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## Reflections on Reading

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## REFLECTIONS ON READING

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### CLIMATE CHANGE: A FEARSOME FOE

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**T**he Reflections on Reading series of articles is intended to highlight books of interest to all members of the USN team—those in uniform, defense civilians, and contractors—and even citizens at large. The focus of this article (the fifty-eighth entry in the current series) is on the military and civilian implications of climate change. In his 5 April 2023 remarks at the Naval War College’s Forum at Newport on climate change, Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) Carlos Del Toro shared his vision of the future that the Navy, and all the Department of Defense, will face.

Make no mistake, climate change is one of the most destabilizing forces of our time, exacerbating national security concerns and posing serious readiness challenges to our naval and amphibious forces. Our world’s changing climate impacts everything we do across the Department of the Navy, ranging from policy and investment decisions to our operations. Almost a year ago, we published our climate strategy—Climate Action 2030—to provide the Department of the Navy with a meaningful framework to guide how we will address climate change across our Fleet and our Force. A climate-ready force is a stronger, more lethal, and more agile force that is able to operate in uncertain environmental conditions. The investments we are making today ensure the survivability of the platforms our Sailors and Marines rely on to accomplish their missions, giving our Fleet and our Force a warfighting advantage.

We are making great strides in building a resilient shore-based infrastructure to support our forces. Beyond infrastructure, our Sailors and Marines are leveraging game-changing technologies to support both the hybridization and electrification of our systems and platforms. From the electrification of tactical ground vehicles to the exploration of hybrid and advanced propulsion solutions for our ships, the Department of the Navy will continue to innovate and optimize our Fleet and our Force for

improved endurance, survivability, and lethality, while simultaneously reducing our environmental footprint.

A search for books about global warming / climate change results in literally thousands of entries, some of which have the word “hoax” in the title. Many of the so-called climate deniers believe that the claim that humans are causing catastrophic climate change is a hoax, which is being promoted for political reasons, economic ones, or both. This writer does not take a position regarding the reality or fiction of potential climate-related consequences. A common theme of the Reflections on Reading series has been encouragement for discerning readers always to consider alternative points of view on any given topic. (See Reflections on Reading, *Naval War College Review* 74, no. 4 [Autumn 2021].) Accordingly, we urge inquiring minds to sample arguments across the entire spectrum of opinions and judge for themselves what is factually based and what may be a hoax.

The Navy’s position that climate change is real and of increasing concern, however, was outlined clearly in SECNAV’s statements shared above. The paragraphs that follow will identify three books that are recognized widely for presenting a science-based consensus on the criticality of taking aggressive action now to address the projected consequences while time remains to alter the existing negative trends.

First, *The Climate Book* by Greta Thunberg, published in February 2023, became an almost immediate *New York Times* best seller. The 464-page book brings together one hundred authors who contribute ninety short pieces about the coming climate crisis. The book’s editor of Yale Climate Connections calls the book “the most ambitious, wide ranging, and hard-hitting collection I have ever encountered.” The book is organized into the following five parts:

- “How Climate Works” is a series of concise and easily accessible fundamentals about the world’s climate engine.
- “How Our Planet Is Changing” consists of two dozen short essays covering everything from arctic warming and the jet stream to microplastics in the ocean.
- “How It Affects Us” provides twenty essays about climate issues, including sea-level rise, climate refugees, and water shortages.
- “What We’ve Done about It” is a concise analysis of issues such as electrification of transportation, the cost of consumerism, and the myth of recycling.
- “What We Must Do Now,” the fifth and final part, details some steps that citizens can take immediately to address the challenges of climate change, including a particularly interesting essay entitled “Overcoming Climate Apathy.”

Yale's Michael Svoboda acknowledges the contributions of youthful editor/author Greta Thunberg when he notes the quality of her "18 short essays that introduce the volume, mark the subsections, highlight the important takeaways, and call readers to action."

Thunberg's *The Climate Book* looks at climate issues from a very global and very civilian perspective. Alternatively, the second offering, Neta C. Crawford's *The Pentagon, Climate Change, and War: Charting the Rise and Fall of U.S. Military Emissions*, uses a historical-analysis approach to describe in scholarly detail the relationship between U.S. national-security policies and the use of (and protection of access to) fossil fuels. Crawford's carefully researched and thoroughly documented book follows the unquenchable thirst of the U.S. military (with a special focus on the U.S. Navy) for fuel, moving from wood to coal in the 1860s to thick and heavy bunker oil in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, into the highly refined distillates of today. The history of American efforts to create a globe-spanning network of coaling stations, from Japan to Pearl Harbor to Pago Pago Harbor in American Samoa, provides an eye-opening view into the relationship between the need to secure natural resources and American diplomatic priorities. Her excellent depiction of the role that energy security has played for over a century is very enlightening.

As the book concludes, Crawford lays out a path to climate security that she believes will guarantee human and national security. This path includes a smaller fleet of USN ships, reduced defense commitments around the globe, and significantly decreased defense spending—which may not sit well with a pro-military audience. The book deserves a good read, however, and it should not be prejudged on the basis of what some might consider its antidefense and anti-industrial-complex mind-set. The book's value is in the establishment of a spectrum of possible actions, ranging from mediation of greenhouse gas emissions to near-isolationist withdrawal from engagements and treaty obligations around the world.

Third, *Climate Change and National Security: Implications for the Military*, by Albert Palazzo, is a very recent book published by the Army University Press in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The book provides a wide-ranging review of the issues facing military forces around the world. The extensive notes following each chapter, the glossary of technical terms, and the select bibliography make this a tremendous resource to aid in further study on the topic. It also benefits from the fact that it can be downloaded at no cost from [armyupress.army.mil](http://armyupress.army.mil).

In conclusion, given the magnitude and complexity of the challenges posed by climate change, it is imperative that urgent and comprehensive actions be taken to address this global crisis. Mitigation efforts, including transitioning to renewable energy, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and promoting sustainable

practices such as reforestation. Considering the magnitude and complexity of the challenges posed by climate change, it is imperative that urgent and comprehensive actions be taken to address this global crisis. Adaptation measures, such as improving infrastructure resilience, implementing early warning systems, and providing support to vulnerable communities, are also crucial to minimize the impacts of climate change and build resilience. International cooperation and coordination among nations are imperative to tackle climate change effectively. In addition to the environmental, social, health, and economic concerns, climate change also poses ethical and moral dilemmas. The consequences of climate change will be borne by future generations who did not contribute significantly to the problem. The unequal distribution of impacts, with vulnerable populations suffering the most, raises questions of justice and fairness. It also calls for a sense of intergenerational responsibility to take urgent action now to mitigate the effects of climate change and ensure a sustainable future for all.

The preceding paragraph was drafted as an experiment by OpenAI's ChatGPT program. It is reproduced here with no additional editing. The writer wholeheartedly concurs with the sentiments expressed by the ChatGPT program.

JOHN E. JACKSON

*(except for the indicated paragraph)*



