

Statement by

Melissa Dalton

Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities

Office of the Secretary of Defense

Before the 117th Congress

Committee on Foreign Relations, East Asia, the Pacific, and International

Cybersecurity Policy Subcommittee

United States Senate

July 21, 2021

Introduction

Chairman Markey, Ranking Member Romney, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Department of Defense's role in supporting the State Department, USAID, and allies and partners to address the effects of climate change in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Interim National Security Strategic Guidance identified climate change as one of the most significant threats the country and the Department faces.

As Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stated in April at President Biden's Leaders Summit on Climate: "No nation can find lasting security without addressing the climate crisis." The climate crisis poses a variety of risks for U.S. national security, beyond increased demands for humanitarian assistance. Hard security challenges, stemming from climate change can threaten the stability of U.S. allies and partners.

Close to the equator, the effects of rising temperatures and extreme weather events are contributing to hunger and displacement in Africa and Central America; exacerbating conditions that can make vulnerable populations susceptible to recruitment and radicalization by extremist groups.

In the Pacific, Secretary Austin has alluded to the particular risks low-lying island countries face from sea-level rise and storms: "In the far reaches of the Pacific, rising sea levels and more frequent and intense storms put individuals, families, and whole communities at risk – while pushing the limits of our collective capacity to respond." Notably, the Marshall Islands has an average elevation of just six feet above sea-level. The country hosts the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site and the Space Fence facility on Kwajalein Atoll. These are examples of critical national security sites located in climate-exposed parts of the Pacific.

The Department of Defense has felt the direct effects of climate change in recent years, as extreme weather events have affected several facilities, including billions of dollars in damage to Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida from Hurricane Michael, the effects of flooding on Offutt Air Base in Nebraska, and threats to military installations in California from wildfires. In the Pacific, an unseasonal typhoon in February 2019 forced the pause of humanitarian relief and disaster response training exercises with Australian and Japanese allies. These delayed multinational exercises impair building interoperability with key allies in the region.

Presidential Executive Order 14008

The President's Executive Order of January 27, 2021, tasked the Department to lead the interagency in the creation of a Climate Risk Analysis that would assess the security implications of climate change and integrate those findings into strategic documents like the National Defense Strategy (NDS).

The Secretary appointed a senior climate advisor, and tasked him in March 2021 to lead a Climate Working Group across the Department to coordinate the Department's response to the January executive order and track implementation.

The Department is currently finalizing the Climate Risk Analysis to meet the objectives of the Executive Order and inform development of the National Defense Strategy, which will likely be completed early next year.

DoD's Climate Priorities

In the interim, Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks has previewed how the Department is thinking about and addressing climate concerns. In a May 2021 speech, she noted, "The effects of climate change are a national security issue, impacting DOD's missions and operational plans, readiness, our installations, and the Department's budget. It does this by simultaneously increasing demands on the force while impacting our capacity to respond to those demands."

Particularly germane to the Pacific region, climate change puts our national security at risk by increasing demands for U.S. military-supported relief activities, alongside increased risks of conflict. While management of international river basins has historically been settled peacefully, climate change will stress management of major rivers in the region, such as the Indus, the Brahmaputra, and the Mekong.

In light of these concerns, the Deputy Secretary identified two priorities for the Department:

1. First, the Department is inculcating a culture of climate-informed decision making and incorporating climate change into threat assessments, budgets, and operational decision-making. Our efforts to train, test, and equip the force have to be "climate ready," meaning taking into account climate extremes into training, ensuring that weapons systems can operate under those conditions, and thinking about the logistical challenges of supplying the force amidst changing climate conditions and wider geo-strategic competition with China for energy resources of the future.
2. Our second priority is taking care of our people, including members of the armed forces and the civilians who serve with them by buttressing the resilience of our installations and the structures where people work and live.

The Department anticipates the Climate Risk Analysis will help various DoD components, notably regional combatant commands like USINDOPACOM, to assess their vulnerabilities and to inform cooperation with allies and partners.

The Department is also focused on improving installation resilience. DoD has developed a Climate Assessment Tool or DCAT, which uses historical data and future climate projections to enable personnel at all levels of the Department - from installation planners to leadership - to understand installations' exposure to climate-related hazards. To that end, the Department has

also recently completed a Climate Adaptation Plan, which will integrate climate adaptation and resilience efforts across the Department and align these efforts with its warfighting missions. The DCAT currently assesses a pilot set of global facilities. The Department is working to expand the tool's coverage and functionality. Within the Indo-Pacific region, the Department has also committed to sharing DCAT with our allies, Japan and the Republic of Korea.

The Department is developing additional plans to fulfill other anticipated presidential directives. For example, the Department is writing the 2021 Sustainability Report and Implementation Plan. Since 2010, the Department has conducted an annual sustainability assessment to improve military readiness through resilient infrastructure and business reforms to increase efficiency and reduce costs.

For example, between 2018 and 2020, DoD supported construction of an energy-efficient facility on Wake Island to support test mission management and monitoring which will reduce the environmental footprint—and operational costs. Misawa Air Base will be building a \$206 million cogeneration plant, smart grid, and solar arrays to build in redundancy and strengthen resilience in the wake of disasters and dramatically reduce energy use and costs.

The Department has postured considerable defense capabilities forward in the Pacific region, such as missile defense and domain awareness assets in the Marshall Islands, Palau, and the U.S. territory Guam. Our Integrated Air and Missile Defense systems (IAMD) are designed to protect the U.S. homeland from missile attacks. The Department also depends on forward basing in Oceania and the Western Pacific to test new technology. This forward U.S. posture contributes to strategic stability with China, but also supports our allies Japan and South Korean to defend against potential North Korean aggression.

In 2019, in response to the National Defense Authorization Act, the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps identified several bases in the Indo-Pacific region among their most vulnerable sites, including Marine Corps Base Camp Butler in Okinawa, Japan; Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Joint Base Pearl Harbor Hickam, and Wahiawa Annex in Hawaii; and Naval Base Guam and Andersen Air Force Base in Guam.

Additionally, many of the sovereign states in the region, particularly low-elevation atoll states like Kiribati and Tuvalu, face considerable vulnerabilities due to climate change. The Department continues to collaborate with our allies and partners in the Pacific to prepare for a combined response capability for climate-related emergencies, through efforts such as ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) working groups on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, the Pacific Islands Forum, and the FRANZ agreement with France, Australia, and New Zealand.

Conclusion

Moving forward, the Department anticipates the analysis on vulnerability of U.S. installations and wider operations to climate change will inform the Department of Defense's strategy, planning, assets, investments, and activities. We anticipate the 2022 National Defense Strategy

will help the Department to better understand its role in addressing the effects of climate change on the U.S. joint force and through its work with allies and partners.

Mr. Chairman, let me conclude by thanking this Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.