

US military and intelligence agencies identify climate change as “national security” threat

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US military and intelligence agencies are studying the strategic implications of global warming, including preparations for military interventions, the New York Times reported Sunday.

“The changing global climate will pose profound strategic challenges to the United States in coming decades, raising the prospect of military intervention to deal with the effects of violent storms, drought, mass migration and pandemics, military and intelligence analysts say,” the Times explained. “Such climate-induced crises could topple governments, feed terrorist movements or destabilize entire regions, say the analysts, experts at the Pentagon and intelligence agencies who for the first time are taking a serious look at the national security implications of climate change.”

The article noted that, while there has been previous discussion within the military and intelligence establishment on the implications of climate change, “The Obama administration has made it a central policy focus.” Amanda Dory, deputy assistant secretary of defense for strategy, is working with a Pentagon group assigned to incorporate climate change into national security strategy planning. She told the New York Times that she had seen a “sea change” in the military’s thinking on the issue in the last year.

War games and intelligence studies have reportedly identified several vulnerable regions—including sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and South and Southeast Asia—which over the next two and three decades face food and water shortages and severe flooding, potentially “demanding an American humanitarian relief or military response”.

The National Defense University, a Defense Department funded institution, last December conducted an exercise examining the potential strategic implications of a major flood in Bangladesh sending hundreds of thousands of refugees into India, and triggering religious conflict, the spread of contagious diseases, and widespread infrastructure damage.

The Defense Department is now including climate change in its strategic calculations, utilizing climate modeling based on advanced Navy and Air Force weather programs and research conducted by NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

In addition, the New York Times explained: “The Pentagon and the State Department have studied issues arising from dependence on foreign sources of energy for years but are only now considering the effects of global warming in their long-term planning documents. The Pentagon will include a climate section in the Quadrennial Defense Review, due in February; the State Department will address the issue in its new Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review.”

As well as examining the potential impact of climate change on food and water supplies, disease, and mass migration, some of the official studies carried out have pointed to more direct implications for the military.

Many key installations are vulnerable to rising sea levels and intensified storms. The headquarters of the Atlantic Fleet, located in Norfolk, Virginia, could be submerged with just a three-foot ocean level rise. Similarly, the US air base on the British island protectorate of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean lies just above current sea levels. Diego Garcia has played a critical role in US imperialism's drive to control the Middle East's oil and gas reserves; the air base provided the platform for the air bombardment of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in both 2003 and the 1991 Gulf War.

Washington's concern over the long term implications of climate change is directly bound up with concerns over its declining global hegemony and control over key resources in the face of challenges from rival powers in Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

The New York Times noted: "Arctic melting also presents new problems for the military. The shrinking of the ice cap, which is proceeding faster than anticipated only a few years ago, opens a shipping channel that must be defended and undersea resources that are already the focus of international competition."

Last year the National Intelligence Council (NIC) issued its first assessment of the national security implications of global warming. NIC Chairman and deputy director of National Intelligence for Analysis Thomas Fingar appeared before a joint meeting of the House of Representatives Select Committee on Intelligence and Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming on June 25, 2008. He noted that the US required "access to critical raw materials such as oil and gas", and warned that climate change could affect this supply, "with significant geopolitical consequences".

Fingar discussed the strategic implications in different parts of the world, particularly emphasizing Africa. "The United States' new military area of responsibility—Africa Command—is likely to face extensive and novel operational requirements," he concluded.

Global warming has featured prominently in Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's seven-country tour of Africa now underway. In South Africa, the New York Times reported, "Mrs. Clinton said she wanted the nation to play a larger role not just in Africa but on the global stage as well, helping in the battle against climate change, for instance."

Democratic Senator and failed 2004 presidential candidate John Kerry highlighted Africa in his remarks cited by Sunday's New York Times article. He argued that the ongoing conflict in southern Sudan was the outcome of drought and desert expansion. "That is going to be repeated many times over and on a much larger scale," he said.

What is being prepared here is a humanitarian and even environmental pretext for military interventions aimed at advancing Washington's strategic and economic interests.

Kerry, now chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, convened a Senate hearing in July to hear testimony from military and intelligence analysts on the global security implications of climate change. Introducing the discussion, Kerry declared: "Just as 9-11 taught us the painful lesson that oceans could not protect us from terror, today we are deluding ourselves if we believe that climate change will stop at our borders.... We risk fanning the flames of

failed-statism, and offering glaring opportunities to the worst actors in our international system.”

The Massachusetts senator told the New York Times that he has been emphasizing the “national security” issue in his efforts to persuade other senators to back the Obama administration’s “cap and trade” legislation limiting carbon dioxide emissions.

In June the House narrowly passed the American Clean Energy and Security Act, which mandates a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions to 4 percent below their 1990 levels by 2020. This is far below what is recommended by climate scientists with the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)—in 2007 they called for advanced economies to cut emissions by between 25 to 40 percent over the same period.

Some climate scientists have since argued that the latest climate data indicates that the 2007 IPCC recommendation significantly underestimates what is required. Even if Obama’s “cap and trade” scheme is enacted, in other words, there is little likelihood that severe environmental consequences, with the accompanying geo-strategic effects, will be avoided.

It remains to be seen whether the “cap and trade” legislation will be put to the Senate as scheduled in October, and if it is, whether enough votes can be found in favor. Many Democrats with close ties to mining companies and other fossil fuel industries are reluctant to endorse any emissions trading scheme that involves the major corporate polluters incurring even minimal costs.

The New York Times cited an earlier statement issued by General Anthony Zinni, former head of the Central Command: “We will pay for this one way or another. We will pay to reduce greenhouse gas emissions today, and we’ll have to take an economic hit of some kind. Or we will pay the price later in military terms. And that will involve human lives.”

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