

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 7, 2022

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin:

We write to encourage you to strongly consider the effects of climate change in the Department of Defense's (DoD) upcoming National Defense Strategy, and to recommend shifts in our federal budget that respond to this reality. Climate change is a clear and present threat to both national security and Americans, as you yourself stated in a January 2021 statement, and DoD has further affirmed in several reports highlighting the environmental impact of the US military's activities.¹ A strategy that integrates climate change considerations at all levels, and shifts our national security budget to effectively address these threats is a critical step to keeping the United States and its citizens safe.

Our present national security investments and strategies fail to protect Americans from the worsening climate crisis and do not address DoD's role as the world's largest consumer of fossil fuels and emitter of greenhouse gases.² The unprecedented scale of wildfires, floods, droughts, typhoons, and other extreme weather events are taking a significant toll on the livelihoods of millions of Americans. The 20 extreme weather-related events of 2021 killed close to 700 Americans, caused over \$100 billion in losses, and continue to have severe economic effects on the entire country.³ Nearly 1 in 3 Americans have experienced one of these climate change-fueled weather events since the summer.⁴

DoD has already seen firsthand the impact of climate change with the flooding of military bases at home and abroad due to rising sea levels and hurricanes, which cost billions to repair.⁵

¹ U.S. Department of Defense, "Statement by Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad," January 27, 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2484504/statement-by-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-on-tackling-the-climate-cr/>; Department of Defense, "Report on Effects of a Changing Climate to the Department of Defense," January 2019, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jan/29/2002084200/-1/-1/1/CLIMATE-CHANGE-REPORT-2019.PDF>; Department of Defense, "Department of Defense Climate Risk Analysis," October 2021, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Oct/21/2002877353/-1/-1/0/DOD-CLIMATE-RISK-ANALYSIS-FINAL.PDF>.

² Brown University, Watson Institute for International & Public Affairs, "Pentagon Fuel Use, Climate Change, and the Costs of War," November 2019, pp. 2, <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/Pentagon%20Fuel%20Use%2C%20Climate%20Change%20and%20the%20Costs%20of%20War%20Revised%20November%202019%20Crawford.pdf>.

³ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Centers for Environmental Information, "Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters," <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/>.

⁴ Sarah Kaplan and Andrew Ba Tran. Nearly 1 in 3 Americans experienced a weather disaster this summer. The Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2021/09/04/climate-disaster-hurricane-ida/>

⁵ Vox, "Extreme weather has again damaged a major military base," Umair Irfan, March 25, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/2019/3/25/18280758/nebraska-flooding-air-force-offutt>.

In addition to degrading military infrastructure, climate change will deepen existing geopolitical crises and create new catalysts for conflict. It will precipitate fights over resources and could displace hundreds of millions of people.⁶ While the Pentagon has made changes in response to the reality of the climate crisis, our federal spending priorities still fail to treat climate change as a clear and present national security threat. The current DoD budget of \$777 billion is a significant sink of precious federal resources that could otherwise be available for more cost-effective investments in climate mitigation and adaptation.

The 2018 DoD directive, “Climate Adaptation and Resilience,” states that DoD must “assess and manage risks associated with the impacts of climate change”⁷; this must include a climate change conscious approach to the National Defense Strategy that incorporates a whole of government approach to responding effectively to the climate crisis. We must work to prevent the most damaging effects of climate change by reducing emissions rather than reacting to conflicts and increased climate migration after climate change has exacerbated these problems.

As such, we urge you to ensure that the administration’s upcoming National Defense Strategy prioritizes the need for more balanced federal investments to prevent, mitigate, and respond to the risks associated with the climate crisis. The National Defense Strategy must not accept climate change and rising temperatures as an inevitable or most-likely outcome and must emphasize the urgent need to rebalance spending to avoid the worst-case outcomes of the climate crisis. By treating the climate crisis as the existential and national security threat that it is through the National Defense Strategy, DoD can maintain national security and military readiness, avoid billions of dollars in damages and save millions of lives.

Sincerely,



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

/s/
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

/s/
Mondaire Jones
Member of Congress



Elizabeth Warren
Senator

/s/
Richard Blumenthal
Senator

/s/
Edward J. Markey
Senator

⁶ Institute for Economics and Peace, *Ecological Threat Register*, 2021. <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Ecological-Threat-Register-Press-Release-27.08-FINAL.pdf>

⁷ Department of Defense, “DoD Directive 4715.21: Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience,” <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodd/471521p.pdf?ver=2018-09-25-081059-330>.

/s/
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/
Sheldon Whitehouse
Senator

/s/
Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

/s/
Cory A. Booker
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