

ADVERTISEMENT

Math App
with a Human
Touch



Try FREE for 2 Weeks

SIGN UP NOW →

AdChoices

As Featured in
The New York Times

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN™

Permanent Address: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/immediate-risk-to-national-security-posed-by-global-warming/>
Energy & Sustainability » Climatewire

Immediate Risk to National Security Posed by Global Warming

A new Pentagon report declares climate change to be a threat multiplier

ClimateWire

October 14, 2014 | By Lisa Friedman and ClimateWire |

Updated at 9:28 a.m. EDT.

The Pentagon released a landmark report yesterday declaring climate change an "immediate risk" to national security and outlining how it intends to protect bases, prepare for humanitarian disasters and plan for global conflicts.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel unveiled the plan at the Conference of Defense Ministers of the Americas in Peru, where he said defense leaders "must be part of this global discussion" on climate change. Militaries, he added, "must be clear-eyed about the security threats presented by climate change, and we must be pro-active in addressing them."

Hagel, who led an effort to kill the 1997 Kyoto Protocol when he served in the U.S. Senate, also embraced upcoming U.N. negotiations in Lima, Peru, aimed at developing a new global agreement. That deal is expected to be signed in Paris at the end of 2015, and leaders hope to see a draft emerge at the Lima climate talks in December.

"Climate change is a 'threat multiplier' because it has the potential to exacerbate many of the challenges we already confront today—from infectious disease to armed insurgencies—and to produce new challenges in the future," he said.

The 20-page "[2014 Climate Change Adaptation Roadmap](#)" warns that rising sea levels could flood coastal military bases in the United States and around the world, while droughts and extreme weather could leave leave military training areas vulnerable, hinder the execution of amphibious landings or complicate surveillance and reconnaissance capability.

It cautions that the opening of the once-frozen Arctic sea lanes will require significant monitoring to "ensure stability in this resource-rich area." The United States, it says, must also be alert to how climate change could leave already weak nations more vulnerable, from

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/immediate-risk-to-national-security-posed-by-global-warming/?print=true>



Military analysts said the plan is a critical one, even in the midst of immediate threats from terrorism, the Ebola virus and Russian military intervention in Ukraine.

Credit: DVIDSHUB via flickr

ADVERTISEMENT

HEADLINE SHIRTS
INTELLIGENTLY FUNNY

BROWSE SHIRTS

restricting food and water to compelling mass migration.

Fragile governments can become more so

"These developments could undermine already-fragile governments that are unable to respond effectively or challenge currently-stable governments, as well as increasing competition and tension between countries vying for limited resources," the report states, warning of "an avenue for extremist ideologies and conditions that foster terrorism."

While Pentagon documents in the past have outlined climate threats, the road map is also forward-looking, calling for combatant commanders to outline departmentwide plans about how they intend to weave climate readiness into theater campaigns, operation plans and contingency plans.

Andrew Holland, a senior fellow for energy and climate at the American Security Project, said getting combatant commanders involved is a key step to fully integrating climate change planning. "You can tell the military is taking something seriously when they bureaucratize it," he said.

Conservatives used Twitter to lash out at the plan and criticized the Obama administration for devising a climate plan but not one to topple the Islamic State group. A spokesman for Rep. Buck McKeon (R-Calif.), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, declined to comment on the road map.

But military analysts said the plan is a critical one, even in the midst of immediate threats from terrorism, the Ebola virus and Russian military intervention in Ukraine.

"The military and the United States has to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. We don't have the luxury of focusing on one threat or another," said Francesco Femia, co-director of the Center for Climate and Security. In the meantime, he said, "Climate change is not an issue that is separate from these other security risks."

He pointed to the conflict with the Islamic State group in Syria, which he stressed was not caused by climate change. But, he said, tensions were exacerbated by a dramatic decline in precipitation, which, combined with poor management of natural resources, led to extreme water scarcity and the displacement of more than 1.5 million people.

"Climate change makes a number of other security issues worse, so we can't ignore it. And if we do ignore it, then we're also ignoring key drivers of instability, key drivers of conflict and potential drivers of terrorism that will come back to haunt us down the road," Femia said.

A sea change for Hagel

Sherri Goodman, senior vice president, general counsel and corporate secretary of CNA Corp., a military advisory board that studies U.S. national security, said the road map was significant for citing climate change not as a distant threat but as an immediate one.

"It's not so future. The time is now," she said. Goodman also applauded Hagel for highlighting climate change in the Western Hemisphere just before a key U.N. climate conference.

"I think it's very significant that he's essentially rallying the national security community and saying, 'Look, we take this as a serious threat, and it's affecting us throughout our operations now,'" she said.

The last time U.S. leaders brought home an international climate change agreement, Hagel rallied against it. A member of the U.S. Senate when the Clinton administration signed the Kyoto Protocol calling on wealthy countries to cut emissions, he teamed up with now-deceased Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) to sponsor a Senate resolution. The measure declared that the United States would not become a party to any agreement that did not also mandate carbon cuts from developing nations—particularly China. It passed 95-0.

Sources said U.N. climate chief Christiana Figueres pressed personally to have climate change highlighted at the defense meeting, something her staff confirmed

In a statement to *ClimateWire*, Figueres said, "There is no doubt that runaway climate change threatens the long-term national security of many countries as well as the overall stability of the world. It is therefore critical that military leaders become aware of the risks and start to engage in providing solutions. I welcome the clear statement to this effect from Secretary Hagel."

Holland, who worked for Hagel in the Senate, said despite the secretary's former opposition to Kyoto, the climate road map aligns strongly with his views.

"This is directly in line with what he was working on in the Senate in 2006 and 2007," Holland said, noting that Hagel included in an intelligence authorization bill an amendment asking for a national assessment on climate change.

"He's always said that if the climate is changing, we need to be aware of the national security implications. He's always been more nuanced," he said.

Goodman called it an "evolution," and a positive one.

"It's a very responsible one, and one that I hope others will take to heart," she said. "It is possible to evolve in one's thinking, particularly as the evidence mounts. And clearly, the evidence has made abundantly clear to him that climate change is happening now, today, and affecting our troops."

Reprinted from Climatewire with permission from Environment & Energy Publishing, LLC. www.eenews.net, 202-628-6500

ClimateWire

Scientific American is a trademark of Scientific American, Inc., used with permission

© 2014 Scientific American, a Division of Nature America, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

TRY A RISK-FREE ISSUE



YES! Send me a free issue of Scientific American with no obligation to continue the subscription. If I like it, I will be billed for the one-year subscription.

Subscribe Now

Back to School Sale!



12 Digital Issues + 4 Years of Archive Access just \$19.99

Order Now >