

An aerial photograph of a vast, cracked, and dry lake bed, likely a salt flat, surrounded by rugged, brown mountains. The ground is a mosaic of dark grey and black polygonal cracks, indicating extreme aridity. The mountains in the background are layered and eroded, with some snow or light-colored rock patches. The overall scene conveys a sense of environmental hardship and climate impact.

Challenge Accepted: Can the US Move from Plans to Actions?

The Honorable John Conger
March 29, 2023



**CENTER FOR
CLIMATE & SECURITY**
COUNCIL ON STRATEGIC RISKS

Hon. John Conger

- Director Emeritus of Center for Climate and Security
- Former Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)
- Former Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense (Energy, Installations, and Environment)
- President, Conger Strategies and Solutions



Bottom Line Up Front:
Climate Change is
happening.
How do we prepare?

Climate Change Through a Security Lens

Damage to Military Installations	Great Power Competition	Impacts of Instability Abroad
		

How can DoD accomplish its mission in this new environment?



Secretary of Defense Perspective

- *“Every year, we see the consequences of increasing incidents of flooding, drought, wildfires, and extreme weather events on our installations at home. Every year, our commanders and their Allies and partners conduct operations that result from instability in societies strained by desertification, the threat of adversary access to homelands through the Arctic, and the demands for humanitarian assistance worldwide... There is little about what the Department does to defend the American people that is not affected by climate change. It is a national security issue, and we must treat it as such.” – Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, 1/27/2021*

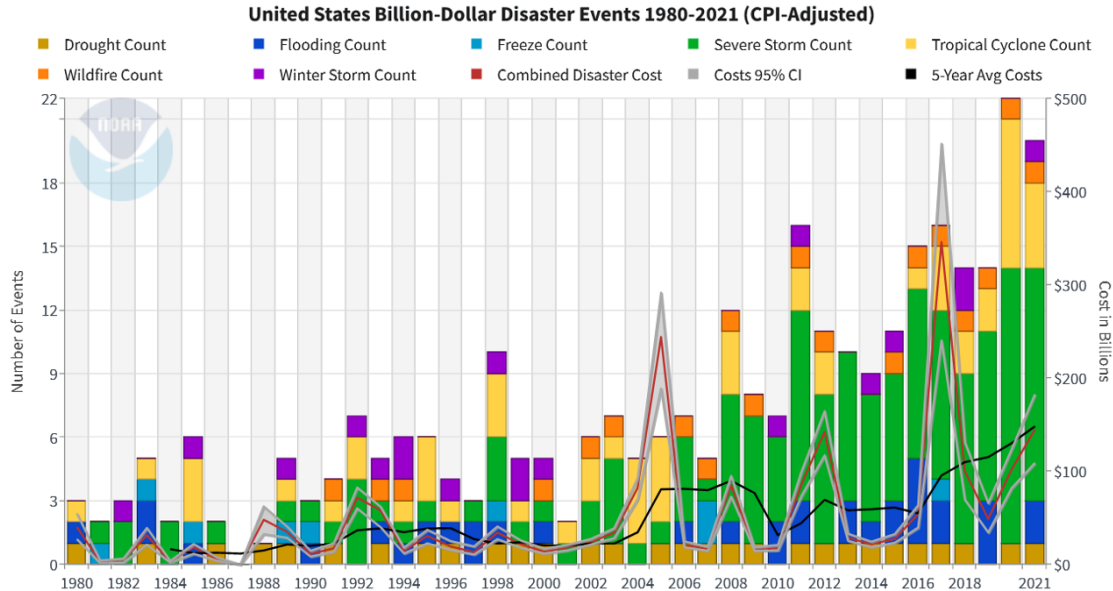
Resilience Demand Signals

Extreme Weather at:

- Tyndall AFB (\$5 billion)
- Camp Lejeune (\$3.6 billion)
- Offutt AFB (\$1 billion)

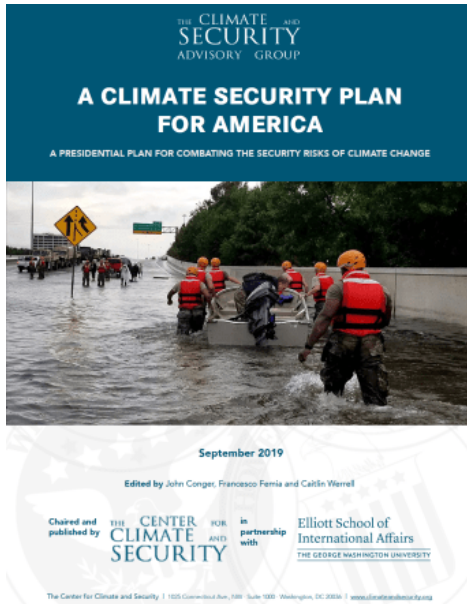


Resilience Demand Signals – Part 2



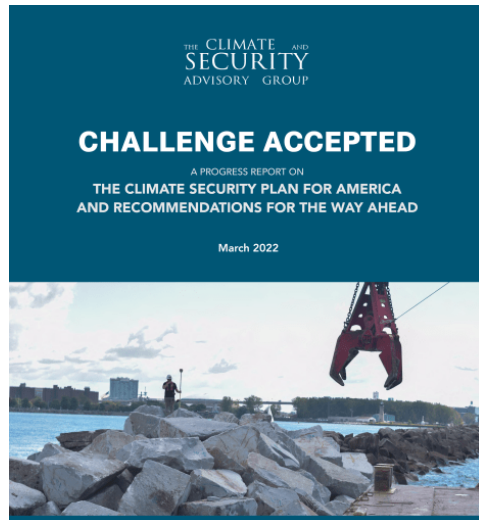
In 2021, there were 20 billion-dollar disasters in the US, at a cost of \$152.6 billion.

Climate Security Plan for America (2019)



- Endorsed by dozens of national security leaders, including 8 retired four-star generals and admirals.
- Four pillars:
 - Demonstrate Leadership
 - Assess Climate Risks
 - Support Allies and Partners
 - Prepare for and Prevent Climate Impacts

Challenge Accepted (2022)



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- Leadership Demonstrated / Challenge Accepted
- Challenges Remain:
 - Assessing Climate Risks
 - Supporting Partners and Allies
 - Preparing for and Preventing Climate Impacts



Leadership Demonstrated

- **Executive Order:** *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad* – Made Climate Change an Core National Security Priority
- **Climate Advisors** in the White House and in top positions across USG
- **Climate Plans** at Each Agency, including Army/Navy/Air Force
- **International Leadership:** Rejoining Paris Agreement, through United Nations, Special Envoy



Progress Achieved

- **Assessing Future Risks:** National Intelligence Estimate on Climate
- **Supporting Allies and Partners:** Climate informed decision-making at USAID, President's Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience (PREPARE)
- **Prepare for and Prevent Climate Security Impacts:** Some increase in investment, focused on energy resilience and efficiency, improved building codes, but insufficient scale



Challenges Remain

Some key resilience priorities that need more progress:

- Military Installation Resilience Plans
- Investing in Security Infrastructure
- Climate “finance” for international resilience

Vignette: From Plan to Project

- **Risk:** Sea-level rise around outdated floodwalls putting multi-billion-dollar nuclear submarines at risk
- **Timeline:**
 - 2013: Congress directs Navy to develop Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Plan (not climate focused), initial report delivered
 - 2018: Follow-on SIOP Report delivered
 - 2019: Administration requests \$49M for flood protection due to climate risks –project prioritized ahead of non-climate resilience projects
 - 2020: Contract awarded, ground broken on project
 - 2023: Projected completion



Photo credit: Shayne Hensley / U.S. Navy

Military Installation Resilience Plans

Key Elements:

- Identify vulnerabilities
- Look inside and outside the fenceline
- Develop Projects

Moving at the Speed of Government

- CSPA Recommendation (2019)
- Congressional Requirement (2020)
- DoD IG – No progress – Installations unaware of the requirement! (2022)
- Congressional Restriction on Funding until 2 plans complete per service (2022)
- First assessments delivered (2023)
- Projects? (TBD)



AF Photo by Tech Sgt Liliana Moreno



Investing in Infrastructure

Emergencies get funded; Infrastructure gets to take risk

- Facilities degrade slower than readiness
- \$2B (entire AF request the year before Hurricane Michael) vs \$5B (Tyndall Recovery)
- \$1.8B (entire Navy/MC request before Hurricane Florence) vs \$3.6B (Lejeune Recovery)

DoD has more than \$1.3 trillion in infrastructure, with a construction budget request in FY24 of \$14.7B (much higher than recent requests). Military Construction recap rate is still ~88 years.

IJA and IRA excluded Department of Defense, but still fund infrastructure important to national security: FEMA, DOT, NOAA, DOE



International Climate Finance

- International Stability is a key pillar of US National Security, and climate change is inherently destabilizing.
- Biden Administration pledged \$11B annually for international climate aid by 2024, covering both resilience and mitigation investments. Congress approved \$1B in FY23.
- “Climate Finance” is fraught with national and international politics
 - Internationally, nations enduring climate disasters put responsibility for their “loss and damage” at the feet of developed nations like the U.S.
 - Nationally, international funding is extremely unpopular, and was significantly cut even when Congress and Administration were the same political party.



Concluding Observations

- Words are Important – but they are easier than Deeds.
- Climate Change is Inevitable – we have a Responsibility to Prepare.
- The Bureaucracy is Slow, and even planning takes many years – we have to Start Now.
- In a Constrained Political and Budget environment – we need to Prioritize Resilience Investments... we can't and won't do everything necessary.



References

Center for Climate and Security: climateandsecurity.org

Climate Security Plan for America:
climateandsecurity.org/climatesecurityplanforamerica

Challenge Accepted: climateandsecurity.org/challenge-accepted-a-progress-report-on-the-climate-security-plan-for-america-and-recommendations-for-the-way-ahead/