

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

December 20, 2021

Lloyd J. Austin III  
Secretary of Defense  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Austin:

We write today regarding the Department of Defense's (DoD or "the Department") work to mitigate the impact of climate change on its installations across the globe. As you know, climate change poses a grave risk to national security and the United States' interests abroad.<sup>1</sup> We have introduced comprehensive legislation to tackle and prepare for climate change's effects on the Department, which includes several steps the Secretary can take immediately to ensure the resilience of our Armed Forces in the face of a rapidly changing environment. We urge you to take these proactive steps to ensure the strength and readiness of DoD assets and installations in the face of the climate crisis.

Climate change is an existential threat whose effects can be seen across the globe each and every day. It also represents a fundamental threat to national security and DoD's operations worldwide. DoD has acknowledged this threat for well over a decade. As early as 2010, DoD reported that climate change threatens the nation's coastal infrastructure and will require adjustments to its facilities and operations.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent reporting in 2019 and numerous witnesses that have appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee have publicly reaffirmed this assessment.<sup>3</sup> DoD has already seen firsthand the effects of a rapidly evolving climate and the increased frequency of dangerous storms. The Department requested nearly \$9 billion in supplemental funding to fix damage to multiple bases following several hurricanes and subsequent flooding in 2019.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> NPR, "Climate change is a risk to national security, the Pentagon says," Noel King, October 26, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/26/1049222045/the-pentagon-says-climate-change-is-having-a-negative-impact-on-national-security>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "2010 Quadrennial Defense Review Report," February 2010, [https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/quadrennial/QDR2010.pdf?ver=vVJYRVwNdnGb\\_00ixF0UfQ%3d%3d](https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/quadrennial/QDR2010.pdf?ver=vVJYRVwNdnGb_00ixF0UfQ%3d%3d).

<sup>3</sup> Tweet from the Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren, March 6, 2019, <https://twitter.com/SenWarren/status/1103311845740417024>; Council on Foreign Relations, "Climate Change Is a Threat to Military Security," Benjamin Silliman, January 23, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/climate-change-threat-military-security>.

<sup>4</sup> Defense News, "Memo: Pentagon delivers reprogramming request, seeks supplement for \$9 billion hurricane damage," Aaron Mehta, March 25, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/smr/federal-budget/2019/03/25/memo-pentagon-delivers-reprogramming-request-seeks-supplemental-for-9-billion-hurricane-damage/>.


In light of these findings and the myriad reports detailing the catastrophic consequences of climate change, DoD must take proactive steps to mitigate the effects of climate change on our nation's defense and national security. We have introduced legislation, the *Department of Defense Climate Resiliency and Readiness Act*, which would not only address DoD's role as the world's largest emitter of carbon dioxide, but also ensure the Department's resiliency against climate change. Specifically, this legislation would require DoD to consider climate change-related risks when making any decision with respect to base realignment or closure as well as the positioning of any other infrastructure or assets.<sup>5</sup> These considerations and climate-conscious forward thinking will be crucial as temperatures and sea levels across the world continue to rise.<sup>6</sup> The Department must also carefully examine a base's vulnerability to climate change before authorizing any military construction projects. Any projects or assets positioned in areas that could soon be underwater or inhospitable will represent an irresponsible waste of taxpayer dollars if they are allowed to be constructed or upgraded today and a huge detriment to our Armed Forces readiness and capabilities.

Make no mistake - preparing for the effects of climate change is not a replacement strategy for a whole of government approach to reducing carbon emissions and transitioning to cleaner energy sources, but ensuring our Armed Forces are prepared to defend the country in any situation remains crucially important.


It is imperative the Department take steps to increase its resiliency against climate change. Fortunately, DoD does not need to wait for Congress to enact these proposals. You and the Armed Services already have the authorities you need to make these decisions with the climate crisis in mind without a mandate from Congress. These decisions that we can make today will have a profound impact on our ability to defend the nation and protect our interests abroad for years to come. We encourage you to take the proactive steps outlined in the *Department of Defense Climate Resiliency and Readiness Act* to ensure our Armed Forces are resilient and prepared to adjust to the climate challenges we face for years to come.

We appreciate your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Veronica Escobar  
Member of Congress

---

<sup>5</sup> Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren, "Warren, Escobar Announce Legislation to Require Dept. of Defense to Adapt to Climate Change Threat," press release, May 15, 2019, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/warren-escobar-announce-legislation-to-require-dept-of-defense-to-adapt-to-climate-change-threat>.

<sup>6</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "Climate Change: Global Sea Level," <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-sea-level>.