Pentagon, intelligence agencies detail climate threat to security

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Reports released Thursday by the Pentagon and the U.S. intelligence community laid out in frank terms the national security threat posed by climate change, and how rapidly evolving weather patterns will impact global stability in the decades to come.

The release of the documents, which was announced by the White House, comes as President Joe Biden prepares to attend COP26, the United Nations climate conference in Glasgow, next month.

"We are already experiencing the devastating impacts that climate has wreaked on almost every aspect of our lives—from food and water insecurity to infrastructure and public health," a senior administration official told reporters on a call Wednesday.

"And these security challenges are among the many reasons the administration has prioritized addressing the climate crisis both here at home and as a core element of our national security and foreign policy," the official said.

The intelligence report, released by the National Intelligence Council and intended to reflect the views of America's intelligence agencies as a whole, says that climate-driven risks to national security will likely increase through 2040.

The report highlighted three key findings: Geopolitical tensions are likely to grow as countries debate which of them should act on and pay for climate change mitigation; the physical effects of climate change will worsen geopolitical flashpoints, much like what is happening now in the Arctic; and developing countries, which are least able to adapt, will bear the brunt of those effects.

According to the intelligence report, those physical effects will increase the possibility of instability and internal conflict in developing nations, which could in turn create additional demands on U.S. diplomatic, economic, humanitarian and military resources.

The Pentagon's report, which was submitted to the National Security Council, says the military would begin to incorporate the security implications of climate change into its operations and start spending more money on climate analysis as it relates to national security.

"The Department intends to prioritize funding DOD Components in

support of exercises, war games, analyses, and studies of climate change impacts on DOD missions, operations, and global stability," the Pentagon report says. "In coordination with allies and partners, DOD will work to prevent, mitigate, account for, and respond to defense and security risks associated with climate change."

A provision in the fiscal 2021 National Defense Authorization Act directed the DOD to update its 2014 Climate Change Adaptation Roadmap, the military's policy framework for how it will adapt to climate change.

The update, which is due by February 1, 2022, will include descriptions of how the Pentagon intends to deal with extreme weather events and sea level rise—and how much it could cost.

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