



THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

Why retired general **Wesley K. Clark** says you need to see the new environmental doc *Living in the Future's Past*

What kind of world do we want to live in? What kind of world do we want to leave for our children and grandchildren? How are our actions today going to define that future world?

These questions are the subject of a new award-winning environmental documentary *Living in the Future's Past*, premiering in theaters across the U.S. this October. Academy Award winner Jeff Bridges and director Susan Kucera collaborated to bring this thought-provoking film to the screen, assembling a diverse group of thought leaders, including scientists, authors, philosophers, and

politicians, to contribute.

A member of that group is former NATO Supreme Allied Commander General Wesley K. Clark, who rose to the rank of four-star general before retiring after 38 years of service in the Army. In an exclusive interview with *Salute*, Clark calls the film, "a thoughtful appeal to the problems of modern life," noting that the movie "questions some of the assumptions and the situations we find ourselves in as human beings. If you are a parent, bringing a child into the world, you have to help think beyond the everyday situation and think about the world you are leaving that child."

In broad strokes, *Living in the Future's Past* addresses how major changes in the Earth's climate and biodiversity are the result of the collective actions of humanity, particularly the reliance on petroleum to fuel ever-increasing energy requirements. The movie points out that evolution has hardwired human brains to respond to immediate threats, not global ones. "This is the great challenge of our time, dealing with the human impact on the environment and what it means in terms of our civilization going forward," Clark states in the film, adding that climate change "is going to impact the way humans live on the planet."

The film asserts that climate change—and the fossil-fuel-based economies driving that change—is putting stress on societies that are already stressed, decreasing access to adequate supplies of food and water, decreasing biodiversity, and making certain geographic regions less valuable and others more valuable. This, in turn, is causing population shifts, which can destabilize governments and lead to global conflicts.

Clark, who has a high profile both in and out of the military, says that he was approached by the filmmakers to be one of the movie's commentators because of his experience in the fields of energy, alternative energy, corporate and national security, logistics, aerospace and defense, and investment banking. Since retiring from the military in 2000, he has served as an investment banker, board member of various international firms, commentator, author, and teacher. In September 2003, he ran as a Democratic candidate for president of the United States; his campaign won the state of Oklahoma and launched him to national prominence before he returned to the private sector in February 2004, founding his own firm, Wesley K. Clark & Associates.

Clark notes in the film that it is challenging for people and governments to avoid short-term thinking, but vital to "look at long-term problems" and "move into the future wisely." Yet, he admits, he did not always take such a broad view: While in the military, Clark says he followed the advice of General Gordon Sullivan, who served as the 32nd

chief of staff of the U.S. Army, who said, "Work your lane; don't worry about the guy next to you."

"When you are in the military, you have an obligation to follow orders, do your duty, follow the chain of command, and uphold the Constitution of the United States," Clark explains. "As a senior officer, you think about the troops and the missions, but not about these big issues. Once you become a senior officer, you may be in a position to have some input into policy, but most soldiers do not."

When he got out of the military, Clark says he became exposed to a broader range of problems and potential solutions facing the country. "I became concerned about the challenges facing America," he says, pointing to terrorism, cybersecurity, financial stability, the growing global ascendancy of China, and climate change as the areas of deepest concern. "These are big issues that require big thinking. They require international cooperation. There is no magic bullet."

However, Clark says he is optimistic about the future and about humanity's ability to come together and find solutions to these major challenges. "I take a broad view of humanity. People are far more alike than they are different," he asserts. "You have to do what you can to help each other, to do what's right. For people in uniform, that means to be strong, to be ready, to serve. For those out of uniform, there are many other opportunities to help: in charitable ways, in business ways, in helping develop new technologies—it can be a church mission, helping a homeless person, taking better care of your own family. The wonderful thing about the film is that it doesn't recommend a single course of action. People can and should use their own imagination and ideas to make a difference."

On a side note, Clark had a message for *Salute's* readership: "I would like to thank each of your readers, the brave men and women in uniform and the families who support them by helping them through the struggles, the sacrifices, and the moves. All of our brave troops and their family members deserve my thanks, and the thanks of a grateful nation."