

U.S. Military Sees Climate Change as Major Threat

A December 2021 poll by the Pew Research Center asked respondents to report their level of confidence in various groups to act in the best interests of the public. Three groups stood out as those for which respondents said they have either “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of confidence: medical scientists (78%), scientists (77%) and the military (74%). On the low end were journalists (40%), business leaders (40%), and elected officials (24%).

I won't attempt to speculate on why these ratings. My own might differ. But the poll results strike me as particularly significant in light of a book I've just read titled *All Hell Breaking Loose*. As the blurb on the book's back cover states, “of all the major institutions in American society, none takes climate change as seriously as the U.S. military. Both as participants in climate-triggered conflicts abroad and as first responders to hurricanes and other disasters on American soil, the armed services are already confronting the dire effects of global warming.”

And, as the book, authored by Michael T. Klare, documents, all major branches of the U.S. military have been and continue to be taking significant and multifaceted steps to prepare for a future when extreme climate events and the massively disruptive effects of general global warming will almost surely occasion rising civil conflict, chaos, and violence.

By now, I should hope, most people believe the science of global warming. But for those who don't – perhaps because they don't trust journalists or politicians – or rather, they only trust those who deny that climate change is a big deal -- might I suggest trust in the U.S. military. Those in military leadership apparently know and see what's coming, at least enough to know that it requires immediate response and vigorous action.

From the perspective of the U.S. military, climate change is one of the top threats to American national security. But, as Klare makes clear (and the war in Ukraine is also now helping us to understand), our security also depends on the safety, security, and stability of many other countries around the world.

There are all kinds of reasons why environmentalists care about global climate change. Many regard the natural world as God's creation, and believe they have a responsibility to be good stewards of that creation. Many care about the survival of other species, not just human beings. Many believe that human experience and pleasure would be severely diminished by the degradation of the environment, the loss of habitat, and the mass extinctions of plants and animals that provide us food, beauty, knowledge, and even spiritual enrichment.

Klare's book makes the case that, as the U.S. military is doing, global climate change must be taken very seriously. Whether you see yourself as an environmentalist or not, surely the safety, security, and stability of our country and its inhabitants, not to mention that of other countries and the rest of humanity, is sufficient reason to get serious about addressing the challenges of climate change.

Klare does not propose prescriptions for what the rest of us must do. That's part of what we who wish to be responsible citizens of this country and our planet must work out for ourselves. There are all kinds of ways to go. We can all reduce consumption, especially of fossil fuels. We can opt for alternative and renewable energy sources. We can plant trees and gardens. We can support legislation that promotes energy conservation and alternative energy development. We can oppose war, which has enormous destructive effects on the environment as well as human life. Just do it.

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