

The Military's Warning on Global Warming

The U.S. military, which gets called on to cope with unrest tied to global warming, is taking the climate threat seriously as opposed to civilian politicians who are pandering to special interests, says ethicist Daniel C. Maguire.

By Daniel C. Maguire

It wasn't supposed to be this way. The really neat American idea was that the military's zest for battle would be restrained by the measured judgment of a civilian-led government. But the spreading perception internationally is that President Trump's generals are the last-ditch guarantors of common sense in a deranged White House.

Let's admit it. The military can be right. Secretary of State Colin Powell, a retired general, warned President George W. Bush privately against the crazy invasion of Iraq though he later betrayed his own good sense and joined the criminal conspiracy.

What the military recognizes and the civilian government does not, is that the biggest security threat, the biggest security threat our species has faced in 10,000 years, is global warming. The military doesn't call it a hoax. The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review calls climate change "an accelerant of instability" and a "threat multiplier."

In October 2015 a diverse group of experts, including three former Defense Secretaries, said that climate change is "shaping a world that is more unstable, resource-constrained, violent, and disaster-prone."

Africa is a case in point. Andrew Holland writing in *Scientific American* writes: "In northern Nigeria deforestation, overgrazing and increased heat from global warming have turned what was once productive farmland and savanna into an extension of the Sahara Desert. Lake Chad has lost more than 90 percent of its original size from drought, mismanagement and waste."

The population of already overcrowded Africa is likely to double by 2050 leading to explosive conditions already in evidence.

It is precisely from the chaos of this toxic mix that radical groups like Boko Haram have sprouted. The military knows this. The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA said that climate change fueled Syria's civil war. Deep and long droughts, influenced by climate change, drove hundreds of thousands of people from their farms into cities like Aleppo and Raqqa making fertile

breeding ground for ISIS, Al Qaeda and other jihadist groups.

The New York Times reports that as pasture land has dried up in places like Kenya violent and murderous battles are being fought just to get grass for the animals. Climate change is a driving factor in all of this. It is a “threat multiplier” and the threats do not stay within the borders of the poorest most affected nations. Despair also goes global and explodes in our streets and in the streets of Europe and elsewhere.

A Primer for Denialists

President Trump calls anthropogenic global warming “a hoax,” drops out of the historic Paris climate accord and guts the Environmental Protection Agency. Maybe his generals could don their uniforms, sit Trump down and give him a little primer on this epochal threat to planetary security. Here is the primer.

We have had 378 months of above average temperatures. That’s no hoax. Scientists say Arctic ice is in “a death spiral.” That’s no hoax. People fish off Bangladesh in what was once a busy market before rising seas claimed it. That’s no hoax.

Temperatures rose in Iraq and Kuwait to 129 F in July 2016 and to 112 F in parts of France and Italy in August 2017. That’s no hoax.

“For every degree Celsius that temperature rises, agricultural scientists calculate, wheat yields drop 10 percent in the Earth’s hotter midriff,” as Alan Weisman reports in his tellingly entitled book *Countdown*. That’s no hoax.

Environmental refugees no longer come only from Island states like the Maldives and Tuvalu and from Bangladesh. They come from Houston and Florida and will be coming from inundated cities on our coasts.

On top of all that we are awakening the sleeping giant in the earth. As volcanologist Bill McGuire says changing climate triggers earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanoes, unleashing forces that make our destructive power seem puny. And that is coming and that is no hoax. Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, energized by the heated waters of the sea, are portents of a “new normal.” The records they are breaking are not a hoax.

Climate scientist Clive Hamilton reports that “the reluctant conclusion of the most eminent climate scientist is that the world is now on a path to a very unpleasant future and it is too late to stop it.” He describes the scientists’ mood as one of “barely suppressed panic.” He says this in his book ominously entitled *Requiem for a Species*.

Stephen Hawking has so little hope for humanity on this planet that he says our long-term future must be in space. (One can question his idea that we should take our failures and export them into space!) The root of the problem he says is humanity's "selfish and aggressive instinct."

In other words, according to Hawking, it is not a scientific problem: it's a moral problem. An ethical problem for an ethically skewed species. These expressions of near despair are not uttered as a hoax.

Any Hope Anywhere?

Fear is our greatest need: denial our most ingrained and fearsome talent. Acute fear can stoke action. We got scared of small pox and an international effort ended it. We got really scared with the shrinkage of the ozone over Antarctica and we responded internationally. In World War II, the United States transformed its entire economy and its industrial production in a matter of months. The problem is we are not afraid of an incipient apocalypse even as our TV's blaringly report on it.

We have nothing to fear but the absence of fear. We need fear. Green fear. In a kind of homeopathic medicine, we should add green greed to the mix. Creative experiments in many countries are showing that there is money to be made by harnessing renewable natural energy.

Job one for generals is detecting danger and sounding needed alarms. Maybe the generals can be our ecological Paul Revere's. Maybe.

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