



Understanding and Combating the Security Risks of Climate Change

February 7, 2020

Senator Tammy Duckworth
Opening statement (as prepared)

Good morning everyone, I call this hearing to order.

I would like to thank everyone for attending our hearing today on an issue of critical importance— how climate change threatens our national security.

A special thank you to our witnesses for being willing to share their expertise with all of us.

Even from the perspective of someone who has come under enemy fire, it is clear to me that not all the biggest threats we will face over the next several years will take the shape of a weapons attack.

The Department of Defense has long acknowledged that climate change poses a grave risk to our military readiness and global stability.

And yet, a report by the Army War College, one of the Nation's premier universities focused on security, has stated that, quote:

“The Department of Defense is precariously unprepared for the national security implications of climate change induced global security challenges.”

They further observe that, quote:

“DoD must now promulgate a culture of environmental stewardship across the force. Lagging behind public and political demands for energy efficiency and minimal environmental footprint will significantly hamstring the Department's efforts to face national security challenges.”

Simply put, DoD is failing to effectively address the climate-related risks they face.

Take, for example, the risks climate change poses to our military installations and facilities at home and across the globe.

Extreme weather events, including rising sea levels, flooding, droughts, wildfires and storms, are already inflicting billions of dollars' worth of damage to DoD property and platforms.

U.S. bases in the Marshall Islands are home to the Army's world-class range and test facility: the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site. This vital national asset is critical in strengthening our Nation's ballistic missile defenses and space operations.

However, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, these islands are expected to be flooded annually by 2040. By 2035—just 15 years from now—the islands may lack potable water year-round.

In September 2018, Hurricane Florence damaged Camp Lejeune and other Marine Corps facilities in North Carolina. The preliminary Marine Corps estimate of repair costs totaled \$3.6 billion.

One month later, Hurricane Michael devastated Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida, with a preliminary Air Force repair estimate of \$5 billion and upwards of five years to complete the work.

While these bases may rebuild over time, the loss of training and readiness cannot be recovered.

In a February letter to the Secretary of the Navy, General Neller, Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, wrote that because of the damage from the storms, quote: "One-third of the entire combat power of the Marine Corps has been degraded and will continue to degrade."

That should scare anyone who cares about our national security.

Let me be clear: hurricanes are weather events that occur annually in the Atlantic.

What makes 2018 unusual is that it was the third in a consecutive series of above-average and damaging hurricane seasons that caused a total of over \$50 billion in damages.

That makes the damage that occurred at Camp Lejeune and Tyndall Air Force Base not an anomaly, but a preview of what the future holds for our military, if DoD fails to improve resilience in the short-term and does not help lower overall emissions in the coming years.

In fact, a congressionally mandated report published by DoD in January 2019 surveyed 79 military bases in the U.S. and found that two-thirds currently face climate change-related risks.

Unfortunately, this administration failed to comply with congressional requirements of this report.

The report left out the Marine Corps entirely and ignored the requirement to provide an overview of action necessary to ensure resiliency.

It did not include any cost estimates. This failure to complete the assessment and provide future mitigation plans will severely inhibit future readiness.

The threats from climate change do not stop at its impacts on our critical infrastructure. Unfortunately they extend to the service men and women who make our military great.

Climate change has been described as a threat multiplier because of its ability to exacerbate many of the challenges we already confront today like infectious diseases and armed insurgencies.

It is also creating new challenges which can overburden weak states, spurring social upheaval and sometimes violent conflict.

This means that where institutions and governments are unable to manage the stress or absorb the shocks of a changing climate, the risks to the stability of nation-states and societies will increase.

Take for example the ongoing Syrian civil war. Several factors contributed to the civil war, including the Arab Spring.

However, another driving factor was described in a 2015 Pentagon report to Congress: severe drought.

The drought in that region — which started fourteen years ago— has been described as the worst long-term drought and most severe set of crop failures since agricultural civilization began in the Fertile Crescent many millennia ago.

This drought led to increased economic instability which encouraged chaos.

The drought did not cause the war, but its created conditions that allowed unrest to thrive.

I want to conclude my remarks with some good news.

Despite the unprecedented threats we face to our security, we also have unprecedented foresight capability and advances in technology.

With the right investments and rigorous planning, I believe we can dramatically reduce the risks climate change presents to our national security and look forward to working with our witnesses and my colleagues on making sure we do just that.