



“Climate change does not directly cause conflict, but it can add to the challenges of global instability, hunger, poverty, and conflict. Food and water shortages, pandemic disease, disputes over refugees and resources, more severe natural disasters – all place additional burdens on economies, societies and institutions around the world.”

Chuck Hagel Secretary of Defense ¹



The United States is the world’s third-largest country by size (after Russia and Canada) and by population (after China and India).² Climate changes threatens different regions in varied ways. The East Coast of the U.S. is threatened by the increase frequency and intensity of hurricanes in the Atlantic Ocean. The American Southwest, which already experiences the hottest and driest climate in the nation, is likely to become hotter and drier.³ The Midwest will see greater temperature variability, including extreme heat waves that will test agriculture.

The United States, with the additional global pressures from water scarcity and extreme weather around the world, will see an increased demand for its military to deploy to new ‘hot spots’ around the world⁴

Summary

Country: United States of America
Region: North America

ASP Assessment:

Vulnerability: High
Perception of Climate Change: Security Threat
Capacity: High
Preparedness: High
Overall Assessment: Excellent

The Climate Threats

Regional Disaster Vulnerability

- Increased frequency of severe weather events
- Sever droughts in the Southwest
- The East Coast plagued with more intense hurricanes
- Greater likelihood of flooding from heavy downpours⁵

The Need to Adapt

- Sea level rise directly threatens over 30 naval bases
- Coastal Cities are directly threatened by sea level rise
- Agriculture is a top export and will have to change⁷

Links Between Climate and Conflict

- Added pressure on United States military due to its unique role in providing global security
- Increased resource strains in already unstable regions⁶

Direct Threats to Homeland Security

- Damage to infrastructure results in slower deployment of security forces
- There is a growing reliance on the National Guard to respond to severe weather events⁸



How is the Country Preparing for Climate Threats

Preparing for Disaster Response

Due to the complex response landscape, as well as the unpredictable nature of disasters, it is important that DoD personnel deployed to support foreign disaster relief efforts are well-equipped to respond to these crisis situations.”

- Department of Defense, Support to Foreign Disaster Relief⁹

Breaking the Link between Climate and Conflict

“The impacts of climate change may increase the frequency, scale, and complexity of future missions, including defense support to civil authorities, while at the same time undermining the capacity of our domestic installations to support training activities.”

- Department of Defense, 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review Report¹⁰

Adapting Installations

“DoD’s sustainability vision is to maintain our ability to operate into the future without decline, either in the mission or the natural and man-made systems that support it. Including climate change and climate variability considerations in our planning processes will enhance operational and infrastructure resilience.”

- Department of Defense, 2012 Climate Change Adaptation Roadmap¹¹

Planning for Homeland Security Threats

“Climate change will increase the severity and frequency of weather-related hazards such as extreme storms, high rainfalls, floods, droughts, and heat waves.”

- Department of Homeland Security, Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report: A Strategic Framework for a Secure Homeland¹²

Analysis

The United States, as the world’s foremost military power, is a leader in planning for the impacts of climate change on national security. The security community can be non-partisan in an increasingly partisan, political debate over climate change. This non-partisan assessment of risk is important, as climate change presents threats that cross political boundaries. While the US Department of Defense (DoD) has done important work in preparing for the effects of climate change, other institutions within government, including the Department of Homeland Security, should do more to plan for responding to threats at home. The DoD can do more planning at the regional level through the combatant commands for how to respond to climate change and it is beginning to do so. The United States ranks as, “vulnerable, but prepared” for the national security threats of climate change.

The American Security Project’s Global Security Defense Index on Climate Change is an examination of how international governments and militaries plan for and anticipate the strategic threats of climate change.

For more information and references see:

globalsecuritydefenseindex.org