The devastating wildfires consuming neighborhoods from Pacific Palisades to Pasadena are not just a local tragedy—they are a glaring reminder of the challenges posed by climate change. My heart goes out to my friends who have lost homes and businesses. The sight of familiar landmarks engulfed in flames is profoundly saddening.

These wildfires are not mere accidents of nature. While they have intensely local impacts, their underlying drivers are increasingly global. Climate change, fueled by greenhouse gas emissions, has amplified conditions conducive to such disasters. As we confront this harsh reality, it is time to adopt what I call “climate realism”—a pragmatic approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change.



Acknowledge the Inevitable

Climate realism begins by facing facts: the world is unlikely to meet ambitious targets such as limiting global warming to 2°C above preindustrial levels or achieving net-zero emissions by midcentury. In the United States, the likely outcome includes average warming exceeding 3°C (5.4°F) by century's end. This spells intensifying wildfire risks, alongside other climate impacts like severe droughts, extreme heat waves, and powerful hurricanes.

Already, Los Angeles has warmed approximately 3°C since preindustrial times, double the global average. This heightened heat has created conditions ripe for wildfires. By midcentury, these fires could become at least 7% more intense, with even graver projections for 2100. While shifts in weather patterns, such as changes in Santa Ana winds, remain uncertain, the overall risk is clear: a hotter, drier California faces more frequent and destructive wildfires.

Adaptation as an Immediate Priority

Reducing U.S. greenhouse gas emissions—a small and declining share of global emissions—will not meaningfully alter this trajectory in the near term. Instead, adaptation offers the most effective path to reducing wildfire damage. Here are three actionable strategies:

1. **Enforce Stringent Building Codes**: The spread of urban areas into wildfire-prone regions has increased vulnerability. Structures in at-risk zones must be built to withstand disasters, or development should be curtailed in these areas altogether.
2. **Reform Insurance Incentives**: Current insurance regulations often subsidize risky development by shielding property owners from the full costs of living in disaster-prone areas. Exposing property owners to true actuarial costs would discourage rebuilding in vulnerable locations, fostering safer economic development.
3. **Enhance Fuel Management**: Decisive action to reduce dangerous brush through mechanical removal and prescribed burns is overdue. Overhauling cumbersome environmental review processes and significantly increasing

investments in fuel management are vital steps to limit future wildfire devastation.

Prioritize Climate as National Security

Climate change presents far greater risks to U.S. security than many traditional foreign policy challenges. While policymakers focus on conflicts in the Middle East or tensions with China, the damages inflicted by climate change—like the estimated $50 billion cost of the Palisades Fire—far outweigh these concerns. Imagine the economic and human toll of future hurricanes, droughts, and wildfires as akin to missiles launched by foreign coal-burning economies. The United States must elevate climate change mitigation as a top-tier national security priority.



Prepare for Escalating Costs

The fiscal implications of climate change are staggering. Annual disaster recovery and infrastructure hardening costs already reach tens of billions of dollars and could approach a trillion in coming decades. Addressing this challenge requires sound fiscal planning at all levels of government. Without significant budgetary reforms, the U.S. will lack the resources to protect its citizens, rebuild infrastructure, and invest in resilience measures as climate impacts intensify.

Leadership for a Global Solution

Although the United States alone cannot significantly curb global emissions, it has a critical role to play. By developing innovative decarbonization technologies, sharing policy solutions, and leveraging its diplomatic and economic influence, the U.S. can lead the world toward a more sustainable future. Should these efforts fall short, geoengineering may become a necessary, albeit controversial, tool to combat climate change.



The wildfires ravaging Southern California are a stark reminder of what's at stake. They underscore the urgent need for pragmatic adaptation strategies and a foreign policy that prioritizes global emission reductions. Climate realism—grounded in the dual goals of adaptation and mitigation—is not only in America's self-interest but also offers a path to avert the most catastrophic outcomes of climate change.

The road ahead is challenging, but by acting decisively today, the United States can protect its citizens, its economy, and its future from the escalating threats of a warming world.