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# The White House says climate change isn't a national security threat. The military says it is.

The administration's new National Security Strategy document omits climate risks.

By Umair Irfan | Dec 18, 2017, 4:00pm EST



Aircraft carriers berthed at Naval Station Norfolk, a military facility threatened by sea level rise. | MC2 Ernest R. Scott/Navy Media Content Service/Corbis/Getty Images

The Trump administration is backing away from calling **climate change a national**

**security threat**, a move that contradicts **nearly three decades of military planning**.

Conspicuously absent from the **National Security Strategy** report released Monday is any mention of climate issues critical to national security, like how extreme weather drives conflict or how rising sea levels are a looming danger for coastal military facilities.

Compare this to President Obama's 2015 National Security Strategy, which mentioned "climate change" 13 times across 35 pages and had "Confront Climate Change" listed as a security priority.

"Climate change is an urgent and growing threat to our national security, contributing to increased natural disasters, refugee flows, and conflicts over basic resources like food and water," according to the Obama report.

The new report mentions "climate" four times but refers to climate change only once, to criticize how addressing it hurts fossil fuels. "Climate policies will continue to shape the global energy system. U.S. leadership is indispensable to countering an anti-growth energy agenda that is detrimental to U.S. economic and energy security interests," according to the 2017 report.

The softening on climate change as a national security threat is part of an ongoing effort to **dismantle climate change efforts** across all government agencies. But it is at odds with the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, which **Trump signed into law** earlier this month. The \$700 billion law describes climate change as a "**direct threat**" to US national security.

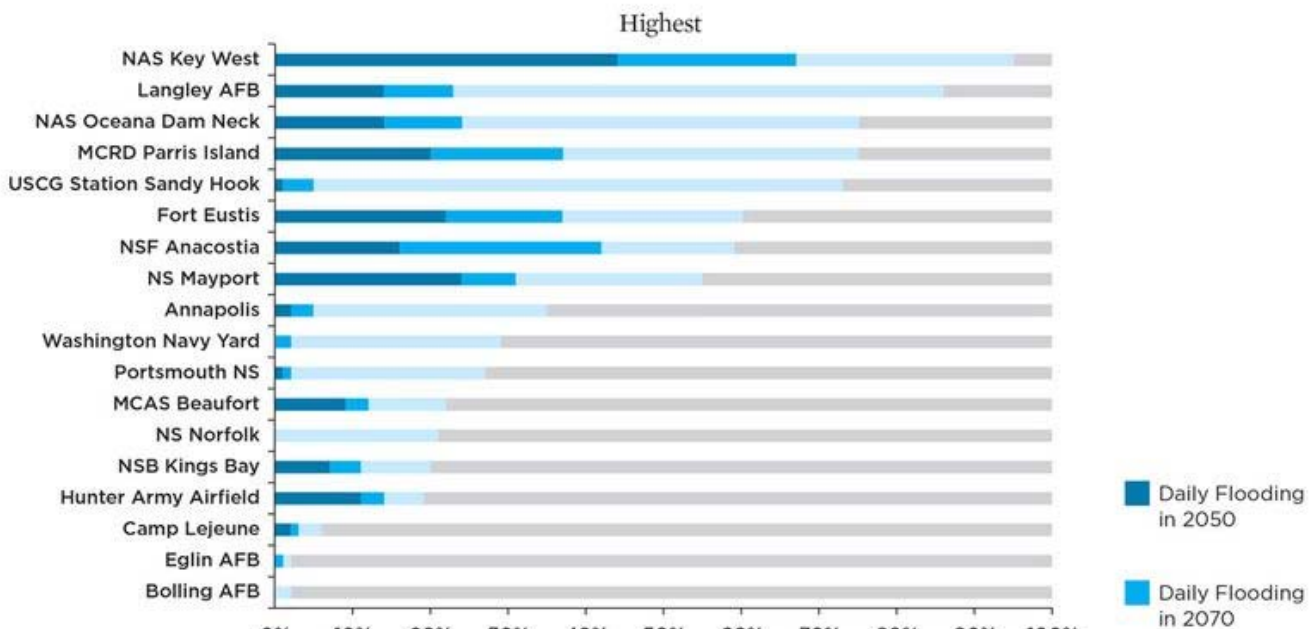
The military has long considered climate change a "**threat multiplier**," with assessments **dating back to 1990**. In 2014, the US Department of Defense published a climate change **adaptation road map**, oblivious to the political wrangling on the issue and writing that "[r]ising global temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, climbing sea levels, and more extreme weather events will intensify the challenges of global instability, hunger, poverty, and conflict."

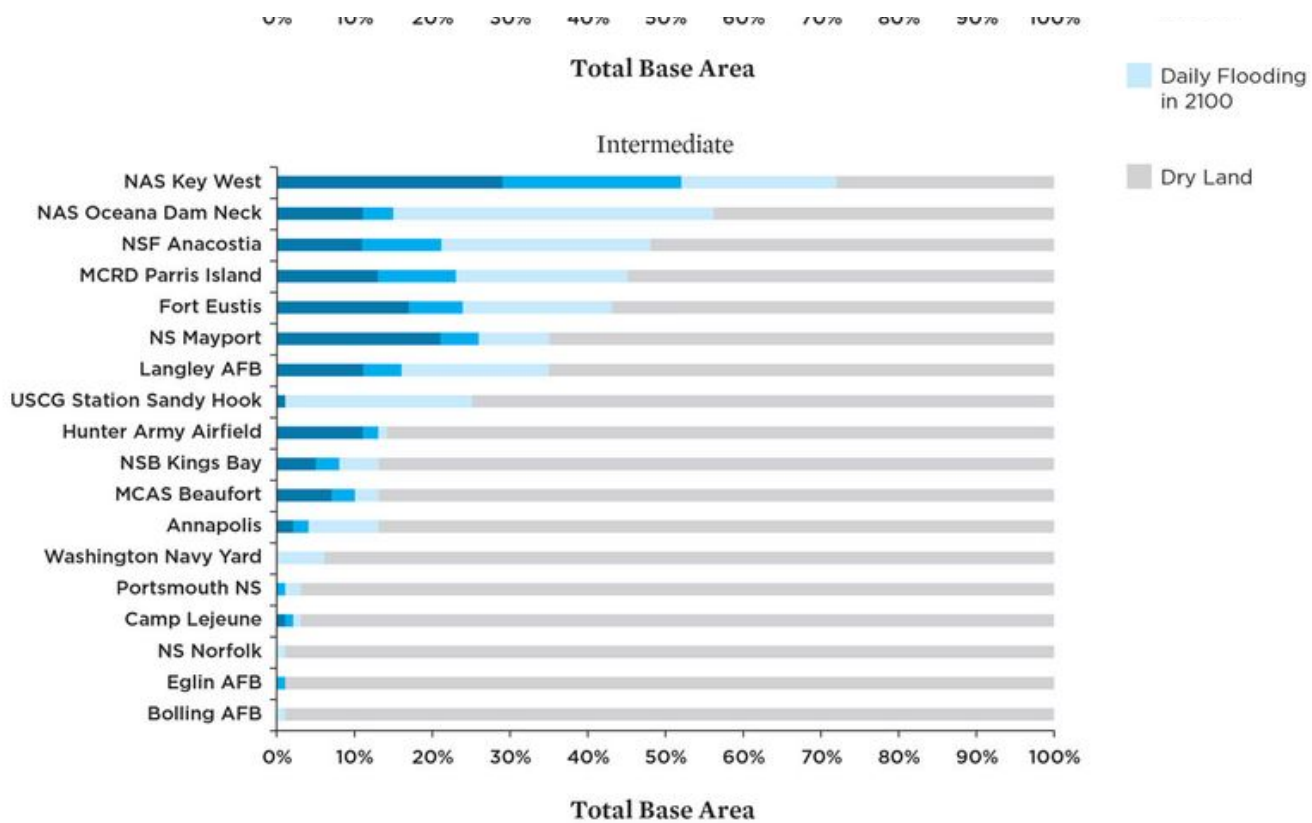
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Higher oceans, for example, menace **128 military bases**. A 2016 report from the **Union of Concerned Scientists** found that the largest naval installation in the world, Naval Station Norfolk, will face water levels that are between 4.5 feet and 7 feet higher in this century.

### Land Loss across Bases





As high tide reaches farther inland, significant land loss is possible, in both the intermediate and highest scenarios, at many of the installations analyzed. Dark blue represents the percentage of total base area that floods with daily high tides in 2050; such land is conservatively considered a loss in this analysis. Medium blue represents the additional area that is inundated with high tide by 2070; light blue represents additional area inundated by 2100. Gray represents the percentage of the total base area that remains above the high tide line at the end of the century. Affected land can include developed and undeveloped areas and even wetlands that reside above the current high tide mark. This analysis finds that installations projected to see major land loss will also see substantial loss of currently developed and utilized areas.

© Union of Concerned Scientists 2016; www.ucsusa.org/MilitarySeasRising

Loss of land at military bases due to rising sea levels. | Union of Concerned Scientists

The new report also furthers the administration’s mission to promote and protect fossil fuel interests at every possible opportunity. It claims that future energy demand will continue to be met with fossil fuels, and that the United States will be an increasingly dominant provider of these resources. At the same time, the country will continue to cut greenhouse gas emissions via energy efficiency and technology improvements.

However, the new National Security Strategy doesn’t preclude the military from factoring climate change into its calculus. Already, facilities like Naval Station Norfolk are **lifting piers** above projected flood levels, while units like the Navy SEALs are working toward becoming **net-zero energy** users. Bases are also aggressively **deploying renewable energy** and cutting their electricity and water use with efficiency upgrades.

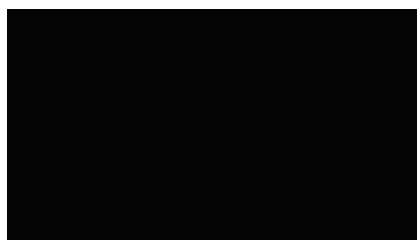
And the military will likely remain a driver of climate science, from operating **satellite instruments** to **modeling humanity's effects on the climate**.

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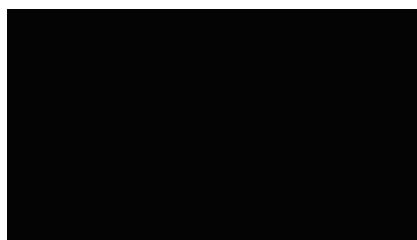
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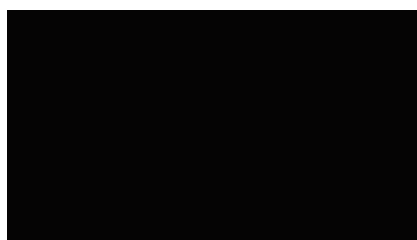
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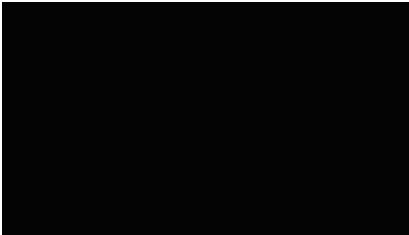
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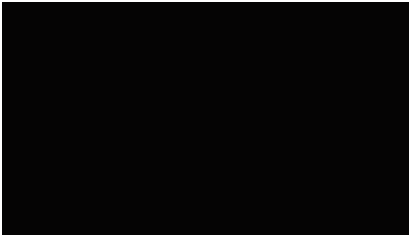
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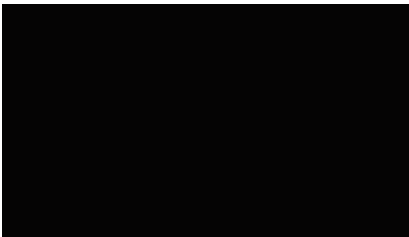
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