



Thank you, Senator Duckworth, Senator Schatz, and members of the Committee, for inviting me to testify at today's hearing on climate change and national security.

I am Andrew Holland, the Chief Operating Officer of the American Security Project, a non-partisan think tank that focuses on America's long-term national security. We cover topics from non-proliferation to counter-terrorism, American competitiveness to energy security. Our board of directors is chaired by former New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman, includes notable former Senators like John Kerry, Chuck Hagel, and Gary Hart, and features retired senior flag officers from all four military services.

As ASP's COO, I oversee all of ASP's work, but my research focuses on energy and the environment, and how they affect America's national security. I've been at the center of these debates since I was on staff here in the Senate more than ten years ago. Then, working for Nebraska Senator Chuck Hagel, I supported his efforts to pass legislation that would request a National Intelligence Estimate on climate change and its impact on national security.

In the security community, we call climate change a "threat multiplier" or an "accelerant of instability." The climate affects issues like food, water, energy security. Its second order effects create economic and political challenges, could drive migration, unrest and – potentially - armed conflict.

Therefore, the national security implications of climate change are determined by how it affects local political, social, and economic conditions –more than by the size of the climatic shift itself. That means areas already under strain are likely to become even more so. These basic findings



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have been enunciated in major defense, intelligence, and foreign policy planning documents since 2006.

Unfortunately, the current National Defense Strategy (released in 2018) and National Security Strategy (released in late 2017) include no mention of “climate change.” However, reading between the lines, its impacts are felt throughout. These documents reframe American priorities within a new context of “great power competition,” focusing on China, Russia and smaller states like North Korea and Iran.

They note the challenges of an “increasingly complex security environment” – while any coherent analysis would necessarily include climate change as a major component. But, even with this “great power” focus, there are two key reasons that climate remains relevant to security planners.

First, the central finding of the 9/11 commission report still holds: ungoverned spaces are a threat to American security. They provide militant groups the sanctuary they need to grow and plan complex attacks across borders. As climate change undermines governmental legitimacy, we’ve seen extremist groups like ISIS and Boko Haram rapidly expand during times of environmental and political crises. They have global ambitions to harm Americans and our allies.

While we know the U.S. cannot ignore these terror groups, we should be concerned that we’re ignoring other places with the same conditions that allowed them to grow and thrive. Long-term droughts or short-term disasters can destroy once-vital farming regions – turning already poor people into desperate migrants, and then into terrorist recruits. We’re seeing this happen



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right now in Central America, but the only clear American policy is to scare people away from leaving. I hesitate to call vulnerable, desperate migrants a “security threat,” but the sheer numbers of them do provide cover and recruits for bad actors like drug smugglers and transnational criminal gangs.

Second, environmental instability provides our global adversaries with a powerful new tool for competition with the U.S. Increasingly, climate and energy assistance are used as a new tool of influence. As countries in strategically important regions - like South America, the Pacific and West Africa – struggle to address climate change, our adversaries offer them comprehensive climate and energy development packages, while they see U.S. focusing primarily on military cooperation and pulling out of the Paris Agreement. In the coming years, climate action will be an increasingly important tool of soft power – one where the U.S. is seen to be absent.

You can see this on the islands of the South Pacific: home to some of the most vulnerable countries with the very existence of places like the Marshall Islands or Vanuatu at risk. This is well-known, but also strategically important in the contest between the U.S. and China. Chinese leaders have extended their “Belt and Road” network into what they call the “second island chain”, showering cash to build seawalls, ports, and clean energy – all while turning a blind-eye to corruption. If we aren’t careful, we could see the current challenges of the South China Sea extended well into the Pacific.

Finally, the Arctic: the fastest warming area of the world. Russia is militarizing its Arctic, while the U.S. ignores investment into the region. NATO faces a severe military challenge in the European Arctic area of operation, while Alaska faces growing security challenges from extreme weather, sea level rise, and growing traffic. The region needs a concerted diplomatic, security, and economic push from the U.S. government – but not one that upends the existing order.



In offering policy recommendations, I would say that there are opportunities for bipartisanship. In the last 3 years, we have proven that there is the ability to legislate within the NDAA on climate security, but this cannot be solely a military mission. I want to encourage members to think beyond the Pentagon. To build the foresight to prevent climate security challenges, we need coordination between the Intelligence Community, the State Department, and the Defense Department. The White House's National Security Council is the logical place for such coordination, and I hope it will one day be again. Until then, Members of Congress should push to build expertise within the agencies: like Senator Menendez's bill, S.745, that some of you have cosponsored, which would create a new Climate Security Envoy within the State Department.

To close, I want to emphasize that there are no security solutions in a world that fails to meet the challenges of climate change sees 4 degrees Celsius of warming: a world of drastically changed food supplies, sea levels, and water availability would be a world that would be beyond the capability of global military forces to secure. On that note of caution, I'll end and be happy to take your questions.