

The military considers climate change to be a threat to national security. Naturally, that's news that the House Republicans would like to suppress. Last week, they tried to do something about it with an appropriations rider. Luckily, the amendment is so poorly drafted that it would accomplish almost nothing.

Here's the language of the amendment:

None of the funds authorized to be appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act may be used to implement the U.S. Global Change Research Program National Climate Assessment, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Fifth Assessment Report, the United Nation's Agenda 21 sustainable development plan, or the May 2013 Technical Update of the Social Cost of Carbon for Regulatory Impact Analysis Under Executive Order 12866.

Why won't this stop the Pentagon from planning for the effects of climate change on national security? Let's take a close look at each of the things that the Pentagon isn't supposed to "implement":

The U.S. Climate Assessment is a report on the projected impacts of climate change. It's nice to have all the information collected together, but it's largely information that already exists elsewhere. So the Pentagon could simply do its own assessment of the same data. The Army Corps is on a separate appropriations bill, so they're not affected anyway.

The IPCC Report is similar. It's just a giant compendium of research results. Telling the Pentagon not to implement the report is like telling it not to "implement" the Encyclopedia Britannica or wikipedia. What does that even *mean*?

Agenda 21. For some reason, conservatives like Ted Cruz have whipped themselves into a frenzy over Agenda 21. Environmentalists only *wish* that Agenda 21 had the kind of power and significance Cruz and others assume. It's hard to know what part of it could be considered a "sustainable development plan," in the words of the statute. It's not really a *plan* at all. Agenda 21 is a non-binding set of general precepts, and so far as I know the Pentagon has never used it as the basis for policy. Certainly, there's nothing in Agenda 21 that relates to the military implications of climate change.

Social Cost of Carbon. The document in question is an update of an earlier effort to determine the social cost of carbon for use in cost-benefit analysis. Even if the Pentagon is forced to use the older estimates rather than the “updated estimate”, its budget and regulatory decisions are reviewed by OMB, which issued the estimate and remains perfectly free to apply the estimate to DOD actions. It makes no difference if DOD uses the estimate, since OMB can always add the estimate later.

Maybe it’s not surprising that the author of the House provision, a freshman tea party Representative from West Virginia, has no idea of what’s actually in these documents. You might have thought some of the staff would have known better. But I suppose it would have been awkward to tell the military that it must ignore science in considering issues of national security.

Of course, when you get down to it, it’s idiotic to say that DOD should build bases in areas that will be flooded by sea level rise, or that it should ignore how future droughts might impact the Middle East. But all too many members of the House seem to have left the reality-based community in favor of a fairy-tale world where threats go away if you just close your eyes and deny them.