

## **Democratic National Convention 2016 Platform America's Role in the World: Climate Change and Security**

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Climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing the United States today. The 2015 National Security Strategy lists it among the “top strategic risks to our interests.” Some, notably Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, have even named climate change as the number one threat to U.S. national security.<sup>1</sup>

There is overwhelming scientific consensus and a growing majority of the American public that understands climate change is real, and that the release of greenhouse gases that are warming our planet at an unprecedented rate are the result of human activity.

The American people are coming to terms with the fact that burning fossil fuels in our power plants, cars and factories is no longer compatible with the long-term stability of our planet or our country. Climate change is not simply an environmental problem. It is an economic, foreign policy and global security problem.

### **A National Security Threat**

The impacts of climate change are already tearing through communities in the United States. Today, those impacts undermine national security by temporarily disabling energy, physical, and virtual infrastructure.

If we continue along the path of ‘business-as-usual’, increasingly extreme weather – from droughts to floods – is anticipated to take a heavy toll in compromised energy security, preparing and repairing infrastructure, and lost property and lives. These disruptions have real economic costs for the entire nation, with the greatest risks to financial security falling disproportionately on low-income people and people of color in the United States.

It is easy to understand why the Democratic National Convention 2012 platform affirmed that climate change - along with terrorism, nuclear proliferation, cyber and biological attacks, and transnational crime - is one of the gravest dangers the United States faces.

### **A Global Security Threat**

The security threats are not limited to our borders. Climate chaos is being felt around the world - from droughts in the Horn of Africa, and flooding across Europe,

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, by 2014, 70% of the world's nations had explicitly acknowledged climate change as a national security concern. Global Security Defense Index on Climate Change, American Security Project, <http://www.americansecurityproject.org/climate-energy-and-security/climate-change/gsdicc/>

to wildfires in the U.S. and Russia, record-busting heat waves across Asia, and extreme storms slamming into island communities. As the Department of Homeland Security outlined in its Quadrennial Homeland Security Review, climate change will increase the severity and frequency of such weather related hazards. In the longer term, if we do not slow global warming, rising oceans and desertification will reshape whole societies.

As in our own country, people in the developing world living in poverty and who are politically and socially marginalized – women, the elderly, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities - are most vulnerable to the disruptions caused by climate change.

Ironically, low-income developing countries – the very nations who have contributed least to the problem – are experiencing the impacts of a warming world first and worst. Those with weak governance structures, particularly in Africa and Asia, are predicted to fair most poorly.

### **Making Matters Worse**

If insufficient action is taken to curb carbon pollution, climate change will become a threat multiplier. A bi-partisan coalition of 48 top national security and foreign policy leaders claim that climate change will make the world more unstable, resource constrained, violent and disaster prone.<sup>2</sup> The Department of Defense has agreed that global warming will exacerbate existing problems like poverty, social tension, weak political institutions, and governments' ability to meet the basic needs of their populations.<sup>3</sup>

Syria has been cited as an extreme example of how drought and food scarcity intersect to spark violent political upheaval. A five-year drought preceding the Spring 2011 unrest was the longest and most severe in modern Syrian recordkeeping, pushing 1.5 million people from rural areas to urban centers. The resource strain contributed to exacerbating ethnic and religious tensions and helped fuel what has become a prolonged and bloody conflict and migration crisis.<sup>4</sup>

Like the war in Syria, climate change effects like rising seas are expected to cause large-scale displacement. More than a billion people live in coastal cities seriously threatened by increased flooding and storm surges will have to find somewhere new to call home.<sup>5</sup> If we continue fueling the global economy with climate-cooking

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<sup>2</sup> National Security and Foreign Policy Leaders Warn of Climate Change Threat, Call for U.S. Leadership, <http://www.psaonline.org/2015/10/22/national-security-and-foreign-policy-leaders-warn-of-climate-change-threat-call-for-u-s-leadership/>

<sup>3</sup> National Security Implications of Climate-Related Risks and a Changing Climate, Department of Defense, <http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/150724-congressional-report-on-national-implications-of-climate-change.pdf?source=govdelivery>

<sup>4</sup> Climate Security Part Two: Climate Change & Global Security, American Security Project, <http://www.americansecurityproject.org/part-two-climate-change-global-security/>

<sup>5</sup> Act Now or Pay Later: Protecting a billion people in climate-threatened coastal cities, Christian Aid, <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/images/act-now-pay-later-climate-report-may-2016.pdf>

oil, coal and gas we can expect massive migration and a climate refugee crisis in the coming decades.

### **A New Security Architecture**

According to the American Security Project, these new challenges necessitate adapting the architecture of security.<sup>6</sup> As a report commissioned by the G7 put it “We must act quickly to limit the future risks to the planet we share and to the peace we seek.”<sup>7</sup>

But climate change is not a security threat we can address with troops and tanks – either by greening them or sending them into destabilized regions. In fact, a bloated defense budget is misplacing an emphasis on military engagement when resources spent on curbing greenhouse gas pollution and strengthening resilience would keep us – and the rest of the world – safer.<sup>8</sup>

As the largest historical emitter of greenhouse gas pollution and the world’s wealthiest nation, the United States has a moral imperative - and an enlightened self-interest – to show international leadership in addressing the global security threat from climate change through multilateralism, cooperation and mutual aid.

**Policy recommendations for showing international leadership on security and climate stability** (aka policy recommendations for a peace economy that’s good for people and the planet):

- **Implement Our Commitments in the Paris Agreement, and Then Do More** – In December 2015 the U.S. joined 194 countries at the UN climate summit in Paris to negotiate a global pact to keep global temperatures from rising more than 2 degrees Celsius (and as close to 1.5 degrees Celsius as possible) from pre-industrial levels. Climate scientists have called this the threshold of irreversible global warming. In Paris, the United States pledged to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 26-28% by 2025 relative to 2005 levels.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. can show international leadership by delivering early on the elements of our contribution to cutting carbon pollution, especially by moving forward with the strongest possible Clean Power Plan to reduce emissions from existing power plants and incentivize renewable energy and supporting states to take early action under

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<sup>6</sup> Effective Measures for Tackling Climate Change: An Analysis of the Divestment Movement, American Security Project, <https://www.americansecurityproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Ref-0186-Effective-Measures-for-Tackling-Climate-Change.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks, an independent report commissioned by G7 members, <https://www.newclimateforpeace.org/>

<sup>8</sup> As William Hartung, director of the Arms and Security Project of the Center for International Policy points out, lavishing more money on the Pentagon will not make us safer, but increasing spending on diplomacy, or economic assistance, or alternative energy, or rebuilding infrastructure, or disease prevention could. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/william-hartung/the-foreign-policy-blueprint\\_b\\_10237472.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/william-hartung/the-foreign-policy-blueprint_b_10237472.html)

<sup>9</sup> U.S. cover note, Intended Nationally Determined Contribution, and accompanying information, <http://www4.unfccc.int/submissions/INDC/Published%20Documents/United%20States%20of%20America/1/U.S.%20Cover%20Note%20INDC%20and%20Accompanying%20Information.pdf>

the plan.

As Sen. Sanders has called for, the United States can further its leadership by helping move the international community beyond the Paris agreement to what is truly needed to secure climate stability. This process can be started by convening a high-level summit to chart the course forward with the world's leading policy and technical experts, scientists, workers rights advocates, climate, environmental and economic justice activists, and representatives from indigenous communities.

- **Global Leadership on Climate Begins at Home** - To lead the world in combating climate change, the United States must take greater action at home to set an example and underpin American leadership in this area. To do what scientists have reported in our fair share, the U.S. should be cutting its emissions by 40-50 percent by 2020 and 80 percent by 2050 from 1990 levels.<sup>10</sup> To help put America on track for those greater reductions, a commitment should be made for at least 50 percent of our electricity to come from clean, renewable sources by 2030, on our way to being fully clean energy powered by 2050.

This means identifying and implementing additional pathways to keep fossil fuels in the ground to protect the environment. Priorities in this area include banning arctic and offshore drilling that threaten the environment, imposing a ban on mountaintop removal of coal which is destructive to local communities, particularly around the Appalachian mountain range, and supporting a moratorium on all new oil, gas or coal exploration and extraction on public lands. Importantly, a progressive carbon tax on polluters causing the climate crisis that is responsive to the needs of low-income Americans can shift energy production, power down wealthy consumers, and incentivize energy efficiency and renewable energy investment.

The United States should also increase fuel economy standards for automobiles, a leading polluter, to 65 miles per gallon by 2025. Reducing automobile emissions can be complemented by greater investments in public transportation, in particularly high-speed passenger and cargo rail systems as enjoyed by much of the rest of the industrialized world.

To help accomplish these and other goals, the Democratic party should commit to eliminating fossil fuel subsidies and banning lobbyists from serving in the White House to ensure special interests do not have undue influence over climate and energy policy.

- **Strengthen Water Security through Cooperative Resource Use** - The impact of climate change on water resources is of particular global security concern.

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<sup>10</sup> Developed Nations Must Cut Emissions In Half By 2020, Says New Study, Climate Progress, <http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2013/03/07/1685881/developed-nations-must-cut-emissions-in-half-by-2020-says-new-study/>

Unlike most conventional security threats that involve a single entity acting in specific ways and points in time, climate change has the potential to result in chronic conditions of water scarcity in various regions at once. Global warming and political responses will impact access to water safe for drinking and household uses, water resources necessary for food production, sufficient water storage for hydro-power generation facilities, and ample flows to support riverine fisheries. The U.S. should support sustainable and cooperative approaches to water management with neighboring countries and through development assistance and climate finance to reduce conflicts related to water resources.

- **Lead Global Efforts to Dial Down Fossil Fuels** – In order to secure a stable climate we must keep as much as 80% of the known global oil, coal and gas reserves in the ground. We can't let dirty energy corporations and billionaire fossil fuel executives trash the planet for their own profit. We have to stop their lobbyists from convincing decision-makers to block global action. The U.S. should take the lead in passing policy at the UN climate convention to kick fossil fuel lobbyists out of international climate negotiations, modeled on provisions in the global tobacco treaty that ban cigarette and tobacco companies from meddling in decisions that regulate their industry.<sup>11</sup>

U.S. foreign policy should also end corporate welfare to fossil fuel companies operating overseas to pad their already enormous earnings while putting the planet at risk. The United States should cut its public financing for fossil fuel production through the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and US Export-Import Bank (ExIm), which averaged \$3 billion in 2013 and 2014, and slash the \$743 million taxpayers send to polluters annually through our contributions to dirty energy projects at multilateral development banks.<sup>12</sup> In addition, U.S. agencies should cease promoting and exporting gas fracking around the world and instead encourage cleaner, safer energy sources.

- **Step Up Delivery of Climate Finance** – At the Copenhagen climate summit, the United States joined developed countries in promising to collectively send \$100 billion per year by 2020 to developing countries to support their action on climate. But to date there is still no clear plan for how the world's wealthy countries will ramp up their climate contributions to meet this goal. The U.S. should be a leader in developing a formula for sharing the \$100 billion burden, and a clear pathway and timeline to increase climate finance from now through 2020. The U.S. should step up its own climate finance pledge and identify concrete, innovative sources of new and additional public climate finance.

Our climate contributions should complement U.S. development assistance, but not substitute for it. Finally, the U.S. should commit to channeling all

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://kickbigpollutersout.org/about/>, <https://www.stopcorporateabuse.org/global-tobacco-treaty>

<sup>12</sup> Empty Promises: G20 subsidies to oil, gas and coal production, Oil Change International and ODI, [http://priceofoil.org/content/uploads/2015/11/Empty-promises\\_main-report.2015.pdf](http://priceofoil.org/content/uploads/2015/11/Empty-promises_main-report.2015.pdf)

contributions through institutions that are democratic and responsive to the needs of developing countries and their populations, such as the Green Climate Fund.

- **Support a Clean Energy Transition in Developing Countries** - The United States should lead the international community in funding clean energy technology development and deployment solutions for developing countries, especially those most vulnerable to climate change. These efforts should focus on building and strengthening the domestic technical, governance, workforce and financial infrastructure within developing countries. An emphasis should be placed on support for micro-, small- and medium-enterprises as particularly important for providing renewable energy access for populations living in energy poverty. In addition, the United States should use the power of the purse to restrict any U.S. contributions from being used for fossil fuel finance – including ‘clean’ coal and gas, especially in the Green Climate Fund.
- **Clean Energy Technology Transfer** – The United States should show leadership by honoring its commitment as a signatory to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to transfer technologies that help developing countries reduce carbon pollution and build their capacity to adapt to climate change. Intellectual property rights must not get in the way of the world’s poorest gaining access to clean energy, sustainable industry, public transportation, and zero waste technologies. By cultivating a vibrant international clean economy, the U.S. will promote jobs creation and business development at home and a growing value chain of potential business partnerships and clientele abroad. Finally, the U.S. must reject the TransPacific Partnership, Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and other free trade agreements that put climate protections at risk for the benefit of corporate profits, and value trade secrets over climate security.
- **Build Regional Partnerships for a Just Energy Transition** – The United States has much to contribute to and to learn from regional clean energy initiatives around the world. Convene expert exchanges with European countries that are increasing wind and solar as core elements of an economy wide shift to renewable power at scale. By supporting green energy production in Europe, the United States can be a partner in reducing dependence on fossil fuels from countries with conflicting political objectives, including natural gas imports from Russia.

Continue to partner with China and other emerging economies to develop best practices and support bold innovation to keep fossil fuels in the ground. Work in partnership with India to support the development of endogenous solar manufacturing and clean energy MSMEs.

In Africa, support the existing efforts of the Africa Renewable Energy Initiative by contributing funds, and ensure that the U.S. initiative Power Africa implements broad stakeholder engagement with impacted communities, highest

standard transparency practices, and is responsive to national clean energy priorities. A special effort should be made to collaborate with small island countries to deliver off-grid and mini-grid renewable energy technology and capacity building, not just to increase green energy, but electrification as well.

- **Support Efforts to Strengthen Resilience in the Face of Climate Chaos** – UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon remarked that every \$1 spend on reducing the risks from disasters now will save \$7 in damages later (studies have put the savings as high as \$24).<sup>13</sup> Communities are able to reduce risks from climate impacts when they have resilience strategies in place. The U.S. should support the development of these strategies, including support for community-based planning and adaptation programs, agro-ecology and other sustainable food security initiatives, building resilience into community infrastructure to maximize disaster preparedness and recovery efforts. The United States can provide funding for building the capacity of local institutions to undertake inclusive development processes that dovetail with climate adaptation priorities.

### Conclusion

The security risks posed by climate change to the United States and global populations are real, imminent and potentially catastrophic. The most critical responses to the curb the threat global warming poses to the American public and global stability are non-military. We must reduce our greenhouse gas emissions at home and support a just transition to clean energy, climate resilient economies in developing countries.

Finding the innovative ways to pay for it could be part and parcel of strengthening our economy. In addition to a progressive carbon tax, two options stand out. First, some of the revenue of a Wall Street speculation tax (also known as a financial transaction tax) could be used to support climate action. Second, military spending on outdated or obsolete weapons and programs could be redirected to program combatting climate change abroad. Currently, U.S. spending is skewed 30:1 in favor of military over climate security (our nearest “peer competitor” spends 1.2:1).<sup>14</sup> To confront the global threat risk that climate change poses, we have to take a holistic approach to security spending.

<sup>13</sup> Reducing Disaster Risks Is “Everybody’s Business”, Secretary General, United Nations Secretary-General, press release, 16 March 2015, [un.org/press/en/2015/sgsm16593.doc.htm](http://un.org/press/en/2015/sgsm16593.doc.htm)

<sup>14</sup> According to research from Miriam Pemberton, director of the Peace Economy Transitions project at the Institute for Policy Studies, US spending on defense has consistently outpaced funding for climate security by about 30:1. The calculations for China’s military and climate spending are using the most recent data from 2013 (<http://www.ips-dc.org/combatsvsclimate/>).

U.S. Spending	Military (\$ billions)	Climate (\$ billions)	Military : Climate
FY 2015	\$560.4	\$17.8	31:1
FY 2016	\$580.3	\$18.3	32:1
FY 2017	\$582.7	\$19.3	30:1