

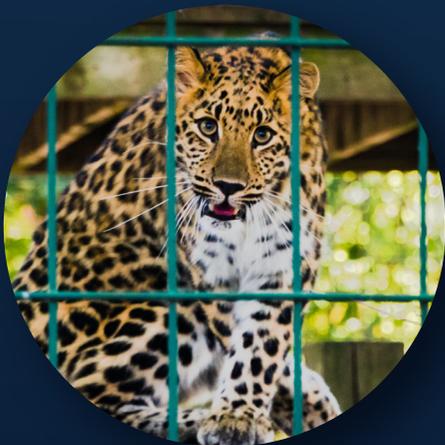
CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON NATIONAL SECURITY

The ecological disruptions that are underway on a global scale are both accelerating climate change and devastating global biodiversity. Decades of evidence show that humans have fundamentally transformed the planet's physical, chemical, and biological composition, and this has in turn altered the evolutionary trajectory of life on earth. It is no secret that increased international efforts, led by the United States, are urgently needed to prevent irreversible damage that threatens human prosperity and wellbeing.

The Threat



Climate change has exacerbated and accelerated the number of extreme weather-driven disasters, which are a growing threat to developed and developing countries alike. They pose a particular challenge for the latter, where they amplify existing stresses and vulnerabilities. The devastation they cause to communities and economies can lead to a breakdown in social structures and the rule of law, creating opportunities for criminals and extremists. And the time and cost required to recover and rebuild can bring longer-term instability and create ripple effects that threaten U.S. national and economic security.



Climate change also acts as a driver of ecological disruption bringing wildlife, livestock and people into closer contact. As wildlife and humans come closer together, viruses or pathogens known as zoonotic diseases spillover from wildlife to humans, which can lead to global pandemics like COVID-19, Sars, Ebola, Bird Flu and HIV. The deadliest pandemics kill far more people than war, and recovery is long and costly.

The Solution

It is imperative that the U.S. infuse natural security into climate change efforts. While rejoining the Paris Agreement and the Biden Administration's Executive Order on climate was an important step, the U.S. needs to lead a major international effort to ratchet up the ambitions of member countries' greenhouse gas emissions targets - and more importantly, also pursue opportunities to reduce vulnerability to the effects of climate change. Building on the Executive Order, addressing ecological concerns must be embedded in the U.S. Government efforts to address security threats arising from global climate change.

Human impact on forests, wetlands, aquifers, and other ecosystems threatens climate stability and amplifies nearly all negative impacts of climate change on water, food, invasive species, and infectious diseases. This international effort will need to address climate change as an interconnected problem of global ecological disruption.

An initial necessary step is to address the fundamental need for a National Intelligence Estimate on biodiversity loss, climate change and preventing pandemics. Additionally, we should advocate for an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on climate change and the biosphere, in the spirit of prior IPCC Special Reports on oceans, the cryosphere and land.

By helping vulnerable countries prepare for, defend against and build resilience to the impacts of climate change, we are helping to reduce the damage and instability these events cause while building a safer world.

U.S. government efforts to conserve and protect the integrity of nature on a global scale are a necessary and vital component of America's approach to ensuring our long-term national security. As defense and intelligence agencies design and update America's national security strategies, they must ensure that these 21st century threats like climate change are well-integrated and addressed. This includes drawing on the expertise and efforts of federal agencies engaged in global conservation, including the Department of the Interior, the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Forest Service.

Increased international conservation funding is essential. With nature loss emerging as one of the greatest challenges we now face as a society, the conservation of biodiversity and natural resources needs to be elevated as a key goal of our foreign policy, development and foreign assistance, and resourced accordingly.

