

Pentagon to unveil plan for dealing with climate change

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At a meeting that brings together many of the world's foremost military leaders, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel is expected to reveal how the ongoing effects of global climate change pose an urgent risk to national security and require extensive rethinking of many aspects of the U.S. military.

In coordination with his comments Monday here at the Conference of Defense Ministers of the Americas, the Pentagon is set to unveil a plan articulating how it will address the effects of climate change that threaten global security and its own operational readiness.

The Pentagon anticipates new strategies at home and abroad, particularly in regions that are more susceptible to changing temperatures and [extreme weather events](#). It has already begun assessing the effects on military bases in coastal regions.

Officials have also started to prepare for expanded roles overseas.

There will be new missions undertaken, such as monitoring the Arctic Sea, where formerly frozen trade lanes have thawed and present shipping companies with fresh routes. An increased humanitarian role is also expected as severe weather could spur turmoil in countries with unstable governments and shoddy infrastructure.

"When there is any natural disaster event that occurs, there always is some element of a security risk - law and order, individuals attempting to

take advantage of those catastrophes, adjusting to shifts in security requirements," Hagel said Saturday, providing a preview at a news conference in Santiago, Chile, after a meeting with government leaders there.

The Conference of Defense Ministers of the Americas is the culmination of Hagel's six-day trip through South America, talking with top leaders in Colombia, Chile and Peru. The conference, which brings together 34 nations, begins Monday.

Unlike previous Pentagon statements that described climate change as a distant threat, the military is now asserting that global warming "poses immediate risks to U.S. [national security](#)," a shift in thinking that has "very significant" implications for the Pentagon's work, said Francesco Femia, co-director of the Center for Climate & Security, a Washington think tank.

Last year, Navy Adm. Samuel J. Locklear III, the head of the Pacific Command, said the greatest long-term security threat in Asia is climate change, which he said would "cripple the security environment, probably more likely than the other scenarios we all often talk about."

The Pentagon has said that it already experiences weather problems on many bases and other facilities. For example, the Hampton Roads region in Virginia, which includes Langley Air Force Base and Naval Station Norfolk, has experienced recurrent flooding.

In May, analysis done by 11 retired generals and admirals for CNA Corp., a nonprofit research and analysis organization in Arlington, Va., said estimates of the sea level in the Hampton Roads area rise by 1.5 feet over the next 20 to 50 years and by more than 7 feet by the year 2100.

"The area has hundreds of miles of waterfront from three major rivers

that all flow into the Chesapeake Bay," the study says. "It is an extremely low-lying area, which makes it particularly susceptible to flooding from relative sea level rise - a combination of global sea level rise, land subsidence and ocean circulation."

As they have come to see the effects of global warming, a growing number of commanders have asked the Pentagon for guidance on how to function in the new, worsening conditions, Femia said.

The military's preparation for changing climates demonstrates a rift with many Republican lawmakers in Congress, who have attempted to block funding to the Pentagon for any attempt to address [climate change](#). Some see the policy as a political ruse by President Obama and Democrats to address environmental issues.

The Pentagon has not provided figures on what the changes in climate might cost. But military officials have asserted that planning is needed to avoid significant costs in the future rather than hastily reacting when an emergency occurs.

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