

Testimony: Climate Change and the Threat to National Security

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Environmental Protection Agency's "Clean Power Plan" proposed rule. I am here today because I believe climate change is a real threat to our national security and it is our responsibility as a nation to respond to that threat in a meaningful way. I am not a regulatory expert, so I will not comment on the specifics of the rule, but I do support actions by our government that reduces the risks climate change poses to our security as a country.

My more than three and a half decades as a Marine has taught me that we cannot wait to address looming threats until we have absolute certainty. A major part of my service was during the Bush Administration and I had the opportunity to hear Vice President Cheney on several occasions. In 2001, the Vice President said that if there is only a 1% chance of a terrorist acquiring weapons of mass destruction, we have to act. Today, when we have over 99% of scientific papers telling us that human emissions are causing climate change, which is more than enough certainty for us to act.

For too long, we have failed to address the challenges of climate change. But our armed forces have seen the risks and, responding to their sacred obligation to protect our citizens, are already acting to address the very real threats posed by climate change. The military understand that we must be ready to conduct missions in a rapidly changing operational environment and while managing the new risks posed by climate change.

The senior leaders of our armed forces increasingly understand the true nature of this threat; not because the military suddenly determined that it wants to save the environment – but rather because the military sees that climate change presents clear danger to our national security with three distinct challenges;

First, climate change is a global "threat multiplier." That means it will make already existing threats like political instability, ethnic tensions, food insecurity, or poverty worse and more dangerous.

Specific threats to security vary around the world depending on both the climate and on the society. For example, in places like Sub-Saharan Africa of the Middle East, the problem is likely to be too little water. Already marginal agricultural land like the Sahel could become incapable of feeding the people living on it – leading them to move into areas where they could come into conflict with people of different ethnic groups already living there.

The effects of climate change around the world will cause resources like food, water, and energy to become more scarce as the effects of climate change worsen; states will seek to secure resources for their own populations at the expense of neighbors. While conflict is not inevitable, it becomes increasingly possible.

This is not just the future we are talking about. Extreme weather events are already demanding a military response. Typhoon Haiyan made landfall in the Philippines with maximum sustained winds

estimated at 195 mph – the highest in recorded history. Over 13,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines from the USS George Washington’s battle group and the Third Marine Brigade responded – and they saved lives.

Second, climate change will effect homeland security – and that is a growing military mission. In 2012, Active Duty and National Guard troops responded to New York and New Jersey after Sandy. Defense Support to Civil Authority is a growing mission for our military – where our active duty troops provide logistical aid, humanitarian relief, and law enforcement support to civilian authorities. These type of operations are growing as extreme weather grows across the country.

You don’t have to go to the Arctic to see climate change occurring. As a farmer, I see it happening here in the South. And the issue is not about hugging trees or saving the red-cockaded woodpecker. Climate change threatens our region’s agriculture and timber industries that support hundreds of thousands of jobs and contribute billions to the economy.

Here in the Southeast, wide swings in temperatures and unpredictable weather require farmers to plant seeds that are more drought-, moisture- and temperature-tolerant. Low-lying communities and farmland are threatened by flooding as extreme rain events require additional measures to protect infrastructure and conservation measures to retain the soil.

Third, climate change is a threat to our military bases at home and around the world. The United States military manages property in all 50 states, 7 U.S. territories and 40 foreign countries, comprising almost 300,000 individual buildings around the globe, valued at over \$600 billion dollars. Rising sea levels already are causing millions of dollars worthier of damage to the Navy’s coastal installations. But they’re not alone: wildfires have caused evacuations this year at the Marine Corps’ Camp Pendleton, while the Army has seen extreme rain events wash-out areas of the National Training Center at Fort Irwin. The military is adapting to these changes, but at a cost to taxpayers.

For those who question the science, I would say that reducing greenhouse gases while implementing measures to adapt to the effects of climate change is basic risk management. Military planners routinely operate under uncertainty and make decisions based on incomplete information. It is important that we take immediate and positive actions to reduce greenhouse gases as an important step in addressing the challenges of climate change.

If we fail in addressing climate change we know that our military will have to respond to more disasters, terrorists will have more recruits to draw from, and the world will see more conflicts over increasingly scarce resources, and ordinary Americans will pay the price.