



May 8, 2017

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USA (ret)

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General James Mattis, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret)
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Mattis:

As you understand from your pragmatic assessment of the national security risks of a changing climate, our nation's military does not have the luxury of waiting for perfect certainty before acting. As retired military and national security leaders, some of whom have served with you, we also know that addressing "blind spots" in the global operating environment is critical for ensuring national security. Since climate change is altering that operating environment – directly impacting our critical infrastructure and increasing the likelihood of humanitarian disasters, state failure, and conflict - we have a responsibility to remove that blind spot. For the armed forces, this means, at the very least, adapting to these climatic changes in order to enhance our force readiness, maintain operational effectiveness, and fulfill our strategic goals.

The Department of Defense (DoD) and the intelligence community have been aware of this "threat multiplier," and taking actions to address it, since the early years of the George W. Bush Administration. By many measures, DoD has been leading in this area, driven naturally by its mission to protect the United States from harm.

DoD's latest and most comprehensive statement of the policies, responsibilities, and actions necessary to prepare for and respond to the impacts of climate change is DoD Directive 4715.21: Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience. This Directive, as the title makes clear, is solely focused on ensuring that the entire DoD remains resilient and mission-capable in the face of a changing climate – a practical and sensible approach that is consistent with existing DoD authorities for protecting the nation. Simply put, it's a policy focused on the important task of adapting the entire DoD to the realities of a changing operating environment.

It is clear that this Directive, or a policy like it, will be needed to ensure that DoD is well-equipped to manage the significant risks associated with climate change. Such a policy helps lay the foundation for a structured and deliberate response to the phenomenon, and its attendant impacts on the global operating environment. It also helps bolster ongoing DoD efforts to ensure the resilience and continued viability of its installations and training ranges, and in so doing, preserve and enhance force readiness.

To date, your leadership on this issue has been clear. We support you in continuing that leadership by maintaining and implementing a comprehensive DoD policy to adapt to a changing climate, to enhance the resilience of our armed forces, and to prepare for these risks in the global operating environment.

In a separate letter, we are also encouraging Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to show leadership in all important international forums where climate risks are being discussed and addressed, and to work with you and our partners and allies to proactively address these risks. We hope that you consider such a partnership as an important step in preparing the United States for this new geostrategic reality.

Respectfully,

THE CENTER FOR
CLIMATE AND
SECURITY

Admiral Frank L. “Skip” Bowman, US Navy (Ret)

Former Director, Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program

General Ron Keys, US Air Force (Ret)

Former Commander, Air Combat Command

Admiral Sam J. Locklear III, US Navy (ret)

Former Commander, US Pacific Command

Dov S. Zakheim

Former Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)

Sherri Goodman

Former Deputy Undersecretary of Defense

Lieutenant General John G. Castellaw, US Marine Corps (Ret)

Former Chief of Staff, US Central Command

Vice Admiral Lee Gunn, US Navy (Ret)

Former Inspector General, US Department of the Navy

Lieutenant General Arlen D. Jameson, US Air Force (Ret)

Former Deputy Commander-in-Chief, US Strategic Command

Vice Admiral Dennis V. McGinn, US Navy (Ret)

Former Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy, Installations and Environment

Brigadier General Joseph R. Barnes, US Army (Ret)

Former Assistant Judge Advocate General, US Army

Brigadier General Stephen A. Cheney, US Marine Corps (Ret)

Former Inspector General, US Marine Corps

Brigadier General Gerald E Galloway, US Army (Ret)

Former Dean of Academic Board, US Military Academy at West Point

Rear Admiral Leendert “Len” Hering Sr., US Navy (Ret)

Former Commander, Navy Region Southwest

Rear Admiral Ann C. Phillips, US Navy (Ret)

Former Commander, Expeditionary Strike Group TWO

Rear Admiral David W Tittle, PhD, US Navy (Ret)

Former Oceanographer, US Navy

Rear Admiral Jonathan White, US Navy (Ret)

Former Oceanographer of the Navy

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Former Deputy Director, Ranges, Sea, and Airspace (Readiness)

Captain James Goudreau, SC, US Navy (Ret)

Former Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Energy)

Colonel Thomas F. Watson, US Air Force (Ret)

Former Director, Infrastructure Coordination and Analysis Office, Department of Homeland Security

Colonel Lawrence B. Wilkerson, US Army (Ret)

Former Chief of Staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell

Cc: The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson, Secretary of State