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Climate change a threat to national security

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South Florida is used to being on the front lines of climate change. Rising sea levels and extreme weather events are facts of life.

Climate change is a fact of life for the military as well. One of us commanded the U.S. Air Force's Aeronautical Systems Center. The other served as Commander of U.K. Maritime Forces with the Royal Navy. Both of us have seen first-hand how the risks of climate change affect military operations and national security around the world.

That's why we are visiting Miami this week to meet with a wide range of local leaders to talk about the fact that a more diversified energy posture makes for a safer nation. And South Florida has a key role to play in moving the world to a stronger energy future.

According to the U.S. National Climate Assessment, global sea levels rose about eight inches in the last century. They are predicted to rise anywhere from one to four feet in the coming century. That especially matters in a place like Florida, where 2.4 million people live within four feet of current sea levels.

But picture that kind of destabilizing change coming to a region in conflict — exacerbating disputes over politics, resources, religion, and economics — and you can readily see why national security leaders around the world have identified climate change as a key threat to the global security system. It's an issue that the U.K. and U.S. governments are tackling together, and one that we have studied and reported on with other senior retired military leaders who serve on the Military Advisory Board of CNA, Virginia-based research and analysis organization.

Strains on natural resources and the growing influence of a changing climate have all played a direct role in deteriorating economic conditions and intensifying political instability across some of the most volatile regions in the world including modern day Syria.

So when we talk about climate change, we're not only talking about a threat to our environment. Climate change represents a direct challenge to national security and global stability, and makes it more likely that our men and women will be sent into harm's way.

As they look for ways to improve their operational effectiveness and efficiency, British and American armed forces are deploying clean, efficient energy, which also cut greenhouse gas emissions and help curb climate change. Entire U.S. Army bases now run on clean energy like solar, wind and geothermal power. Royal and U.S. Marines are using solar-powered equipment in conflict zones, reducing the need for diesel fuel and cutting the number of dangerous re-supply convoys that all too often turn our troops into targets.

Men and women in British and American uniforms are finding ways to use sensible energy innovations, even while doing dangerous jobs. But the military cannot develop and scale up innovative energy sources all alone. The rest of us have a role to play, as well.

The good news is that science has given us ample warning of climate change, and technology and innovation are being developed to blunt its worst effects. Deploying clean energy, boosting efficiency, and finding better ways to use our resources — these strategies mitigate climate change, and make the world a safer and more secure place.

This approach also grows the economy and creates jobs. And Florida is well positioned to benefit. The economic development agency Enterprise Florida counts hundreds of companies working on clean energy, and thousands working on efficiency. The Sunshine State is seventh in the country for generation of utility-scale solar energy, and ninth for solar industry jobs.

South Florida is showing leadership in policy and politics, as well.

The Southeast Florida Regional Climate Action Plan has laid out recommendations for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to regional and local impacts of a changing climate. And leaders across the region are calling for smart energy policies that cut carbon emissions and promote development of renewables.

South Florida is turning the unsettling experience of being at ground zero for climate change to good use, and setting the example for the rest of us. Thank you for helping lead the way to a clean, sustainable, secure energy future.

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