

In written testimony to Congress about threat to national security, the Trump Administration's Director of National Intelligence (DNI) discussed climate change. His discussion didn't equivocate about the reality or dangers of climate change. Rather, he took the science, and the threat, seriously:

“The past 115 years have been the warmest period in the history of modern civilization, and the past few years have been the warmest years on record. Extreme weather events in a warmer world have the potential for greater impacts and can compound with other drivers to raise the risk of humanitarian disasters, conflict, water and food shortages, population migration, labor shortfalls, price shocks, and power outages. Research has not identified indicators of tipping points in climate-linked earth systems, suggesting a possibility of abrupt climate change.”

The DNI is Dan Coates, who was previously a Senator from Indiana. In the Senate, he had a lifetime [score](#) of 22% from the League of Conservation Voters, but he went down to a 0% rating for his 2016 votes. So he's no secret environmentalist. But he does know enough to face the facts.

This is not an isolated example of Republican endorsement of the idea that climate change threatens national security. One significant sign was the passage of the Defense Authorization Act of 2017, HR 1810. The Act is a funding statute for the Pentagon. Section 335 of the Act states that “climate change is a direct threat to the national security of the United States and is impacting stability in areas of the world both where the United States Armed Forces are operating today, and where strategic implications for future conflict exist.” In a crucial House vote, 46 Republicans crossed the aisle to vote against the amendment and in favor of the climate provision. Among the votes against the Perry amendment were 22 Republican members of the House Climate Solutions Caucus. It currently has 70 members, equally split between Democrats and Republicans.

The national security context of the bill is a plausible explanation for why Republican representatives felt safe in supporting it. The military has long taken a proactive stance on climate change. Secretary Mattis has been [clear](#) about the impact of climate change on national security: “Climate change is impacting stability in areas of the world where our troops are operating today. . . It is appropriate for the Combatant Commands to incorporate drivers of instability that impact the security environment in their areas into their planning.”

The current [Defense Authorization Act](#), which went to the President for signature yesterday, refers to climate change. Section 2805(c) provides:

“That in order to anticipate changing environmental conditions during the design life of existing or planned new facilities and infrastructure, projections from reliable and authorized sources such as the Census Bureau (for population projections), the National Academies of Sciences (for land use change projections and climate projections), the U.S. Geological Survey (for land use change projections), and the U.S. Global Change Research Office and National Climate Assessment (for climate projections) shall be considered and incorporated into military construction designs and modifications.”

Of course, Trump is trying to appropriate national security concerns himself as an excuse for propping up coal-fired power plants. But it’s hard to believe anyone is taking him seriously, given that he only latched onto this idea after the previous effort to prop up the coal industry failed.

The link between national security and climate change has been clear for some time. In 2011, Andrew Guzman (now Dean at USC) and Jody Freeman (Harvard) summarized the support for this idea among serious students of national security:

“In 2008, the National Intelligence Council produced the most comprehensive analysis to date of the implications of climate change for U.S. national security over the next twenty years. According to news reports, the classified assessment concluded that climate change could destabilize fragile political regimes, exacerbate conflicts over scarce resources, increase the threat of terrorism, disrupt trade, and produce millions of refugees—all of which would seriously affect U.S. national security interests”

As Guzman and Freeman explained, “[t]he consistent message of these studies is that while climate change . . . is certain to be a “threat multiplier,” exacerbating political instability around the world as weak or poor governments struggle to cope with its impacts.” The evidence has only gotten stronger since then.

What is new is not this insight. Rather, what is new is that significant Republican figures are beginning to talk about it and support action. Perhaps there is hope that we will yet be able

to get beyond the partisan divide on climate change.