

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) Must Address Our Climate-Related National Security Threat

June 2021

An open legislative letter to the members of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees

Global Warming is a National Security Threat

On January 27, President Biden issued an Executive Order, "[Putting the Climate Crisis at the Center of U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security](#)." It directs all agencies of the federal government to address the "national and economic security impacts of climate change" and directs the Secretary of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and others to "consider the security implications of climate change," in "developing the National Defense Strategy."

The administration's [Interim National Security Strategic Guidance](#) issued March 3rd concluded:

Recent events show all too clearly that many of the biggest threats we face respect no borders or walls, and must be met with collective action. Pandemics and other biological risks, the escalating climate crisis, cyber and digital threats, international economic disruptions, protracted humanitarian crises, violent extremism and terrorism, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction all pose profound and, in some cases, existential dangers.

On April 9, the Director of National Intelligence's [Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community](#) declared:

"Ecological degradation and a changing climate will continue to fuel disease outbreaks, threaten food and water security, and exacerbate political instability and humanitarian crises ... [including] direct, immediate impacts — for example, through more intense storms, flooding, and permafrost melting."

It is a self-evident reality that climate catastrophe is America's most serious immediate and long-term national-security threat, more so than Chinese geopolitical ambitions, Russian expansionism, corrupt governments in Venezuela, rebels in Yemen, Iranian mullahs, or desert terrorists. As defense expert Mandy Smithberger [recently put it](#):

Washington needs to redefine the meaning of both "national security" and "national interest." In a world in which California burns and Texas freezes, in which more than half-a-million Americans have already been felled by Covid-19, it's time to recognize how damaging the over-funding of the Pentagon and a myopic focus on an ever more militarized cold war with China are likely to be to this country.

For too long, "defense" has been too narrowly defined as only fighting, and preparing to fight, armed human enemies. But in our modern world, that definition excludes too many of the most serious dangers that we must defend against today. To meet these real and immediate threats, we must broaden our concept of national-security and national-defense from its current Pentagon-only, guns and soldiers emphasis.

It is incontrovertible that the global-warming climate crises we now face are a direct result of the human-caused increase in greenhouse gases, resulting in:

- Intensifying maximum & minimum temperatures (lethal heat waves & freezing cold)
- Rising sea levels & coastal inundation (massive threat to civic, commercial & private properties)
- More frequent and more intense droughts (shortages of drinking water and food supplies)
- Higher ocean temperatures and acidity (collapse of essential fisheries)
- More frequent and more intense hurricanes & tornadoes (deaths and property destruction)
- Significantly increased precipitation (floods and erosion)

- More frequent and more intense wildfires (deaths and property destruction)
- Permafrost thawing (release of long dormant pathogens and yet more greenhouse gases)
- Hunger, migration, and warfare due to drought, climate shift, desertification, and lethal storms

The number of Americans killed by COVID will soon exceed all those who died in WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, and 9/11 combined. While the role that climate change played in the pandemic is still being studied, scientists are clear that environmental changes are already spreading diseases to new populations as wildlife is forced into new habitats and into contact with humans by global warming. And epidemiologists are sounding the alarm that thawing permafrost may release into the biosphere deadly pestilences from ancient times that modern human beings no longer have any natural immunity against.

We cannot continue to ignore these national security threats. National defense against the growing climate emergency must proceed on five separate levels:

1. **Mitigating the impact on the military and national defense infrastructure.** Like everyone and everything else on the planet, our military is threatened by the effects of global warming. The Obama administration began programs and appropriations to mitigate these threats at bases and installations, but that work was slowed by the Trump regime's climate denial. We support [President Biden's call](#) to reinvigorate this effort.
2. **Reducing and mitigating military activities that cause global warming.** The U.S. military is the largest institutional emitter of greenhouse gases on the planet. Secretary of Defense Austin has stated his intention to address "...[how we approach our own carbon footprint...](#)" We support his initiative, and we urge him to also include provisions like phasing out diesel vehicles and mitigating ship and aircraft pollution.
3. **Addressing the impact of global climate change on "risk analyses, strategy development, and planning guidance."** Rising sea levels, desertification, killer storms, famines, and lethal heat waves will affect people and foreign governments in ways that will create – or be perceived as creating – national security threats. We adamantly **reject** adopting any kind of a "*fortress-America*" approach that erects more barriers to refugees and asylum seekers, suppresses legitimate democratic movements, or uses our armed forces to seize and hold, for our sole use, natural resources in other nations. Our response must prioritize aid and assistance to protect the lives and livelihoods of people around the world who are suffering from the ravages of climate change.
4. **Using national-defense resources to directly combat global warming.** Since global warming and deadly pandemics are significant, serious, and immediate national security threats, some defense resources have to be directed towards combating them. This does not mean placing the Pentagon in charge of our national response to these crises, but it does mean that just as other agencies and departments need to shift some resources towards addressing these threats, so too should the Department of Defense (DoD).
5. **NATO, ANZUS, and other military alliances.** Since climate change both affects the entire planet and is caused by human activity around the globe, the Department of Defense and State Department need to work closely with our military allies to encourage and influence them to also incorporate global warming as a critical security threat that has to be addressed.

Combating the Climate Catastrophe as a National Security Threat

F-35s cannot shoot down Cat 5 hurricanes; a new generation of nuclear weapons won't protect us from killer heat waves; improved battle tanks cannot fight raging wildfires; aircraft carriers won't stem rising sea levels; and Trump's vanity Space Force is useless against lethal pandemics. Therefore, to the greatest extent possible, our national security budget must be reoriented towards defending against catastrophic climate change by bolstering our defenses against global warming, reducing pollution of our air, land, and water, and removing greenhouse gasses from the atmosphere. For example:

- **New generation of nuclear weapons.** For the past 76 years, no nuclear weapon has been used in combat because the international balance of Mutually Assured Destruction has deterred their use. But death and destruction from global warming grows worse every year. Instead of spending \$1.7 trillion over a decade to develop new and more deadly nuclear weapons, defense research should

be redirected towards finding commercially-viable methods for carbon capture and sequestering greenhouse gasses from the atmosphere.

- **Boondoggle fighter jets.** Instead of spending \$80-100 million each to buy more F-35s that cannot meet their mission specifications and cost \$36,000 per hour to fly, that program should be immediately terminated and the funds used to completely cover the roofs of offices, barracks, warehouses and other structures at military installations with solar panels – and then sell the surplus power into the grid at cost.
- **Aircraft Carriers.** Instead of \$11-13 billion apiece for new Ford-class aircraft carriers, those funds should be used to protect essential civilian infrastructure from catastrophic storm floods and rising sea levels.
- **Combat vehicles.** Since the U.S. military is the world's largest institutional producer of global-warming emissions, instead of spending billions on ever more fossil fuel ships, tanks, planes, and helicopters, those funds should be used to significantly reduce the DoD carbon footprint.
- **Super Weapons.** America's national electric grids are crucial components of the national defense infrastructure, yet they are antiquated, vulnerable to hacking and catastrophic weather events, and inadequate to the needs of modern decentralized renewable energy production. Instead of spending billions on hypersonic strike missiles and other weapons more suited to science fiction novels than the current threats we actually face, those funds should be used to expand, harden, strengthen and modernize the grids on which our entire economy and national defense infrastructure depend.
- **Space Force.** Instead of creating an unnecessary and internationally destabilizing Space Force, defense research funding should focus on ways to protect the American people from droughts, fires, famines, and species collapse caused by climate change.

Reduce Pentagon Spending to Fund Other Aspects of National Security

We agree with [President Biden's statement](#) that, “*American leadership must meet this new moment of advancing authoritarianism, including the growing ambitions of China to rival the United States and the determination of Russia to damage and disrupt our democracy.*”

Napoleon observed that, “*An army marches on its stomach.*” Modern military leaders understand that the armed services – and national defense in general – rest on foundations of infrastructure, education, health, and a tax-base derived from general economic prosperity. Therefore, our concept of national security has to become broader than just the weapons and personnel of the armed services.

It is a truism of military history that all too often nations and their armed forces are well prepared to fight the last war but ill-equipped and unready for the current threats. China's global Belt & Road Initiative, its aggressive sovereignty claims in the South China Sea, its human rights abuses against minorities within its borders, and its intense economic effort to dominate the strategic industries of tomorrow are the kinds of threats we face today – threats in which research, education, economic, and diplomatic components play strategic roles that are as important as – or more important than – weapons and soldiers.

Decade by decade, our military has consumed an ever-increasing portion of federal resources while money for diplomacy, economic-infrastructure & development, healthcare, education, scientific research, housing, food-security, clean water & air has declined in real terms. While we spend far too much on a narrowly-defined concept of defense, our schools are deteriorating, our hospitals are closing, our critical infrastructure is crumbling, our research lags, and strategically-directed economic development is nonexistent. Moreover, our defenses against cyber-attack have not received the attention and resources that meeting the threat requires. All of which leave us ill-prepared and poorly positioned to confront and defend against national security threats that are more economic, political, technological, and diplomatic than military.

- The U.S. spends more on its military than the next 12 nations combined. That is neither warranted by the actual foreign threats we face nor is it sustainable indefinitely into the future.
- The size of our armed forces and the paucity of non-military alternatives encourage policy makers to resort to force as the *first* rather than the *last* option – a reflex that makes us less safe and less

secure.

- Pentagon spending has become a form of corporate welfare, so much so that Congress now funds (and over-funds) weapons systems and programs – such as the V-22 Osprey – beyond what the DoD has requested.

Therefore, we **oppose President Biden's [budget request](#)** for a 1.6% increase in defense spending. Instead, we call for significant overall reductions in Pentagon spending and redirecting those funds to other aspects of more broadly and appropriately defined national security:

- Cap overall national defense spending at no more than 2.5% of GDP (Biden is requesting 3.7%).
- Finally end unwinnable “forever wars” that no longer serve any achievable purpose.
- Close unnecessary and redundant foreign and domestic military bases.
- Reduce for-profit private contracting for basic military services.
- End “use-it-or-lose-it” contract-spending policies.
- Cancel the F-35 program.
- Cancel the B-21 bomber program.
- Cancel the GBSB nuclear missile program.
- Slow down and extend the Navy’s shipbuilding programs.
- As proposed by President Biden in his budget request, eliminate the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) budget, and bring legitimate warfighting expenses back under the normal DoD budget.

Defense Policies and Priorities for We the People

National security and national defense issues are not defined by money alone. Therefore, we urge adoption of the following policies and priorities:

- **Solar Power Feed-In.** As a matter of national-security, electricity generated from burning fossil-fuels must be swiftly phased out and replaced by renewable sources. Power utilities must be **required** to purchase and feed into the grid solar-generated electricity from individuals and businesses at a price equal to the cost of the most expensive fossil fuel currently being used by that utility. This will subsidize and encourage individuals and businesses to maximize installation of solar panels on their rooftops and sell the surplus power they generate at a profit. And it will incentivize power companies to phase out fossil fuels starting with the most expensive.
- **Strategic Nuclear Weapons Treaties.** With our planet threatened by environmental catastrophe, we cannot afford the diplomatic cost of engaging in an arms race with other nations whose cooperation we must have to combat global warming. Nor can we afford \$1.6 trillion for a new generation of nuclear weapons and missile systems. Arms control treaties like SALT, START, and INF have been either terminated, allowed to expire, or never implemented. Instead of spending on new generations of enhanced nuclear weapons and missiles, we must negotiate, ratify, and implement a new generation of arms control treaties with Russia and China, and devise some international method of reigning in rogue states like North Korea and Iran.
- **Technology & Education Initiatives.** Use money saved by provisions discussed above to fund a National Defense Technology Initiative to support and encourage the teaching of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) disciplines in public schools that serve low-income communities. And establish a National Defense Scholarship Fund for low-income students who meet college admission criteria for STEM majors but cannot afford to attend university.
- **Cybersecurity.** We support the steps outlined in President Biden’s May 21st [Executive Order on Improving the Nation’s Cybersecurity](#) and urge Congress to appropriate sufficient funds and enact such legislation as is needed to implement the steps he calls for. This must include requirements that essential national infrastructure owned or run by private entities implement and maintain adequate defenses against cyber-attack and that they agree to report and share essential knowledge regarding cyber threats and countermeasures.
- **2001 AUMF.** Either revoke the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (Afghanistan) or amend it to include a “sunset” termination date, a clear and specific expression of mission objectives, targets, and geographic scope, and mandatory reporting requirements to increase transparency and

ensure proper congressional oversight.

- **2002 AUMF.** Repeal the 2002 Authorization for the Use of Military Force Against Iraq.
- **Congressional Authority.** Require presidents to report all incidents in which American armed forces are involved in an attack or hostilities, in either offensive or defensive capacities, to the House and Senate Defense and Foreign Relations committees within 48 hours of their occurrence.
- **End Corruption.** Amend the federal criminal code to prohibit U.S. presidents, vice-presidents, members of the cabinet, and anyone acting on their behalf or for their benefit, from entering into private contracts or agreements with the federal government, any of its agencies, or any foreign government.
- **Prohibit Discrimination.** Prohibit federal employees from discriminating against employees, interns, or applicants on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, or disability. Broaden and strengthen whistleblower protections for all employees.
- **Revoke Restrictions.** We support President Biden's proposal to end the war in Afghanistan by finally withdrawing all U.S. troops. Congress needs to eliminate politically motivated legal provisions that prohibit or restrict withdrawals of U.S. troops from or reduction in military assistance to Europe (e.g. Germany), South Asia (Iraq & Afghanistan), East Asia (Japan & South Korea), West Asia (Yemen, Saudi Arabia, & the Gulf States), and Africa (Niger & Djibouti).
- **Limit the Insurrection Act.** Limit presidential authority to use the Insurrection Act against peaceful nonviolent protests and/or for personal or partisan purposes.
- **Foreign Influence Reporting.** If the FY2022 Intelligence Authorization Act is incorporated into the NDAA, include Senator Warner's "Foreign Influence Reporting in Elections" proposed amendment to last year's act.

Transparency, Accountability, and Honest Bookkeeping

The Pentagon continues to fail its legally-required audits; they can neither track nor account for the funds they already have. The Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990 requires annual audits and financial statements for *all* federal agencies. Every agency except the DoD has complied with that law. The Defense Department failed its first-ever agency-wide audit in 2018; in 2019 it tried and failed again, and in doing so, uncovered 1,300 new deficiencies. And it failed yet again in 2020. *This cannot be allowed to continue.*

Last year, defense spending reached \$750 billion. Of that total, defense contractor profits swallowed an estimated \$150 billion. Yet year after year, contractors who have been **found guilty** of fraud, price-gouging, inadequate or poor-quality goods & services, abusing programs, and improperly disseminating classified information are allowed to continue business-as-usual. When they are caught, they simply pay a fine that is so miniscule it amounts to merely a routine cost of doing business covered by their exorbitant profit margin markups.

Congress must exercise thorough and sustained oversight to track defense spending:

- **Independent Audits.** Direct the Secretary of Defense to commission audits of DoD financial systems by *independent* public accountants to ensure that they meet applicable federal requirements. And continue to do so until they pass.
- **Sanction Fraud.** Require that contractors who have committed proven criminal fraud, misuse, price-gouging, or mishandling of classified information be either barred from doing business with the DoD or subjected to civil and criminal penalties significant enough to deter them in the future.
- **Protect WhistleBlowers.** Amend relevant laws and regulations to enable and protect whistleblowers who report fraud, waste, or abuse to the Inspector General, a supervisor in the employee's direct chain of command, or some other designated official.

Organizational Signatures:

Indivisible San Francisco (ISF), CA
 Action San Francisco, CA
 Ban SUP, CA
 Build Back Better Thurston, WA
 Cloverdale Indivisible, CA
 DemCast USA, National
 Feminists in Action, CA
 INDI2 (Indi Squared), CA
 Indivisible Acton-Area, MA
 Indivisible Alta Pasadena, CA
 Indivisible CA-33, CA
 Indivisible CA-37, CA
 Indivisible CA-43, CA
 Indivisible CA-49, CA
 Indivisible CA Green Team, CA
 Indivisible Chicago Alliance, IL
 Indivisible Claremont / Inland Valley, CA
 Indivisible Columbus District 3, OH
 Indivisible East Bay, CA
 Indivisible Fortuna, CA
 Indivisible Harlem, NY
 Indivisible Healdsburg, CA
 Indivisible Media City Burbank, CA
 Indivisible Ocean Hills, CA
 Indivisible ReSisters, CA

Indivisible Ross Valley, CA
 Indivisible San Jose, CA
 Indivisible Sausalito, CA
 Indivisible Sonoma County, CA
 Indivisible Troy, MI
 Indivisible Ventura, CA
 Indivisible Windsor, CA
 Indivisible Yolo, CA
 Livermore Indivisible, CA
 LP Indivisible, Lincoln Park Detroit, MI
 Normal Heights Indivisible, CA
 Northridge Indivisible, CA
 Orchard City Indivisible, CA
 Progressive Democrats of America, National
 Progressive Dems of the Santa Monica Mtns, CA
 Progressive Schenectady, NY
 Rooted in Resistance, CA
 Santa Cruz Indivisible, CA
 Sister District Marin, CA
 SoCal 350 Climate Action, CA
 Swing Left Marin, CA
 Together We Will/Indivisible - Los Gatos, CA
 Venice Resistance, CA
 Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club, CA
 West Harlem Progressive Democratic Club, NY





LP-INDIVISIBLE
LAFAYETTE PARK, DETROIT



Build Back Better



NORMAL HEIGHTS
INDIVISIBLE



Indivisible Windsor



Cloverdale
indivisible



Wellstone Democratic
Renewal Club



SwingLeft Marin

