

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 24, 2020

The Honorable Mark T. Esper  
Secretary of Defense  
Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Esper:

We write to follow up on the findings and recommendations of a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report – *Climate Resilience: Actions Needed to Ensure DOD Considers Climate Risks to Contractors*.<sup>1</sup> We urge you to make every effort to address the deficiencies identified by GAO and to implement its recommendations.

We requested GAO identify previously unaddressed threats to national security resulting from the potential for climate change to disrupt the operations of defense contractors and the defense supply chain.<sup>2</sup> Contractors play a significant role in the Department of Defense (DoD or the Department) operations. From FY 2017 to FY 2019, DoD obligated more than \$1 trillion for contracted goods and services.<sup>3</sup> However, while DoD has assessed the impact of climate change on military facilities in the past,<sup>4</sup> it has not examined the risks posed by climate change on the network of military contractors that provide mission-critical goods, services and research and development to the Department.

After a year-long audit, the GAO report concluded that DoD “has not systematically incorporated consideration of climate change into its acquisition and supply processes ... [and] has not fully assessed risks to commercially owned facilities that support critical missions as part of its mission assurance process.”<sup>5</sup> These deficiencies in the Department’s consideration of climate change in its contracting process are particularly disturbing because they “pose[] a risk to

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<sup>1</sup> Government Accountability Office, “Climate Resilience: Actions Needed to Ensure DOD Considers Climate Risks to Contractors,” June 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Senators Elizabeth Warren and Jack Reed to the Government Accountability Office, April 11, 2019, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/senator-warren-armed-services-committee-ranking-member-reed-call-on-gao-to-review-threats-to-national-security-from-climate-change-impacts-on-pentagon-contractors-and-defense-supply-chain>.

<sup>3</sup> Government Accountability Office, “Climate Resilience: Actions Needed to Ensure DOD Considers Climate Risks to Contractors,” June 2020; Congressional Research Service, “Defense Primer: Department of Defense Contractors,” updated January 31, 2020, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/IF10600.pdf>; Congressional Research Service, “Defense Acquisitions: How and Where DOD Spends Its Contracting Dollars,” July 2, 2018, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R44010.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Defense, “Report on Effects of a Changing Climate to the Department of Defense,” January 10, 2019, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jan/29/2002084200/-1/-1/1/CLIMATE-CHANGE-REPORT-2019.PDF>.

<sup>5</sup> Government Accountability Office, “Climate Resilience: Actions Needed to Ensure DOD Considers Climate Risks to Contractors,” June 2020.

the department that it will not be fully knowledgeable of or able to prepare for threats to facilities it relies on for key missions” and “jeopardize DoD’s ability to carry out its missions.”<sup>6</sup>

To address these deficiencies, GAO recommended DoD incorporate climate adaptation, consistent with Directive 4715.21 on climate change adaptation and resilience,<sup>7</sup> into its acquisition and supply guidance and issue or update guidance on mission assurance-related assessments for mission critical commercial facilities. DoD concurred or partially concurred with each of these recommendations, and we urge you to implement them as rapidly as possible.

We recognize that incorporating climate risk analysis into the DoD’s contracting processes in a systematic way is a challenging task, but the potential risks to DoD operations and mission-critical assets are significant. If DoD fails to identify and address the impacts of climate change to its contracts and supply chains, it could jeopardize DoD’s ability to carry out its missions.

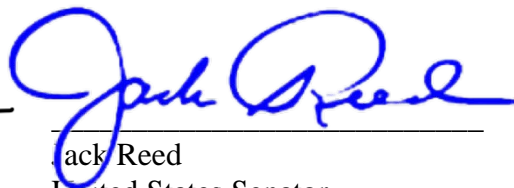
We urge you and the military services to fully and concurrently implement all six of the GAO’s recommendations as rapidly as possible, and we ask that you provide us with a staff-level telebriefing on your efforts to do so by no later than September 15, 2020.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Jack Reed  
United States Senator

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<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> Department of Defense, “DoD Directive 4715.21 Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience,” accessed on July 20, 2020, <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodd/471521p.pdf>.