



Dr. James R. Lee

Natural Security: Global Warming and World Conflict

EXCLUSIVE

“We’re used to thinking of climate change as an environmental problem, not a military one, but it’s long past time to alter that mindset.” So says Dr. James Lee, an international expert in how global warming is heating up geopolitical tensions around the world.

An innovative researcher and practitioner of international relations, Lee is a professor in the School of International Service at American University in Washington, D.C. and the author of the soon-to-be published “Hot War and Cold War: Pathways from Climate Change to Armed Conflict.”

Lee is a veteran of the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency who has a broad base of experience in government and academics. His latest research is his project, the “Inventory of Conflict and Environment,” or ICE—a catalyst work that has built and made available over 200 case studies on the crosshairs of climate change and human conflict. (www.american.edu/TED/ice/ice.htm)

As climate change affects the planet, tensions increase because of scarcity--the massive migration of people fleeing increasingly uninhabitable areas, creating border conflicts, greater demand for rescue and evacuation services and disputes over essential resources. The world gets hotter and drier, glaciers melt, and the amount of arable land will shrink. In turn, Lee explains, fresh water, plants and crops, cattle and other domestic animals will be harder to come by, spurring competition over what’s left.

But, that’s not the only national security issue, Lee contends. With climate change comes the opposite impact of abundance. Previously economically or physically undesirable precious resources become more desirable to attain with warmer temperatures like oil and gas in Canada, Alaska, and Siberia. The world order then reshuffles the deck and claims to sovereignty over areas like the Northwest Passage and the entire Arctic becomes a race.

Lee, associate director for American University’s Center for Teaching Excellence, also runs the “Trade and Environment Database” researching the field of trade and the environment. He is the author of “Exploring the Gaps: The Vital Links Between Trade, Environment and Culture” and co-author of “Theory and Practice of International Relations.”

He has written or appeared in The Washington Post, the BBC, Maryland Public Television, National Public Radio (NPR), and WorldNet Television. His presentations have reached to the United Nations, the International Studies Association, the National Wildlife Federation, the Congressional Youth Leadership Council, and the Association for International Agriculture and Rural Development, among others.

James Lee is an insightful and global visionary who explores the intersection of the ecological tipping point with the political boiling point.