

U.S. Military Strategy for Environmental Security

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OVERVIEW

The primary goal of this report is to analyze future environmental concerns and threats and theorize how the U.S. military can both develop and implement a strategy to mitigate them. It seeks to establish a long-term comprehensive approach operating in the 2025-2085 timeframe to tackle the threats, those in which are known or expected and those yet to be discovered. In developing and defining four strategic objectives, U.S. military forces will be able to address environmental concerns on a local, regional, state, and global level. It addresses how the military must honor its responsibility to be stewards of human health and security while reducing its own environmental footprint.

Environmental Threats: Known and Unknown

While there are a variety of variables in the future of environmental security, there are several national and transnational issues in which the U.S. military seeks to combat. These issues include – but are not limited to – deforestation, pollution, disease (natural or manmade), ecological degradation, natural disasters, resource scarcity, and climate change. Climate disruption presents a particular challenge due to the wide variety of issues it creates. Of these are increased output of greenhouse gases, rising sea levels changing geographical boundaries, forced migration leading to a potential refugee crisis, and resource scarcity. However, military forces can target individual issues that pose a security issues to help alleviate the threats associated with them.

Environmental concerns also shape geopolitics. U.S. forces should therefore integrate environmental considerations in its planning while also developing corresponding strategies directly related to environment-driven geopolitics (Mosher and Arroyo Center 2008, 4). In addition, the military must remain cognizant of its own environmental impact and the potential damage it could create. Some of these concerns and threats are addressed in the U.S. military strategic objectives expanded upon below.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The U.S. Military will need a holistic approach in combating environmental challenges that threaten human and environmental security both today and in the future. This strategy contains four primary objectives:

- (1) Protect the commons for collective benefit
- (2) Support and cooperate with allies and partners
- (3) Maintain and enhance current practices and human security
- (4) Develop new technology and minimize environmental impact

These objectives will help the U.S military forces address the wide range of environmental threats and concerns highlighted above. Achieving these goals would also contribute to the broader objectives in America's grand strategy.

Protect

The U.S. military must seek to protect not only its own interests, but those in which affect global security as a whole. In pursuing protection of the commons, it will allow forces to secure the rite to natural resources – a rite in which should be granted to all living things. It must strive for environmental conservation by addressing specific issues, respectively. Some of these threats are (but are not limited to):

Deforestation – Military intervention should be considered to roll back deforestation practices in vital areas to slow the pace of global warming. Coincidentally, it can engage in afforestation domestically. These practices would aid in maintaining and safeguarding biodiversity.

Natural Resources – This includes (but is not limited to) protecting the quality of air/water/food. If natural resources are strained, forces should have preparedness for possible political, social, economic, or direct military engagement.

Climate change and its effects – The effects of climate change are seemingly limitless. Ultimately, the continued deterioration of our environment through climate change could lead to a national security disaster. Special emphasis should be taken in securing not only the quality of water but the quantity, as it fuels every aspect of life and directly shapes geopolitics.

Borders – Forced migration may pose a risk to U.S. borders due to environmental drivers. Declining birthrates will likely lead to a disproportionate elderly:youth ratio which could trigger increased immigration (Jones 2020, 22). This not only calls for immigration reform by policymakers, but vigilant border security enforced by the military to manage the influx of persons entering the U.S.

Future of the military – Plummeting birthrates may negatively affect enrollment rates into the services. With a decrease in military comes a decrease in security, threatening its ability to enforce its environmental strategic objectives and otherwise. Should this occur, the U.S. must be open to considering alternative solutions like the reinstatement of conscription.

Support and Cooperate

The U.S. military must support and cooperate with allies and partners in its shared objective of securing the environment. This means interacting with state and private actors as well as with academia. U.S. forces should participate in four primary practices to achieve this objective: communication, consultation, coordination, and collaboration (“Strategy for the

Environment” 2004). These practices would aid in conservation efforts by finding utility in new practices. Moreover, collaboration would also be used in useful in achieving broader security goals shaped by environmental factors.

Maintain and Enhance

The U.S. military must maintain current practices while enhancing human security. It has developed methods of dismantling and decommissioning nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons with low impact on the environment. These practices should be maintained and/or improved upon, when necessary, to ensure to reduce or eliminate environmental contamination. In addition, particular care should be taken in minimizing and/or eliminating any hazard to personnel.

Develop

The U.S. military must strive to develop new technology with a concentration on low environmental impact. This means focusing on innovation that is green and ecologically friendly. The military must reassess its energy sources and find sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels that do not compromise the safety of its forces or its missions. Finding clean energy while maintaining energy efficiency is key in decreasing its carbon footprint. Moreover, considerations should be taken to optimize the environmental impacts of missions, both during and after operations.

THE ARCTIC: ZEROING IN ON GROUND ZERO

The Arctic plays a vital role in securing our environment. It is a direct contributor to the rapid pace of climate disruption globally and its security should be prioritized. Consequently, it is also an area of geopolitical contention. Once considered to be impenetrable, climate change has drastically changed its landscape, making it far more traversable than in the past. This is critical, as the Arctic is home to several natural resources that are all competitively sought after (Peimani 2012, 8). Strategic deterrence may be achieved with a global shift from utilizing fossil fuel so energy efficient alternatives, as the allure of the Arctic’s natural resources may fade. Additionally, a reversal of climate degradation may also lead to Arctic waterways being less traversable, thus leading to a decrease in geopolitical contention.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

While environmental security has not been traditionally associated with decisive military action, a new strategic approach is necessary. The rapid deterioration of the environment is creating new security challenges that need to be addressed with both short-term and long-term goals from the U.S. military. It must not simply respond, but rather be an active participant in

securing the future. It must develop a tailored approach to specific threats while being able to maintain the greater objectives outlined above. Military forces must be able to reassess old and develop new strategies if/when necessary to accommodate for new challenges as they arise. A strong and unwavering vision must be maintained, and the U.S. must rise to meet the environmental challenges of future as well as environment-produced threats. Humanity's biggest threat has always been itself. While there is an uncertainty of future threats, this much is certain: the environmental challenges we face are manmade; therefore, we are capable of fixing them.

References

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