

THE FOSSIL FUELED MILITARY BATTLES CLIMATE CHANGE

"The responsibility of the Department of Defense is the security of our country." Thus begins DOD's 2014 Climate Change Adaption Road Map, released yesterday to much acclaim.

But then two paragraphs later, it refers to climate change as a "threat multiplier," not a threat.

In our defense strategy, we refer to climate change as a "threat multiplier" because it has the potential to exacerbate many of the challenges we are dealing with today – from infectious disease to terrorism. We are already beginning to see some of these impacts.

A few more paragraphs later, it admits this report primarily looks at climate change's impact on DOD, not its impact on the US.

Our first step in planning for these challenges is to identify the effects of climate change on the Department with tangible and specific metrics, using the best available science.

I don't mean to be churlish – and I do recognize that DOD is quite forward-thinking, among government agencies for its awareness of and initial preparations for climate change.

But that's sort of the point. This is as good as it gets. And only secondarily does even one of the most progressive agencies in government, with respect to climate change, get to this kind of admission.

Maintaining stability within and among other nations is an important means of avoiding full-scale military conflicts. The impacts of climate change may cause instability in other countries by impairing access to food and water, damaging infrastructure, spreading disease, uprooting and displacing large numbers of people, compelling mass migration, interrupting commercial activity, or restricting electricity availability. 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. These gaps in governance can create an avenue for extremist ideologies and conditions that foster terrorism. Here in the U.S., state and local governments responding to the effects of extreme weather may seek increased [Defense Support of Civil Authorities].

Climate change is going to be hell. It's going to cause wars. And it will even require addition DOD resources domestically, in the form of Reserve troops to help local authorities cope with emergencies. And – though DOD doesn't say it, certainly not in its publicly released document – the US is one of the places that will struggle with governance of the internal effects of climate change, even if they'll do better than, say, Bangladesh or some harder hit countries. Certainly the US is no model of proactive government preparing for these disasters!

Meanwhile, here's what else DOD does in the name of fulfilling its responsibility for the security of the country. (h/t OTB)

To date, there have been approximately 240 coalition air strikes against ISIS

targets in Iraq and Syria since air operations began nearly a month ago.

[snip]

What goes underreported and, hence, underappreciated, is the magnitude of the overall air operation being conducted in support of or in addition to the actual air strikes against targets on the ground. Simply put, behind every successful air strike is a massive supporting infrastructure of aircraft, ground operations and planning activities. Air strikes are not conducted in isolation. Every strike package consists not only of bomb-carrying aircraft but others providing the protection, electronic warfare support, aerial refueling, battle space management and intelligence. The 240 strikes in Iraq and Syria were supported by some 3,800 aircraft sorties, 1,700 tanker flights and over 700 ISR sorties. There have also been thousands of flights by transport aircraft, C-17s and C-130s making up the largest fraction, providing humanitarian relief but also moving personnel and essential supplies into the region.

Behind all these aircraft stands the supporting personnel and infrastructure necessary to any air operation. These range from ground crews and air traffic controllers to maintainers, armorers and intel personnel. Then there are the people in the air operations center who put together the air tasking order that details all the air activities for a 24-hour period. There are more people and more complexity when it is a joint and coalition operation.

Doing the math, this means there have been around 20 supporting sorties for each strike conducted. This is in a fairly benign environment.

That is, even while DOD notes – laudably, given how dysfunctional our government is – that climate change is going to destabilize countries and will even require deployment of the Reserve to limit instability in our own country, it is burning up fossil fuels at an alarming rate, even in its relatively circumscribed operation against ISIL.

This report edges us closer to the point where we call climate change a threat to the US, rather than just a threat multiplier to all the other things looming out there.

But until we're there – until we recognize that climate change has killed far more people in the US since 9/11 than terrorism – we will continue to burn fossil fuel as a first or second response to threats on the other side of the world.