



Climate Change is Such a Serious Threat to National Security that Military Organizations are Now Part of the Solution

Washington, D.C., March 18, 2009 – International climate change policy must take into consideration the effects of climate change on national security and military organizations are part of the solution, said participants at yesterday’s “Climate Change & Security At Copenhagen” conference in Washington, D.C., hosted by the Institute for Environmental Security and the Global Legislators Organisation for a Balanced Environment (GLOBE-EU), in partnership with the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars. Dwindling natural resources is one factor that could fuel conflict and become a threat multiplier. “Climate change is threatening 1,500 miles of glaciers on the Tibetan Plateau that feed the rivers that supply drinking and agriculture water to billions of people in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh,” said Air Marshal A. K. Singh, (Ret) Former Commander in Chief of Indian Air Force. “Less water from the retreating glaciers could spur serious conflicts between the countries. This is reason enough for military organizations to join with their governments in stopping climate change.”

Conference speakers such as David Sandalow from the Brookings Institute discussed both U.S. and international climate policy with regard to national security, and what it will mean for this December’s climate negotiations in Copenhagen. Other presentations focused on the role of military organizations worldwide in helping reduce the threat of climate change. “Environmental protection is not a new concept to military organizations,” said Stephen O. Andersen, from the U.S. EPA. “When ozone depletion threatened health and prosperity, the U.S. Department of Defense and defense ministries worldwide played an important role in eliminating their own dependence on ozone depleting substances and they shared that alternative technology worldwide. Now, military organizations are taking responsibility for protecting global security by helping eliminate global dependence on fossil fuels and promoting new, sustainable technologies.”

Last week at the Copenhagen Climate Congress, scientists confirmed that climate change is advancing much more quickly than anticipated, as well as tipping points for abrupt climate change events, such as the dieback of the Amazon rainforest and the melting of the Hindu-Kush-Himalaya-Tibetan glaciers and the Greenland Ice Sheet. The resulting sea level rise would produce millions of environmental refugees.

In order to avoid abrupt climate change as well as security threats, world leaders must take immediate action on “fast-action” measures that will buy time for long-term climate strategies. “Unfortunately, the world is already committed to 2.4°C of warming and recent research has shown that even aggressive reductions in CO₂ emissions won’t provide significant cooling for

1,000 years,” said Durwood Zaelke, president of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development, who spoke on the topic of abrupt climate change at yesterday’s event. “In light of approaching tipping points and the security implications of passing them, we need to be pursuing a number of mitigation measures that can be implemented now and bring quick reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.”

Zaelke presented two main strategic “levers” to produce fast mitigation. The first is to reduce emissions of black carbon soot and non-CO₂ emissions, such as HFCs. With over 20 years of success in phasing out 97 percent of almost 100 ozone-depleting substances and significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the process, the Montreal Protocol ozone treaty could be an effective framework for phasing down HFCs. The second lever is to expand bio-sequestration through forests, agriculture, and biochar (which in addition to sequestering significant amounts of carbon, also improves soil fertility for increased agricultural productivity). Some scientists have noted that bio-sequestration appears to be the only current way to draw down CO₂ concentrations to a safe level of 350ppm. These strategies could be included under the new climate agreement.

Tom Spencer, Vice Chairman of the Institute for Environmental Security, stated that “the defence ministers of the world are expanding their superior threat assessment tools to analyze the threats climate change poses to national security. The military have a major ecological footprint...perhaps we should call it a ‘bootprint.’” Mr. Spencer added that “the defence community needs to join the climate battle in full force during the climate negotiations at Copenhagen in December.”

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