

WILL CLIMATE CHANGE BECOME NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUE BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE?

A significant list of serious national security figures (along with some not so serious people like Joe Lieberman, James Woolsey, and Frank Wisner) have released a letter calling for immediate focus on climate change.

The letter is not perfect. It still treats climate change as a force that will destabilize parts of the world, causing more headaches for us, rather than a force that will kill people directly.

Countries least able to adapt to or mitigate the impacts of climate change will suffer the most, but the resulting crises will quickly become a burden on U.S. priorities as well. Both the Department of Defense and the State Department have identified climate change as a serious risk to American security and an agent of instability. Without precautionary measures, climate change impacts abroad could spur mass migrations, influence civil conflict and ultimately lead to a more unpredictable world. In fact, we may already be seeing signs of this as vulnerable communities in some of the most fragile and conflict-ridden states are increasingly displaced by floods, droughts and other natural disasters. Protecting U.S. interests under these conditions would progressively exhaust American military, diplomatic and development resources as we struggle to meet growing demands for emergency international engagement.

It is in our national interest to

confront the risk that climate change in vulnerable regions presents to American security. We must offer adaptive solutions to communities currently facing climate-driven displacement, support disaster risk reduction measures and help mitigate potential future impacts through sustainable food, water and energy systems. Advancing stability in the face of climate change threats will promote resilient communities, reliable governance and dependable access to critical resources.

It still treats climate change as something that happens over there, not in New York or the midwest. It still treats climate change as a secondary issue.

Nor does it situate climate change against other threats, which pretty quickly shows that not only is climate change a more immediate threat than al Qaeda or China, but that its effects create conditions that foster the former.

But it's a start.

Until it becomes consensus that climate change is a national security threat, and must be treated with the same seriousness and intolerance with failure as any other national security threat, we're not going to a damn thing about it.