

Spying on Sea Lions?

The Truth About Bipartisan Concern over the Threat of Climate Change

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) recently re-launched a program to share surveillance and other data with scientists monitoring climate change. Images from spy satellites—declassified and degraded—will be invaluable to scientists as they monitor the effects of climate change on sea ice, glaciers, tropical rainforests, and other natural phenomena. While some have criticized the program as merely “spying on sea lions,”¹ they ignore the growing consensus across the national security community about the threat posed by climate change.

The Threat is Real

Despite recent criticisms to the contrary, climate security has received growing bipartisan concern for decades, dating back to the last days of the Reagan Administration. In many cases, initiatives began under President George W. Bush are being continued and/or expanded by President Barack Obama, today.

Central Intelligence Agency: The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) announced the creation of a Center on Climate Change and National Security in September 2009. It will examine how droughts, sea-level rise, migration and resource competition could affect U.S. military and economic security. On climate change, CIA Director Leon Panetta stated “Decision makers need information and analysis on the effects climate change can have on security. The CIA is well positioned to deliver that intelligence.”²

Department of Defense: The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) fact sheet released in April 2009 states: “U.S. strategy must also increasingly account for... powerful trends that are reshaping the international landscape and will dramatically

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1 “Sen. Barrasso Equates CIA Climate Center to ‘Spying on Sea Lions.’” Wall Street Journal: Washington Wire Blog. 10/6/2009. <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2009/10/06/sen-barrasso-equates-cia-climate-center-to-spying-on-sea-lions/>

2 “CIA Opens Center on Climate Change and National Security.” Central Intelligence Agency Press Release. 9/25/2009. <https://www.cia.gov/news-information/press-releases-statements/center-on-climate-change-and-national-security.html>

complicate the exercise of American statecraft and overseas relations. In addition to the current global economic downturn, these trends include climate change, cultural and demographic shifts, increasing scarcity of resources and the spread of destabilizing technologies.”³ Similarly, the final national military strategy of the Bush administration included climate change among key trends shaping the international arena.

United States Global Change Research Program (USGCRP): Announced by President Ronald Reagan in January 1989 and sustained by every Democratic and Republican president since then, the USGCRP coordinates and integrates federal research on changes in the global environment and their implications for society. Overseen by the Executive Office of the President (EOP), in 2009 the USGCRP released, “Global Climate Change Impacts in the United States,” representing the consensus of the 13 USGCRP agencies and providing a comprehensive overview of the America’s climate future by region and sector.⁴

National Intelligence Council (NIC): The National Intelligence Council has increased its focus on climate change in recent years. It completed its first assessment specifically focused on the security implications of climate change, “National Intelligence Assessment on the National Security Implications of Global Climate Change to 2030,” in 2008. The report stated that climate change would significantly impact geopolitics and contribute to problems including poverty, environmental degradation and the weakening of national governments. It also warned that the storms, droughts and food shortages resulting from continued global warming would create increased relief emergencies and add strains on U.S. military capacity. After the report’s release, the NIC began research on the national security implications of climate change in six countries/regions: China, India, Russia, Mexico/Caribbean, North Africa, and Southeast Asia/Pacific Islands.⁵

“Green Fleets” at Sea and on Land

The U.S. military is focused on climate change because it recognizes the phenomenon’s potential to shape international conflict in the years ahead. For a variety of reasons, the military is reconsidering its dependence on petroleum—not simply as a matter of environmental stewardship, but because of hard national security concerns. Put simply, oil and gasoline cost a lot of money and have to be shipped around the world to sustain American military operations. This makes American service members vulnerable. Here’s how the U.S. military is responding:

3 “2010 QDR Terms of Reference Fact Sheet.” United States Department of Defense. 4/27/2009. <http://www.defense.gov/news/d20090429qdr.pdf>

4 “Global Climate Change Impacts in the United States.” United States Global Change Research Program (USGCRP). 6/16/2009. <http://www.globalchange.gov/publications/reports/scientific-assessments/us-impacts>

5 “The Impact of Climate Change to 2030.” National Intelligence Council. 6/25/2008. http://www.dni.gov/nic/special_climate2030.html

United States Navy: The Chief of Naval Operations has created “Task Force Climate Change,” headed by Rear Admiral David Titley, the Navy’s senior oceanographer, to evaluate climate change’s implications for maritime security and “assess the Navy’s preparedness to respond to emerging requirements, and to develop a science-based timeline for future Navy actions regarding climate change.”⁶ In addition, in calling for a “Green Fleet,” Navy Secretary Ray Mabus has stated that by 2020 the U.S. Navy will cut its fossil fuel use by half and increase overall energy efficiency. This will require investment in a number of technologies, particularly ethanol, biofuels, solar power and improved efficiency fuel cells. Among their initiatives, the Navy will cut the petroleum consumption of its 50,000+ vehicles by 50% by 2015, and as vehicles go out of service, they will be replaced with flex-fuel, hybrid and electric vehicles.⁷

United States Marine Corps (USMC): The Marine Corps held the first ever USMC Energy Summit on August 13, 2009. That same month, Marine Corps Commandant General James Conway sent energy experts to Afghanistan to carry out the first ever battlefield audit of USMC energy use. On October 14, 2009, Conway stated that he would make energy efficiency “one of his top priorities for the service” during this last year of his service as Commandant.⁸ A permanent Energy Office will be established at the USMC Headquarters.

United States Army: The U.S. Army is building a 500MW solar thermal plant at Fort Irwin in California. When completed (est. 2022), the \$1.5 billion plant will be one of the largest solar arrays in the world. Army officials cited cost, self-sufficiency, low risk of disruption and reduced environmental impacts as primary incentives behind the project. Similar smaller projects are already underway on other bases.⁹

Foresight

Ultimately, the professionals charged with protecting America’s security, with anticipating the dangers the country will face, and with planning our response to meet them are rightly concerned about the implications of climate change—and they have been for some time. They’re acting now to share information, understand the dynamics at play, and take the appropriate actions necessary for us to be ready for the challenges the future holds. Anything less would be a dereliction of duty.

6 Navy Task Force Assesses Changing Climate.” United States Department Of Defense: American Forces Press Service. 7/31/2009. <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=55327>

7 U.S. Navy cuts fuel usage.” *United Press International*. 10/23/2009. http://www.upi.com/Science_News/Resource-Wars/2009/10/23/US-Navy-cuts-fuel-usage/UPI-44341256316175/

8 “Marine Corps goes green in Afghanistan.” *The Telegraph*. 8/14/2009. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/energy/6025460/US-Marine-Corps-goes-green-in-Afghanistan.html>

9 Danger Room: What’s Next in National Security Army Starts Solar Plant; Next Step: Care About Climate Change.” *WIRED*. 7/31/2009. <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2009/07/army-starts-solar-plant-next-step-care-about-climate-change/>

Building a New American Arsenal

The American Security Project (ASP) is a bipartisan initiative to educate the American public about the changing nature of national security in the 21st century.

Gone are the days when a nation's strength could be measured by bombers and battleships. Security in this new era requires a New American Arsenal harnessing all of America's strengths: the force of our diplomacy; the might of our military; the vigor of our economy; and the power of our ideals.

We believe that America must lead other nations in the pursuit of our common goals and shared security. We must confront international challenges with all the tools at our disposal. We must address emerging problems before they become security crises. And to do this, we must forge a new bipartisan consensus at home.

ASP brings together prominent American leaders, current and former members of Congress, retired military officers, and former government officials. Staff direct research on a broad range of issues and engages and empowers the American public by taking its findings directly to them.

We live in a time when the threats to our security are as complex and diverse as terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, climate change, failed and failing states, disease, and pandemics. The same-old solutions and partisan bickering won't do. America needs an honest dialogue about security that is as robust as it is realistic.

ASP exists to promote that dialogue, to forge consensus, and to spur constructive action so that America meets the challenges to its security while seizing the opportunities the new century offers.



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