

REDEFINING SECURITY

Joe Biden finally endorsed yesterday what the imperialists in DC have long been backing: an open-ended presence in Afghanistan.

“It is not our intention to govern or to nation-build,” Mr Biden said. “As President Karzai often points out, this is the responsibility of the Afghan people, and they are fully capable of it.”

But he stressed that the United States would continue to assist the Afghan government.

“If the Afghan people want it, we won’t leave in 2014,” Mr Biden said.

Meanwhile, Lester Brown uses the last paragraph of a piece on the coming food riots to point out how out-dated our empire—the decision-making that will lead us to stay in Afghanistan until we go broke—is.

As the new year begins, the price of wheat is setting an all-time high in the United Kingdom. Food riots are spreading across Algeria. Russia is importing grain to sustain its cattle herds until spring grazing begins. India is wrestling with an 18-percent annual food inflation rate, sparking protests. China is looking abroad for potentially massive quantities of wheat and corn. The Mexican government is buying corn futures to avoid unmanageable tortilla price rises. And on January 5, the U.N. Food and Agricultural organization announced that its food price index for December hit an all-time high.

But whereas in years past, it’s been weather that has caused a spike in commodities prices, now it’s trends on both sides of the food supply/demand

equation that are driving up prices. On the demand side, the culprits are population growth, rising affluence, and the use of grain to fuel cars. On the supply side: soil erosion, aquifer depletion, the loss of cropland to nonfarm uses, the diversion of irrigation water to cities, the plateauing of crop yields in agriculturally advanced countries, and – due to climate change – crop-withering heat waves and melting mountain glaciers and ice sheets. These climate-related trends seem destined to take a far greater toll in the future.

[snip]

The unrest of these past few weeks is just the beginning. It is no longer conflict between heavily armed superpowers, but rather spreading food shortages and rising food prices – and the political turmoil this would lead to – that threatens our global future. Unless governments quickly redefine security and shift expenditures from military uses to investing in climate change mitigation, water efficiency, soil conservation, and population stabilization, the world will in all likelihood be facing a future with both more climate instability and food price volatility. If business as usual continues, food prices will only trend upward.

Note, I think Brown misses one cause of the food shortages: the treatment of food and commodities used in its production as one more thing our bankers can bet on at their casino.

But his point stands: probably the two biggest threats to our country are—first—climate change and—second—the refusal to fix the global economy the bankers broke. Yet we're continuing to pour our dollars into Afghanistan, and to pour

it into efforts that may well just exacerbate the violence.

A McClatchy story written by Medill graduate students shows how badly our own “security” establishment responds to such non-military threats.

Yet the U.S. government is ill-prepared to act on climate changes that are coming faster than anticipated and threaten to bring instability to places of U.S. national interest, interviews with several dozen current and former officials and outside experts and a review of two decades’ worth of government reports indicate.

Climate projections lack crucial detail, they say, and information about how people react to changes – for instance, by migrating – is sparse. Military officials say they don’t yet have the intelligence they need in order to prepare for what might come.

Rolf Mowatt-Larssen, a 23-year veteran of the CIA who led the Department of Energy’s intelligence unit from 2005 to 2008, said the intelligence community simply wasn’t set up to deal with a problem such as climate change that wasn’t about stealing secrets.

[snip]

In 2007, Department of Energy intelligence chief Mowatt-Larssen built an experimental program called Global Energy & Environment Strategic Ecosystem, or Global EESE. He tapped Carol Dumaine, a CIA foresight strategist known around the agency as a creative visionary, to lead the program.

“Our modern intelligence evolved for a different type of threat: monolithic, top-down, incrementally changing,” Dumaine, who has since returned to the

CIA, said in a recent interview. She, on the other hand, was “trying to grow a garden of intelligence genius.”

The program brought together more than 200 of the brightest minds from around the world to explore the impact of issues such as abrupt climate change, energy infrastructure and environmental stresses in Afghanistan.

But after only two years, the program was shuttered. Former members say it was brought down by bureaucratic infighting, political pressure from Congress and the Bush White House, and concerns about including foreign nationals in the intelligence arena.

“The most important thing we lost is data. We lost the data that accompanies new ways of conducting intelligence and for getting it right with environmental problems,” Mowatt-Larssen said. [my emphasis]

We can't prepare for issues that involve science that has been attacked by a well-funded lobby; we can't prepare for issues that require open sharing with foreign nationals; we can't prepare for events that don't involve stealing secrets; we can't protect national security programs that don't fit Republicans' narrowly defined understanding of it; we can't prepare for problems not caused by nation-states.

And one thing this article doesn't say is that if we can't prepare to deal with the changes climate change will bring, we sure as hell can't prevent or mitigate its effects.

The US empire is in decline on many levels. Its time of economic hegemony is passing; its too-big military is not designed to fight the threats against our country; its government has been rendered dysfunctional by corporate money.

But one of the biggest problems with the US

empire is that it chose not to—or was unable to—use its twilight period to prepare for the challenges ahead.