

Written Testimony of Michael Breen, President and CEO, Truman Project and Truman Center  
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Hearing on  
Examining the Role of Environmental Policies on Access to Energy and Economic Opportunity  
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Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Boxer, and distinguished members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I come before you first and foremost as a fellow citizen with a shared concern for the security and prosperity of our great nation. Like many in the post-9/11 generation, I am no stranger to the costs and consequences of war. While I am currently the President and CEO of the Truman Project and Truman Center—a nationwide network of leaders and experts dedicated to improving America’s national security — I previously had the privilege to lead American soldiers in combat in both Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, and to work with refugee families on the ground in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and elsewhere.

National security leadership, on the battlefield or in Washington, means taking seriously the risks to those you are charged with protecting. As a combat leader in Afghanistan and Iraq, I often received intelligence that indicated lethal danger to my unit and our mission. Regardless of whether or not I personally believed in the conclusions drawn from that intelligence or the sources from which it came, I would have committed unpardonable error if I did not heed the warnings I was given, and act decisively to minimize the risk.

America’s military leaders have already come to understand that climate change is a risk to our national security. The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review—a document of military strategy, not partisan political

design—identified climate change as an “accelerant of instability” that would place a “burden to respond” on the Department of Defense.<sup>i</sup> The next review, in 2014, designated climate change a threat multiplier because its impacts “increase the frequency, scale, and complexity of future missions.”<sup>ii</sup>

Moreover, the Center for Naval Analysis Military Advisory Board, which includes 16 retired, high-ranking military leaders including former Army Chief of Staff General Gordon Sullivan (ret.) and former Marine Corps Commandant General James T. Conway (ret.), recently argued in a report co-signed by former Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff and former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta that “the nature and pace of observed climate changes pose severe risks for our national security.”<sup>iii</sup>

Those severe risks include drought, famine, flooding, sea level rise, extreme weather events, mass migration, and increasingly intense resource competition. Each of these phenomena is currently fueling violence and instability around the world. If we remain on our present course, the overwhelming consensus of the scientific profession is that we can expect much more of this, simultaneously, everywhere in the world. The security implications of this reality are as clear as they are dire.

For years, we have discussed the risk of climate change in the abstract—as a possible eventuality for which we as a nation might prepare. But the days of speculation are over. Climate change is having an impact on our operations and our interests around the world in the present day.

According to the Department of the Navy, the United States receives a request for humanitarian assistance from somewhere in the world “on an average of once every two weeks.”<sup>iv</sup> Given that our fiercest enemies prey on the human misery wrought by manmade and natural destruction alike, the United States cannot afford strategically nor morally to leave these calls for help unanswered.

Unfortunately, climate change makes such requests all the more taxing on our military. Disasters are increasing in size, scope, and frequency, often ravaging the most fragile of communities around the world and pushing feeble governments into chaos to the benefit of extremists.

Considering state fragility, I am reminded of a senior Bangladeshi military officer I met years ago who recognized climate change as a threat to not only his nation's security, but its very integrity. A full one-fifth of Bangladesh's landmass would be underwater with little more than a three-foot rise in sea level, threatening to displace more than 22 million people into nearby India.<sup>v</sup> Our democratic ally has in turn planned for this eventuality by building an eight-foot fence along 70% of its 2,500-mile border.<sup>vi</sup> This creates the very real possibility of millions of Bangladeshis frantically fleeing a catastrophe only to be repelled from India by force. Considering that these nations fought a war over the same territory just decades prior, I find it hard to imagine that a resurgent conflict in this strategic region would not have adverse implications for U.S. national security.

Climate change has the chance to facilitate or exacerbate great power conflict as well. At the same conference, I spoke with numerous leaders in NATO, the bedrock hard security organization of the U.S.-led international order. Along with senior leaders in our own military, they expressed their concerns about prospects for conflict in the Arctic, where melting ice is giving way to new strategically valuable waterways; indeed, the Northern Sea Route has seen a steadily growing number of passages since 2011.<sup>vii</sup> Russia has accordingly moved to develop anti-access capabilities in the region, increasing its military exercises and number of military bases in use in the Arctic considerably since 2007.<sup>viii</sup> These newly open sea lanes will surely be a source of tension between the United States and an ascendant nationalist Russia.

The possible range of first, second, and third order climate change effects around the world could make for a far lengthier testimony than time allows, so I will close with a reminder that we are experiencing climate change on the home front as well. More than 11,000 and 50,000 men and women of the National Guard deployed to our own cities during Hurricanes Sandy and Katrina (respectively), leading relief efforts that cost our nation a combined 151 billion dollars in repairs and rebuilding.<sup>ix,x</sup> Extreme heat and wildfires have halted live fire training exercises in Alaska, and have required mobilization for

emergency assistance throughout the country, such as in Idaho, and—as recently as the time of preparing this testimony— in Oklahoma as well.<sup>xi,xii,xiii</sup> And sea levels rising at twice the global rate threaten, of all things, our own naval headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia.<sup>xiv</sup>

Perhaps most fundamentally, climate change is a risk factor that makes many of the other threats we face both more likely, and more dangerous – from terrorist organizations that prey on fragile and failing states, to rising and resurgent major powers who are hostile to our values. Demanding that we act to address either the risk of climate change or the threat posed by a given enemy, but not both, is a deeply misguided false choice. The United States fought and won a two-front, two-ocean war on behalf of the world; surely we can confront threats in both the short- and long-term now. I urge the Congress to do what it has always done when our nation has been tested throughout history: Heed the threat, listen to the risk-assessment our military leaders make, and grant them the tools they need to minimize risk to our servicemembers, our citizens, our nation, and our allies around the world.

The time for denial and delay is long since passed. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify—I look forward to your questions.

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<sup>i</sup> [http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/QDR/QDR\\_as\\_of\\_29JAN10\\_1600.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/QDR/QDR_as_of_29JAN10_1600.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> [http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2014\\_Quadrennial\\_Defense\\_Review.pdf](http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> [https://www.cna.org/CNA\\_files/pdf/MAB\\_5-8-14.pdf](https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/pdf/MAB_5-8-14.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.navy.mil/navydata/people/secnav/Mabus/Speech/USNI2013.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/sea-level-could-rise-at-least-6-meters/>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/07/30/indias-border-fence-extended-to-kashmir/39e3e816-9704-4a3b-8d6c-fd46123ce005/>

<sup>vii</sup> [http://www.arctic-lio.com/nsr\\_transits](http://www.arctic-lio.com/nsr_transits)

<sup>viii</sup> [https://csis.org/files/publication/150826\\_Conley\\_NewiceCurtain\\_Web.pdf](https://csis.org/files/publication/150826_Conley_NewiceCurtain_Web.pdf)

<sup>ix</sup> [https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1923-25045-7442/sandy\\_fema\\_aar.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1923-25045-7442/sandy_fema_aar.pdf)

<sup>x</sup> [http://www.army.mil/article/44368/Hurricane\\_Katrina\\_response\\_\\_National\\_Guard\\_\\_039\\_s\\_\\_039\\_finet\\_hour\\_\\_039\\_/](http://www.army.mil/article/44368/Hurricane_Katrina_response__National_Guard__039_s__039_finet_hour__039_/)

<sup>xi</sup> <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/663734.pdf>

<sup>xii</sup> <http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/guard-reserve/2016/03/26/national-guard-black-hawk-helicopters-deployed-help-fight-kansas-wildfire/82293318/>

<sup>xiii</sup> <http://www.newson6.com/story/26372082/tulsas-army-national-guard-base-covered-in-fire-suppression-foam>

<sup>xiv</sup> <http://www.npr.org/2014/06/24/324891517/as-sea-levels-rise-norfolk-is-sinking-and-planning>