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**Presidential Climate Action Project**

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**Climate Action Brief:**  
**National Security in a Changing Environment**  
June 6, 2008

The rapidly shifting global landscape presents historic challenges and unique opportunities in international relations as the impacts of climate change become increasingly apparent and severe. Shrinking polar ice caps, expanding desert regions, changes in the oceans' acidity, disease outbreaks, more severe storms and altered rainfall patterns all create the potential for conflict among peoples and governments everywhere.

The next President of the United States will need to act quickly to protect our national security in an environment far different from what we have ever known.

Controversy erupted at the meeting of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome this month between the developing and the developed worlds over rising food prices and what role the production of biofuels has played in the hunger crisis across Africa and Asia. President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt called for international dialogue that "sets standards for the responsible utilization of agricultural crops as food for human beings, not as fuel for human beings."<sup>i</sup>

Meanwhile, rising fuel prices have provoked protests around the world from France to India.

Clearly, as demand for food, water and fuel outstrips supplies, international tensions are building.

Sen. Gary Hart (U.S. Ret.) long has cautioned that our national security is threatened by our continued dependence on foreign oil. “Oil is now the centerpiece of America’s foreign policy, economic policy, defense policy, environmental policy and energy policy,” he said. “So long as the economy of the United States is held hostage by foreign oil producers, America will remain vulnerable to price rises, interruption of oil supplies by terrorists, overthrow of producing governments and regional unrest, instability and conflict.”<sup>ii</sup>

In their 2007 study, “National Security and the Threat of Climate Change,” 11 U.S. admirals and generals described climate change as a “threat multiplier” in volatile regions of the world and a source of tension in stable regions. “The critical factors for economic and security stability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are energy, water and the environment,” said Gen. Paul Kern in the report. “When [these factors] are not in balance, people live in poverty, suffer high death rates or move towards armed conflict.”<sup>iii</sup>

A report by the Center for American Progress last November was unequivocal: “The expected greenhouse gas emission scenario developed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change portends a world in which people and nations will be threatened by massive food and water shortages, devastating natural disasters and deadly disease outbreaks.”<sup>iv</sup>

The report identifies a “growing demand for international institutions to play new and expanded roles in the management of refugee crises and in providing forums for the negotiation of climate agreements.”

The consensus among these and other experts is that the United States must reduce its consumption of fossil fuels immediately, dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prepare to adapt to the changing political, economic and natural environment.

The Presidential Climate Action Project calls for:

- A 50 percent reduction in domestic oil consumption by 2020;
- Creation of a collaborative international force to protect shipping lanes as oil supplies become increasingly scarce;
- An assessment by the National Intelligence Council of the risks associated with energy policy choices;
- An increased effort to protect the nation’s energy infrastructure from natural disasters or terrorist attacks; and

- An urgent effort to negotiate international agreements to reform subsidies that encourage oil consumption, and to create joint agencies for research and development of new technologies.

*This brief was prepared by the nonpartisan Presidential Climate Action Project at the University of Colorado Denver. PCAP, which is developing a 100-day climate action plan for the next President of the United States, issues briefs from time to time for the use of the presidential candidates as they consider policies to deal with climate change. Details are available at [www.climateactionproject.com](http://www.climateactionproject.com).*

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<sup>i</sup> “U.N. Officials Praise Donation from Islamic Development Bank,” New York Times, June 4, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/05/world/05food.html?ref=world>

<sup>ii</sup> “Climate, Energy and Security” white paper, Sen. Gary Hart, April 2007, [http://www.climateactionproject.com/docs/hart\\_on\\_security.pdf](http://www.climateactionproject.com/docs/hart_on_security.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> “National Security and the Threat of Climate Change,” [www.securityandclimate.cna.org](http://www.securityandclimate.cna.org)

<sup>iv</sup> “Global Warming: The Security Challenges of Climate Change,” John Podesta and Peter Ogden, November 2007, [http://www.csis.org/component/option,com\\_csis\\_pubs/task,view/id,4154/type,1/](http://www.csis.org/component/option,com_csis_pubs/task,view/id,4154/type,1/)