

Climate Changed

# 'Climate Security' Panel May Give White House Skeptics New Voice

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- ▶ White House considering presidential committee on climate
- ▶ Move comes as federal agencies say global warming a threat



Physicist William Happer in the lobby of Trump Tower in New York in 2017. *Photographer: Albin Lohr-Jones/Pool via Bloomberg*

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The White House is considering establishing a presidential committee to assess the consensus of scientists and the Pentagon that climate change poses a national security threat, according to a person familiar with the plan.

The move, being spearheaded by William Happer, a physicist and National Security Council senior director who has touted the benefits of carbon dioxide emissions, could give climate skeptics a platform to push back against conclusions reached by Pentagon and other agencies within Trump's own administration that climate change is a major national security threat.

The proposed Presidential Committee on Climate Security has yet to receive sign off by the White House and the panel will be the subject of a deputy-

level meeting on Friday, according to the person who requested anonymity to discuss non-public deliberations.

Representatives of the National Security Council did not immediately comment.

The idea drew swift condemnation from climate activists.

“The science and facts on climate change are well-established and do not need a administration-influenced review by an NSC headed panel,” said Ron Keys, a retired U.S. Air Force general and senior member of the advisory board at the Center for Climate and Security, a nonpartisan Washington think tank. “What we do need are practical and pragmatic policy choices today to fix the problem.”

#### Earlier: Pentagon Warns of Risk to Bases, Troops From Climate Change

According to a National Security Council discussion paper obtained by the Washington Post, which reported earlier on the proposed committee, the panel would “advise the president on scientific understanding of today’s climate, how the climate might change in the future under natural and human influences, and how a changing climate could affect the security of the United States.”

“It’s a great idea, spearheaded by a great guy,” said Steve Milloy, a policy adviser for the Heartland Institute, a group critical of climate science. “Sounds like the dishonest/know-nothing climate bedwetters in the national security apparatus – as well as those across the federal government – are about to get schooled in CO2 reality.”

The effort to upend the military approach to climate change comes as some conservatives grow disappointed the Trump administration is not moving more aggressively to eliminate or undercut a swath of domestic climate policies enacted under former President Barack Obama.

### **Conservative Concerns**

Still the possible new initiative illustrates the seriousness of the Trump administration’s commitment to undermining a scientific and government consensus about the national security threat posed by climate change, as rising seas, more intense storms and deeper droughts threaten to uproot communities, destroy property and create new geopolitical tensions around the globe.

#### Related: Florence’s Path Shows Pentagon Has to Fight Climate Threats Too

Last month the Pentagon issued a report warning of the dire risk of climate change to the military’s bases and troops and a worldwide threat

assessment of the U.S. intelligence community by the Office of the Director for National Intelligence recognized climate change as a threat. A report issued late last year by several federal agencies said climate change posed a serious threat to the U.S., and one that is quickly getting worse.

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“Global environmental and ecological degradation, as well as climate change, are likely to fuel competition for resources, economic distress, and social discontent through 2019 and beyond,” Dan Coats, Director of National Intelligence, said in a statement for the Senate intelligence committee. “Climate hazards such as extreme weather, higher temperatures, droughts, floods, wildfires, storms, sea level rise, soil degradation, and acidifying oceans are intensifying, threatening infrastructure, health, and water and food security. ”

The committee could shift the Pentagon’s behavior in a new and significant way, according to John Conger, who was assistant secretary of defense for energy, installations and environment under Obama.

In the two years since Trump became president, the military has been able to continue planning for climate risks, Conger, who now directs the Center for Climate & Security, said in a phone interview Wednesday. But if a White House committee declared that climate change was not a security threat, the result could be what he called a “dampening” on those efforts.

For example, Conger said that budget officials might stop requesting funds to protect air bases and other facilities against the effects of more severe storms, guessing that those requests were unlikely to be approved. Military planners might become reluctant to raise climate concerns with their superiors.

“You want the military to be able to give their best military judgment. What happens when the White House advocates a view that is directly opposed to that best military judgment?” Conger said. “Budgeting is an inherently political process.”

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