

“National Security Impact of Climate Change Opportunism”

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Climate change is currently a forbidden topic with the Trump administration. Undermining policies designed to mitigate its impacts should not be misunderstood as obliviousness to its implications, however, particularly in the realm of national security concerns. In the opening months of the second Trump administration, the White House announced its intent to withdraw from the Paris Agreement for the second time. It also demonstrated hostility towards renewables and insisted on an “energy dominance” policy predicated on exacerbating global reliance on fossil fuels. On the surface, this implies a cavalier disregard of global warming science. Yet, if the reality of climate change must be denied, the Trump administration’s policy ambitions betray a calculating awareness of the opportunities and dangers of the dystopic climate change future they are helping to usher in.

Take the administration’s outspoken interest in acquiring Greenland. On its face puzzling, but rational in the context of a world where ice caps are melting and the Arctic will increasingly become a site of contestation for great power ambitions. As Sumantra Maitra [argues](#), “further integration between the United States and Greenland is necessary and inevitable because of ... emerging multipolarity and great power competition in the Arctic.” NPR [reported](#) that Denmark has complained to the United States about a U.S. orchestrated influence campaign designed to weaken ties between Greenland and Denmark. Trump’s interest in Canada may derive as well from the same geopolitical considerations as the U.S., Russia and other powers maneuver for hegemony in the Arctic.

Other administration priorities, particularly on the domestic front, do not need the reality of global warming for them to make sense, but nonetheless they are consistent with the kinds of policy concerns that national security experts have identified as being exacerbated by global warming. I focus here on domestic militarization: the eagerness of the current administration to impose an authoritarian presence in domestic affairs through the heavy-handed deployment of the military, as is most visibly seen presently in the attempted military takeover of Washington, D.C. in the name of imposing order upon lawlessness, with noises being made about Chicago as next. To understand how climate change might feed into that propensity, even while its existence is publicly denied, I first summarize some of the concerns posed by climate change as identified by the national security establishment.

In October, 2021, the National Intelligence Council released its first and only [report](#) on the security risks climate change poses for the United States: *National Intelligence Estimate: Climate Change and International Responses Increasing Challenges to U.S. National Security Through 2040*. To be sure, since at least 1999, the national security establishment has been producing reports and offering testimony before Congress regarding the [dangers](#) of climate

change. That is, up until the present day, with a 2025 annual threat assessment by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) [disappearing](#) the issue.

The 2021 *National Intelligence Estimate* [report](#) notes climate change will increasingly destabilize countries, particularly developing countries, as they experience food and water insecurity, which can in turn translate into international conflict over shared but scarce resources. Those insecurities will exacerbate internal tensions, testing governance capacities and resulting in internal violence. That combined with droughts, floods, intense storm surges, and so on will lead to internal migration or “displaced people.” And that in turn will foster cross-border migrations, especially from countries bearing the brunt of climate change impacts. *Id.* at 10.

As for the U.S., the 2021 *National Intelligence Estimate* [report](#) finds it “relatively better positioned” to adapt although it “will often be wrenching” with impacts on people anticipated to be “massive even if the worst human costs can be avoided.” *Id.* at 15. But overall domestic impacts get secondary attention, which is typical of most national security climate change analyses, as the National Security Archive website authors note.

At the same time, immigration, foreseen as the problem of climate refugees resorting to cross-border movements to escape increasingly unlivable circumstances, is a central policy and public relations concern of the current administration, although never discussed in relation to the disappeared issue of global warming. Millions of immigrants, the 2025 [report](#) explains, are “straining resources and putting U.S. communities at risk,” and the report credits aggressive border security for a recent drop in the flow of migrants. 2025 ODNI Report at 4, 8.

The militarization of the border, with soldiers, armored vehicles, and even warships, all to combat what the Trump administration calls an “[invasion](#)” is, like the hunger for Greenland, a not irrational policy response to climate change. Far right parties in Europe in the last decade have found ways to mobilize environmental concerns as a rationale for closing borders to immigrants. As Marine Le Pen has explained, non-citizen migrants, “the nomadic,” have a [rootlessness](#) that precludes any long-term environmental concern for place—here the nation. In other words, concern about global warming can be used to justify aggressive border policing, let alone xenophobic racism, provided you redefine the global environmental problem in terms of a national ecology—an approach getting dubbed as “[ecofascism](#).” The idea is establishing a national climate-haven in a world otherwise burning.

But the border is hardly the only thing the Trump administration wants to militarize. Thus far, it seems enamored of a general, increasingly visible, militarized federal presence in domestic civilian matters, testing the limits of the Posse Comitatus Act. ICE immigration raids, conducted by masked individuals in military regalia have established a “[regular, visible](#)” presence in cities like Los Angeles. Moreover, spectacle for the sake of spectacle appears to have been the purpose of the sweep ICE agents, arriving in military vehicles, conducted in MacArthur Park. The *New York Times* quoted Gregory Bovino, a Customs and Border Patrol Chief in Southern California as [saying](#): “Better get used to us now, cause this is going to be normal very soon.”

Protests against the aggressive presence of ICE agents in daily life have in turn been the pretext for sending the National Guard and the Marines into cities—a policy that the present administration plans to continue where the opportunity presents itself, with again, normalizing impacts raising concerns about “creeping authoritarianism” under the pretext of, in the words of Sean Parnell, Pentagon spokesperson, “[Defense of our people & our homeland.](#)”

Climate change can enable this trend because it manifests as disorder and disruption by virtue of the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events. A coherent policy response to climate change at the national level would seek both mitigation of climate change through greenhouse gas reductions and adaptation. Adaptation involves planning to soften the unavoidable impacts of climate change. Adaptation means, as the 2023 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report explains, things like “[land use planning such as no build zones](#)” to reduce increasing flood risk. Presently, with “[energy dominance](#)” as the federal policy, mitigation is not on the cards and with the EPA expected, as of this writing, to issue a rule disavowing authority to address climate change, it is unlikely the federal government will be proactive with regard to adaptation.

That leaves reactive disaster management as the main federal role and even there the current policy is to downsize federal responsibilities with the dismantling of [FEMA](#) and the [National Weather Service](#) along with a transfer of resources and personnel from FEMA to ICE.

Fires and floods displace people. For example, the 2025 Palisades and Eaton [fires](#) destroyed 16,000 structures and displaced thousands of people. Those households, by and large, were high income and well-resourced to handle the displacement. But that need not always be the case as demonstrated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. There [over eighty percent](#) of New Orleans flooded and more than a million people were displaced, many permanently. As Katrina loomed, there was what has been called a “private sector evacuation,” meaning those who had access to transportation and who could afford temporary housing elsewhere left while those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder [stayed](#). The situation exacerbated traditional social tensions along lines of race and class, and called forth the typical blame-the-victim rhetoric about the poor existing in a social malaise of their own making from which government, operating on taxpayer dollars, will have to [rescue them](#).

After flooding made New Orleans uninhabitable, the stranded became equivalent to internal “immigrants” threatening to contaminate neighboring communities, as infamously exemplified by the frustrated attempts to cross the bridge connecting New Orleans to neighboring Gretna. As the largely African American poor streamed into the largely white neighboring suburb, they [encountered barricades](#) manned by Gretna police. Communities which eventually hosted the New Orleans displaced exhibited a similar concern about and hostility towards the arrivals, viewing them as a drain on their tax base, new competition for local jobs, and a threat to their community. In effect, displaced United States citizens were viewed in the same [hostile light](#) that is normally shined on immigrants crossing at the southern border.

The same dynamic in the future will easily justify military internment of displaced people, for their own good as well as their neighbors. Recall the hysteria about those left stranded in New Orleans who were portrayed as looters and lawless criminals—emissaries of social disorder that required military intervention. To be sure, the military did much more than treat civilians as potential looters; forensic analysis in the aftermath [found](#) that the National Guard and active duty military provided the main vehicle for a federal level response to the disaster. But either way, the result is the same: with climate change increasing the frequency and severity of natural disasters, calling out the national guard will be the regular aftermath response, with an increasing normalization of military policing and management of civilian areas.

The Los Angeles fires of last year, while affecting more affluent neighborhoods nonetheless triggered the same concern about looting as well as the intervention of the National Guard – although this time the [concern](#) was to police outside interlopers rather than an affluent resident population.

Climate change, combined with a non-existent policy to mitigate it and an enervated FEMA, promises more frequent and heightened national emergencies, opening the way for federal interventions in states and cities to restore civil order. This military presence, even when aggressively challenged in the courts, will accustom the citizenry to the long arm of the President, readily extended at his behest, as well as engender diminished faith in the abilities of municipal and state authorities to cope with climate emergencies. And even if local and state authorities can manage on their own, Los Angeles and D.C. show that even merely anecdotal evidence of disorder may be all that is needed to establish and help normalize the quick descent of military boots on the ground.