

**Opening Statement of Chairman Whitehouse  
Senate Budget Committee  
“Budgeting for the Storm: Climate Change and the Costs to National  
Security”  
May 15, 2024**

Ranking Member Grassley, members of the committee, witnesses, and guests: welcome. As we examine the looming economic dangers of climate change, today we’ll learn about the strain it’s placing on our defense and national security operations.

Climate change is a catalyst of conflict, while also threatening our military’s infrastructure and operational readiness—all at significant cost. According to a recent Bloomberg analysis, “Rising tides and powerful storms turbocharged by climate change are poised to hobble federal facilities worth at least \$387 billion in coming decades, disrupting everything from veterans’ medical care to military operations and space exploration.” The vast majority of these costs are related directly to military infrastructure. For over a decade, the Government Accountability Office has identified climate change as a high-risk area for the Department of Defense and has highlighted billions of dollars in annual damage to military installations.

In a congressional hearing this month, the Air Force testified that rebuilding U.S. facilities in Guam damaged by Typhoon Mawar will cost \$10 billion. That’s more than twice what the Department of Defense spent rebuilding Tyndall and Offutt Air Force Bases in Florida and Nebraska—both also devastated by climate change-related weather events. Around the world, nearly half of our military installations are facing threats from rising sea levels and increased flooding, with serious damage becoming increasingly frequent.

Naval Station Norfolk, the world's largest naval base, is particularly vulnerable. In Hampton Roads, persistent flooding, even on bright, sunny days, disrupts operations and requires extensive and costly adaptation efforts. A former base commander estimated that Norfolk’s useful life as a naval base could end in as little as 20 years, and he said that in 2015.

In Rhode Island, our Air National Guard 143rd Airlift Wing, operates out of a high-risk coastal flood area, threatening its ability to deploy to protect life, property, and public safety. Much of the neighboring Electric Boat submarine manufacturing facility, producing *Columbia*-class submarines, the Pentagon’s top acquisition priority, also sits in the high-risk coastal flood area, vulnerable to storm surge and extreme weather. Across Narragansett Bay, the United States Naval War College and Naval Station Newport share causeways which I have seen cut off by increasingly heavy rainstorms — New England’s climate telltale.

In short, repairing, rebuilding, and maintaining our defense infrastructure—the foundation of our national security—is becoming ever more costly in a world shaped by climate upheaval.

Climate change is a source of geopolitical tensions, hence a catalyst of conflict. Around the world, climate change is destabilizing entire regions, stoking conflicts over increasingly scarce resources, driving impoverishment and migration, and creating new tensions in geopolitically sensitive areas.

In the Arctic, melting ice has opened new sea routes, creating new security threats from Russia and China that require increased U.S. military and Coast Guard presence. In low-lying Bangladesh, sea-level rise and extreme weather could cause mass migration, perhaps 13 million people, toward India.

In Kashmir, tensions between nuclear-armed India and nuclear-armed Pakistan will worsen as Himalayan glaciers disappear and disputes intensify over water resources and border management. It is widely accepted that climate-driven drought contributed to the ongoing conflict in Syria, fueling regional political instability. In Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, disrupted agriculture and worsened food and water insecurity has brought climate destabilization to our borders. In the coming decades, climate change could drive mass migration of up to 200 million people worldwide.

In that more dangerous world, military operations will be made more difficult and dangerous, as soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines have to work in unprecedented conditions, testing the limits of human physical endurance. Already, air operations are affected by midday surface heat on airbase runways.

As many national security experts have recognized, climate change is causing environmental damage that affects global stability, our national safety, and our long-term fiscal health. That comes home to roost in the budget. If you don't believe me, read the Pentagon's and Intelligence Community's own reports.