brussels)*

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is your compatriot Robert Kagan who said and wrote “Americans are from Mars, Europeans come from Venus”.

Well, I don’t know what paleo-anthropologists would say about this, but it is a fact that they both now inhabit the planet Earth, that tiny, vulnerable blue ball in the Universe, seen for the first time in the 1960s by American astronauts, that extraordinary feat of American technology!

For all practical and political purposes, it is only the very thin outer layer of that blue ball, containing the atmosphere, the oceans and the soils, that sustains and can sustain life as we know it.

But, as you all know and as we see every day on the front pages of our newspapers with these poor, petroleum-plastered pelicans, we are messing up that thin layer, our biosphere of which we are an inextricable part.

Now while we all agree this has to be stopped, there is definitely a distinctive American and European approach to it. Europeans see the biosphere and a stable climate as global public goods, which require binding legal instruments to protect and conserve these goods, such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and UN Convention on Biological Diversity. In the case of the Climate Convention, the implementation should contain targets and timetables, such as specified by the Kyoto Protocol.

To put it mildly, Americans are less keen to enter into internationally binding commitments, and have a – to put it a bit starkly – blind faith in technology to solve problems like climate change and also therefore see much less the need to change consumer behavior than the Europeans. I remember very well President Bush Sr. saying at the Rio '92 UN Conference on Environment and Development: “The American way of life is not up for negotiation.”

These different approaches very much manifest themselves in the ratification procedures for international treaties: the European Union and its Member States usually first ratify the treaties and then proceed to implement them by national or EU legislation, while In the U.S. the domestic legislation has to be in order as a necessary condition to ratify international commitments.

It was very heartening for me to hear this morning in relation to the excellent panel on the Arctic that in all probability all conference participants in the room would be in favor for the U.S. to ratify the Convention on the Law of the Sea! I trust this will be communicated to Congress and the White House.

Also, please don't forget that poor Convention on Biological Diversity: U.S. ratification would give a much needed boost to that convention and it would be great if it could be done in this year, 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity.

Europe of course also attaches great importance to technology and has committed itself – in a legally binding way! – to have 20% of all energy consumed coming from renewable sources by 2020. This includes biofuels, for which there is much less enthusiasm nowadays, however, in light of its negative impacts on the tropical rainforests with all their biodiversity.

An extremely important contribution by the U.S. to the climate policy debate has been and is the connection with security, not only national, but also local and global security. Let me refer here to the ground-breaking report of the CNA of April 2007 on climate change and national security and the leadership by people like Sherri Goodman, Senior Vice President of CNA and moderator of the Arctic Panel this morning. The CNA report and many other publications since then from also other security think tanks over here, have contributed tremendously to the EU thinking and positioning on the relation between climate and security. It is of course a main interest of our Institute for Environmental Security and we have discussed with NATO to make climate change a prominent feature in NATO's New Strategic Concept, to be adopted later this year.

Looking at the actual state of international climate change policy discussions and negotiations we do have the outcome of Copenhagen in the form of the Copenhagen Accord. While many still think Copenhagen was a failure and the Accord a piece of useless paper, I beg to differ. The Accord is far from the legally binding text the Bali Roadmap of 2007 called for, but it contains the global consensus that temperature rise has to remain below 2 ° C in comparison with pre-industrial levels – even to be pushed down to 1.5 ° after evaluation of the Accord in 2015 – and it commits money especially to assist developing countries in getting on a sustainable energy path and in coping with the impacts of inevitable climate change.

I think President Obama was a constructive factor in Copenhagen, but, domestically speaking, he came empty-handed and was therefore less influential than he should have been as leader of a country with historically and actually such a major impact on the world's climate.

The EU was marginalized in Copenhagen because of its difficulty to speak with one mouth and by the fact that it had (and has) committed itself to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20% by 2020, no matter what the rest of the world does, so no need to negotiate with the nicest pupil in the class...

From a political perspective I think that the importance of Copenhagen lies to a great extent in the fact that the so-called BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India and China), all major polluters of the atmosphere, have taken up a leadership role in the negotiating process, very much also because they are major victims of climate change with its impacts on food, water and

energy security, its changing weather patterns (monsoons!) and loss of land both in quantity and quality due to sea level rise and salination. Much leaves to be desired in what they are prepared to do in practice and how this can be verified, but their willingness to be – in my view – deeply involved in the negotiating process in principle takes away one of the major objections of the U.S. against an implementation instrument like the Kyoto Protocol, which let the big emerging economies off the hook. While I have always defended the Kyoto Protocol, I think the U.S. was perfectly right to point to this great flaw.

Looking ahead to the next Conference of the Parties at the end of this year in Cancún, Mexico, I was a bit dismayed to hear from Congressman Alan Mollohan this morning, that there was no chance that the U.S. would be ready with its domestic legislation in time. If there is any silver lining in that terrible spill in the Gulf, I would hope it would help speed up that legislation... What absolutely binds the Americans and the Europeans is the theme of this conference, the need to have the best information on the state and dynamics of the biosphere and especially the vital role of satellite-based intelligence in this.

On both sides of the Atlantic the demand for earth observations has to be articulated by both scientists and policy-makers and communicated to the builders of the satellites, platforms and sensors, such as Northrop Grumman, the sponsor of this lunch!

I am happy to share with you that my institute carries out a project for the European Space Agency (ESA) to analyze the EU's climate and energy policies for its relevance for ESA and the related space industry. As we attach great importance to the role of tropical forests for the global climate and as

repositories of the richest biodiversity in the world, I am proud to say that our remote sensing partner in the Netherlands, SarVision, has an agreement with JAXA, to get their radar images of the major tropical forest areas for free, because of SarVisions advanced methodology to develop algorithms for the interpretation of these images. Our partner is also well-connected with their counterparts in NASA and NOAA, and participates in the Forest Carbon

Tracking system now promoted by GEO, the Group on Earth Observations.

What we aim to do and are doing in the Guiana Shield area in the Northern Amazon is to develop monitoring protocols where remote sensing-based information is combined with ground-truthing by trained local observers using GPS-connected handheld devices, and with SarVision and other partners we are discussing with Google Earth how to share the maps resulting from these protocols around the world. As such it can be a powerful awareness-raising tool, and very useful in a verification mechanism for international treaties.

From an environment and security standpoint we are – with many others of course – very concerned about the situation on the Tibetan Plateau – the Third Pole, because it contains the largest amount of snow and ice after the Arctic and the Antarctic – the Water Tower of Asia, its glacier-fed rivers providing billions of people with their essential water. The diversion of the river waters, the melting of the glaciers and the snowcaps puts India and Pakistan against each other on the Indus, India and China on the upstream (Tsjing Po) section of the Bhramaputra, and India and Bangladesh on the lower section.

China is building dams on the upper section of the Mekong, compromising livelihoods in the downstream Mekong countries. As some of these countries are nuclear powers and many have territorial and or ethnic/religious conflicts, it is a situation, which from an environmental diplomacy perspective requires the greatest attention. With our Military Advisory Council we aim to bring together representatives from the security and military communities to anticipate the potential hard security challenges if diplomacy and international negotiations were to fail.

Finally, if we are to solve the paradox that on the one hand climate science is hardening and at the same time climate skepticism among the larger public is growing – due to the growing gap between the perception of what should be done and the perception of the unpleasantness of changing current behavior, a form of *cognitive dissonance* – we need to show that there are attractive alternatives.

The worlds of science, politics and education have to be brought together and this conference has done exceptional work in doing that. I am very happy and privileged to be with the organizer of this conference, Nancy Colleton, on the IUCN Commission on Education and Communication to bring the results and outcomes of today to other audiences around the world, and I want to thank Ray Kolibaba from Northrop Grumman for having me here.