



Congress Continues to Affirm that Climate Security is National Security

SHANA UDVARDY, CLIMATE RESILIENCE ANALYST | JANUARY 5, 2021, 1:43 PM EST

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Last week Congress voted to override the president’s veto of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), enacting H.R. 6395, the “William M. (Mac) Thornberry” NDAA for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021.

The FY21 NDAA [marks the fourth year](#) in a row in which both sides of the aisle have come together to pass climate change provisions in the NDAA, the annual [legislative vehicle](#) for a broad range of defense policies.

This year felt like no other, not least due to how the impacts of [climate change showed up in our daily lives](#) and exacerbated the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, among other stressors. For many, it may have seemed like a year-long, climate change bootcamp – challenging us physically, mentally and emotionally but without the adequate tools to ensure we were prepared, ready, and resilient.

First, it requires DOD to update the 2014 Climate Change Adaptation Roadmap

It's been six years since DOD released their [2014 Climate Change Adaptation Roadmap](#) in response to the [Executive Order 13653](#), *Preparing the United States for the Impacts of Climate Change*, which required all federal agencies to incorporate climate change into their planning and operations. DOD's Roadmap is the military's policy framework for how DOD will adapt to climate change impacts and implement its adaptation provisions across four "lines of effort": plans and operations, training and testing, built and natural infrastructure, and acquisition and supply chain.

The FY21 NDAA directs DOD to update the 2014 Climate Change Adaptation Roadmap by February 1, 2022 and include descriptions of approaches and measures to mitigate the risk of current and foreseeable extreme weather events—including the increased frequency of flooding, drought, desertification, wildfires, thawing permafrost, hurricanes and extreme heat—and sea level rise.

What will make DOD's updated roadmap stand apart from its predecessor is the inclusion of a provision for the DOD to make estimates of the investments that will be required to address foreseeable costs due to extreme weather and sea level rise over the next five, 10, and 20 years. For more information see Section 327 under Title III – Operation and Maintenance, Subtitle B – Energy and Environment.

Why it matters:

In the spring of 2017, [President Trump revoked](#) Executive Order 13653. With this legislation, Congress provides the Pentagon with a directive to revive this important work which is a particularly timely requirement, given the daunting [scientific findings](#) on the [impacts of global warming](#) over the past few years.

[communities](#). An updated climate change adaptation roadmap should help to provide additional guidance to help close these gaps.

For example, the updated roadmap ought to help DOD plan for where they ought to invest in risk reduction measures and over what timeframe. The cost estimates of these risk reduction measures should also help the Pentagon focus on some hard questions and decision points regarding their tolerance for risk across the four lines of efforts at different locations.

Second, it provides DOD with more authority to implement resilience projects

The FY21 NDAA broadens DOD’s authority to implement resilience projects on locations outside of a military installation or facility if the secretary of defense determines the project would preserve or enhance the resilience of an installation, facility or mission essential functions. The bill also authorizes an additional \$25 million to the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program (REPI) and \$25 million for planning and designing climate resilience projects. For more information see Section 315 under Title III, Division A, Subtitle B—Energy and Environment.

Why it matters:

This provision is critical to mission readiness as many installations rely, either directly or indirectly, on infrastructure that is outside of their footprint, such as roads and bridges. In fact, [GAO’s recent report](#) found that DOD domestic installations have “extensive and varied use” of infrastructure and support services of surrounding communities, including roads, bridges, electricity, water, and medical facilities and that these shared infrastructure and support services have been impacted by a range of different climate change related impacts.

undersecretary of defense for intelligence to establish a joint agreement with the National Academies of Science to create a new “National Academies Climate Security Roundtable” that will function as a critical support system to the Climate Security Advisory Council –an organization established by Congress in last year’s NDAA.

The short-term roundtable—set to terminate September 30, 2025—will include members of the Climate Security Advisory Council; senior representatives and practitioners from federal science agencies, the intelligence community, and the Department of Defense; and key stakeholders from higher education institutions, federal research laboratories, industry and nonprofit research organizations.

This roundtable is tasked with identifying gaps in national security knowledge and solutions, exchanging data, establishing climate security indicators and warnings, and developing best practices for incorporating these into the military’s operational planning and intelligence analyses. For more information see Section 1622 under Subtitle B—Defense Intelligence and Intelligence-Related Activities under Title XVI —Space Activities, Strategic Programs, and Intelligence Matters.

Why it matters:

The establishment of the National Academies Climate Security Roundtable will provide more support and resources to the recently established Climate Security Advisory Council and demonstrates a continued recognition by Congress and the Pentagon that investing in climate security is an investment in our national security.

Fourth, it directs DOD to report on the Coast Guard’s vulnerability to climate change impacts

In one year, DOD must provide Congress with a report on the top ten Coast Guard installations that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change including

Section 8250 “*Report on effects of climate change on Coast Guard.*”

Why it matters:

In 2019 DOD reported back to Congress on the [vulnerability of military installations](#) to climate change-related impacts however the report request omitted the inclusion of Coast Guard facilities and infrastructure which are managed under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). This directive will help provide the data needed to address some of [GAO’s findings and recommendations](#) from 2019. GAO’s report uncovered that the “Coast Guard’s \$18 billion portfolio of shore infrastructure was deteriorating, and almost half of it was past its service life as of 2018.”

Congress provides DOD directives to track and reduce heat trapping emissions

In addition to climate resilience, Congress included a few provisions on reducing heat-trapping emissions.

The FY21 NDAA requires DOD to report on its total emissions levels for the last 10 fiscal years. Given that DOD is known to be the single largest institutional producer of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the world (see [here](#) and [here](#)), that per capita the [US is the largest GHG emitter](#), and that [GHG emissions continue to rise](#) despite scientific warnings, it’s important for the Pentagon to take a leading role in quantifying and tracking these emissions to help meet its emission reduction benchmarks.

It also requires DOD to evaluate and plan for the use of renewable and small-scale local energy generation units that are connected to the electricity grid, collectively called distributed energy assets (DEAs). Moving forward, Congress ought to request a report by DOD or GAO to track the level to which DOD builds DEAs into its

capture and direct air capture program.

Finally, the FY21 NDAA reestablishes the position of assistant secretary of defense for energy, installations, and environment, which is a critical position to ensure DOD's success in integrating climate change provisions.

When considering the extent of the Pentagon's carbon footprint, moving forward Congress must take more significant strides on emissions reduction provisions in the next NDAA to provide resources and advance the [good work the Pentagon](#) is already doing on green energy.

The directives are in, now the hard work begins

Now that Congress has given the Pentagon its climate change-related directives, the real work begins for DOD to implement these policy provisions. Congress will need to track and assess DOD's progress and the lessons learned on overcoming barriers. Congress also needs to work now to begin laying the groundwork for even bolder climate adaptation and mitigations measures in next year's NDAA and the years after that. With the support from Congress and the Administration, the Pentagon can play a more prominent role in advancing climate change risk and emissions reduction research, technology and measures and by doing so, lead the federal family on best practices for using the latest climate change science to tackle one of the most pressing national security issues.

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