



Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

962 Wayne Avenue, Suite 610 • Silver Spring, MD 20910

Phone: (202) 265-PEER • Fax: (202) 265-4192

Email: info@peer.org • Web: <http://www.peer.org>

Trump Schizophrenic on Climate Change National Security Risk

March 26, 2018

Introduction

To say the Trump Administration's posture on climate change lacks coherence would be an understatement. Over the past few months, Mr. Trump has contradicted both himself and his Pentagon. He signed the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act making it the law of the land that climate change is a "direct threat to national security." In addition, the Administration released the Climate Science Special Report, to date, the most authoritative assessment of the science of climate change, which provides further irrefutable evidence that our climate is changing and the change is caused by human activities. But Mr. Trump has lost touch with this reality and has released his first National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy, neither of which address the long-known impact of climate change on national security. Not only does Congress disagree with Trump's view that climate change is not a direct national security threat, his Secretary of Defense himself disagrees. DOD officials acknowledged climate change as a security threat and are moving forward to protect U.S. installations from that threat.

National Security Strategy

Periodically the executive branch releases a National Security Strategy (NSS), which outlines the major national security threats of the United States and how the administration plans to deal with them. The Trump Administration's first NSS¹ was released in December 18 2017, replacing the 2015 Obama Administration NSS². The most glaring change from the previous strategy is the omission of climate change as a national security threat. The Obama Administration highlighted climate change prominently in 2010 NSS³ and, in the 2015 NSS, included it as one of the top 8 strategic security risks facing U.S. It stated "confronting climate change as an urgent

¹<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>

² <http://nssarchive.us/national-security-strategy-2015/>

³ <http://nssarchive.us/national-security-strategy-2010/>

and growing threat to national security, contributing to natural disasters, refugee flows, and conflict over basic resources like food and water.”

In the Trump NSS, three of the four uses of the term “climate” refer to business climate. The fourth use is in the “Embrace Energy Dominance” section, which states “Climate policies will continue to shape the global energy system.” In this same section, the strategy mentions greenhouse gases pollution. It states “The United States will remain a global leader in reducing traditional pollution, as well as greenhouse gases, while growing its economy.” And finally, in the section “Promote American Resilience” it states, “We can, however, help Americans remain resilient in the face of adversity. Resilience includes the ability to withstand and recover rapidly from deliberate attacks, accidents, natural disasters, and ...”

The NSS is primarily a political document and will likely have a marginal impact on the day-to-day actions of the Department of Defense (DoD) to minimize climate change risks to its mission.⁴ Thus, even though the 2017 NSS does not explicitly call out climate change as a risk to our national security, it does not preclude any departments and agencies from addressing climate change risks to security.

Congress disagrees with the omission of climate change as a threat to national security. In a letter to Trump⁵, a bipartisan group of 100 House members called leaving climate change out of NSS “a significant step backwards”. The letter went on to say, “We have heard from scientists, military leaders, and civilian personnel who believe that climate change is indeed a direct threat to America’s national security and to the stability of the world at large. As global temperatures become more volatile, sea levels rise, and landscapes change, our military installations and our communities are increasingly at risk of devastation. It is imperative that the United States addresses this growing geopolitical threat.”

National Defense Strategy

An unclassified summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) was released in January and articulates the U.S. strategy to compete, deter, and win in an increasingly complex global security environment. The NDS is updated about every ten years and replaces the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). The NDS is a statement of defense priorities and values and is not a binding, controlling, nor exhaustive blueprint for DOD activities⁶. The NDS flows from the vision laid out in the National Security Strategy and, not surprisingly, deliberately omits reference to climate change as a national security threat.

⁴ <https://climateandsecurity.org/2017/12/18/reaction-the-new-national-security-strategy-and-climate-change/>

⁵ http://langevin.house.gov/sites/langevin.house.gov/files/documents/01-11-18_Langevin_Stefanik_Letter_to_POTUS_Climate_Change_National_Security_Strategy.pdf

⁶ [http://www.newsweek.com/trumps-new-defense-strategy-where-climate-change-and-special-forces-789629.](http://www.newsweek.com/trumps-new-defense-strategy-where-climate-change-and-special-forces-789629)

Such omission in the NDS is a rejection of not only Obama era policy but also of an identified national security threat since George W. Bush. The military and intelligence communities have been concerned about climate change since 1990⁷. In 2003, the Bush Administration reported the potential for conflict, refugee crises and border tensions resulting from abrupt climate change. Bush first included climate change in the 2008 NDS⁸. Both the 2010 and 2014 QDRs, prepared under Obama, also featured climate change as a national security threat.

These Trump strategies are a giant step backward for humankind.

2018 National Defense Authorization Act

In contrast to the Trump National Security and Defense Strategies, Congress passed the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)⁹, which identifies climate change as “a direct threat to the national security of the United States.” The NDAA also requires each branch of the military to address bases and installations that are most vulnerable to the effects of global warming and report on their efforts to mitigate the effects. On December 12 2017, Trump signed the 2018 NDAA into law. Thus, it is now **the law of the land that “climate change is a direct threat to the national security of the United States and is impacting stability in areas of the world both where the United States Armed Forces are operating today, and where strategic implications for future conflict exist.”**

Department of Defense Infrastructure Report

On January 26, 2018, in response to a 2016 Congressional request, the DOD released a new survey of climate-change related risks to military infrastructure worldwide. The Climate-Related Risk to DoD Infrastructure Initial Vulnerability Assessment Survey (SLVAS) Report¹⁰ finds that military installations worldwide are already seeing the effects of a changing climate. The highest number of reported effects were from drought, wind, and non-storm related flooding followed by flooding due to storm surges and wildfire.

Trump’s military appears to disagree with him

As other agencies drop the mention of climate change from their web sites, Secretary Mattis and other DOD officials have acknowledged climate change as a security threat during testimony and public comments. Since March 2017, 12 senior DOD officials have raised

⁷ <https://climateandsecurity.org/2017/01/12/chronology-of-the-u-s-military-and-intelligence-communities-concern-about-climate-change/>

⁸ <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2008NationalDefenseStrategy.pdf>

⁹P.L. 115-91

¹⁰ <https://climateandsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/tab-b-slvas-report-1-24-2018.pdf>

concerns and recommended actions to address the security implications of climate change.¹¹ This includes Secretary James Mattis; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Joseph Dunford; Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Paul J. Selva; and four Assistant Secretaries among others.

In unpublished testimony before a Senate panel, now Secretary James Mattis stated “Climate change is impacting stability in areas of the world where our troops are operating today¹².” Secretary Mattis has also stated¹³:

“Climate change can be a driver of instability and the Department of Defense must pay attention to potential adverse impacts generated by this phenomenon”

“..climate change is a challenge that requires a broader, whole-of government response. If confirmed, I will ensure that the Department of Defense plays its appropriate role within such a response by addressing national security aspects”

“I agree that the effects of a changing climate — such as increased maritime access to the Arctic, rising sea levels, desertification, among others — impact our security situation. I will ensure that the department continues to be prepared to conduct operations today, and in the future, and that we are prepared to address the effects of a changing climate on our threat assessments, resources, and readiness.”

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Joseph Dunford, has said that climate change and rising sea levels pose the most serious long-term security threat to the country.¹⁴

In March 2017, President Trump signed an Executive Order 13783 rescinding Obama climate change actions in the Federal agencies. The DOD, however, is keeping Obama climate resilience policies (DOD Directive 4715.21)¹⁵ intact with minor changes. This directive is a cross service effort to assess and respond to concerns over climate adaptation and resilience. The military is still moving forward to protect U.S. installations from the threat of climate change by leaving the semantics of climate change to others. They have separated the arguments around climate change from the threats that sea level rise, more extreme storms, etc. are generating.¹⁶

¹¹ <https://climateandsecurity.org/2018/02/21/chronology-of-u-s-military-leadership-on-climate-change-and-security-2017-2018/>

¹² https://www.propublica.org/article/trumps-defense-secretary-cites-climate-change-national-security-challenge?utm_campaign=bt_twitter&utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social

¹³ <https://climateandsecurity.org/2017/03/14/secretary-mattis-clear-eyed-on-climate-security-risks/>

¹⁴ <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/national/article158716369.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/471521p.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2017/09/12/pentagon-is-still-preparing-for-global-warming-even-though-trump-said-to-stop/>

U.S. Global Change Climate Science Special Report

The U.S. Global Change Research Program (USGCRP), comprised of 13 federal agencies, was established by Presidential Initiative in 1989 and mandated by Congress in 1990¹⁷ to “assist the Nation and the world to understand, assess, predict, and respond to human-induced and natural processes of global-change.” The Congressional mandate also requires USGCRP to prepare a quadrennial national climate assessment.

The Climate Science Special Report¹⁸, released November 3 2017, is the first installment of the Fourth National Climate Assessment, which is due out in 2018. The Climate Science Special Report, released by the Trump Administration, is, to date, the most authoritative assessment of the science of climate change with a focus on the United States. Based on thousands of studies, the report concludes that storms (including hurricanes) are becoming more powerful, heavy rainfall is more frequent, extreme cold temperatures and cold waves are less frequent, heat waves, wildfires, and droughts are more intense and more frequent. This assessment concludes, based on extensive evidence, that it is extremely likely that human activities, especially emission of greenhouse gases, are the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century. With an unprecedented level of scientific certainty, the Climate Science Special Report refutes Trump’s and high-level administration official’s views of climate change – its existence and causes.

Conclusion

If you think Trump is confused, you are not alone. Our allies and our enemies agree. The American public and climate scientists, however, understand the threat of climate change. Ninety-seven percent of climate scientists agree climate change is happening and is the result of human activity¹⁹. And 68% of the American public understands that climate change is due to the effects of human activities²⁰. Fortunately, the Pentagon’s preparations for climate change are well underway and are accelerating in pace and intensity.

¹⁷ P.L. 101-606

¹⁸ <https://science2017.globalchange.gov/>

¹⁹ <http://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/11/4/048002>

²⁰ <http://news.gallup.com/poll/206030/global-warming-concern-three-decade-high.aspx>