

# THE U.S. MUST REBOOT AN ENVIRONMENT-READY NATIONAL SECURITY APPARATUS



Many of the world's experts in conservation issues impacting our national security are already employed by the government, but they are typically siloed from the national security community. Because of this, our defense, diplomatic, and intelligence communities currently have insufficient capacities to track and understand the impacts of the Earth's systems - especially the biosphere.

A new report from the Converging Risk Labs of the Council on Strategic Risks identifies the global loss of nature and degradation of natural systems as one of the most underrated national security threats of our time. To confront it effectively, the existing U.S. national security architecture must adapt to the threats presented by a changing planet. Just as the U.S. has adjusted its national security posture in recent decades to account for security threats from non-state actors, it must now undergo a similar evolution to confront the rise of "actorless threats".

## *Actions the U.S. Can Take to Reboot an Environment-Ready National Security Structure*

- **Build and strengthen international alliances asserting the U.S. position as a global leader on climate and ecological security communities.**
  - Ratify the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and deploy national security officials to bolster the case. Under the CBD, the U.S. would gain new opportunities to control invasive species, combat environmental crime, enhance climate change adaptation, and develop new avenues for scientific research.
  - Ratify the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea providing the U.S. the opportunity to exert leadership on the problem of overfishing and activate the critical legal tools that allow the U.S. Coast Guard to better enforce maritime regulations
- **Prevent pandemics at the source of zoonotic spillover and spread.**
  - Efforts to detect and characterize novel viruses in wildlife and animals, such as the USAID PREDICT program, need long term government commitments to prevent future zoonotic outbreaks, epidemics, and pandemics. More monitoring and analysis of known and unknown pathogens are needed to understand and prevent zoonotic disease spillover and spread to people.
  - The U.S. should use its myriad international programs to help strengthen foreign government capacities in One Health approaches that integrate wildlife health, animal health, and human health.
  - In addition to preventing the legal and illegal live wildlife trade for human consumption that contributes to zoonotic spillover, the U.S. needs to cooperate with other nations to strengthen tropical forest conservation and establish alternative sustainable nutritional programs in the tropics. Congress should consider global health security legislation that includes preventing pandemics at the source by addressing deforestation, the live wildlife trade for human consumption, sustainable alternative nutrition programs, and zoonotic spillover surveillance.
- **Treat environmental crimes as serious crimes promoting effective prosecutions and deterrent penalties.**
  - The U.S. should use its instruments of national power to counter foreign states that, in the pursuit of critical resources such as fish or timber, engage in violations of sovereignty, precipitate conflict, fail to comply with international laws and norms, and exploit weaknesses in governance.

- Building national and international capacity to track and respond to transnational crime markets is necessary. Global approaches such as the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime are important but hampered by the highly fragmented legal framework and laws worldwide.
- Environmental crime is market-driven making a law enforcement-only approach inadequate. While seizures are necessary, future approaches need to further target corrupt activities such as bribery, patronage, falsified permits, and the like and seek to dissuade the demand side of the illicit trade.
- **Elevate the security risks generated from ecological and natural security issues within the Intelligence and National Security apparatus of the U.S. Government.**
  - While rejoining the Paris Agreement and the Biden Administration's Executive Order on climate was an important step, the U.S. needs to lead a major international effort to ratchet up the ambitions of member countries' greenhouse gas emissions targets - and more importantly, also pursue opportunities to reduce vulnerability to the effects of climate change. Building on the Executive Order, addressing ecological concerns must be embedded in the U.S. Government's efforts to address security threats arising from global climate change.
  - Call for a National Intelligence Estimate on threats posed by the global biodiversity crisis and nature loss.
  - Elevate international water security issues at the Department of State to help advance several objectives including reducing conflict over shared waters and strengthening water governance.
  - ODNI should also seek new and enhanced partnerships with Non-Title 50 Federal agencies such as NASA, NOAA, HHS, USDA, USGS, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to bolster their respective missions.
- **Create more offices and positions that will tackle planetary change's national security dimensions and coordinate effective interagency policies and actions to bolster U.S. national security interests. Such positions could include:**
  - Ecological security roles in intelligence agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research are necessary;
    - A Deputy Assistant to the President of the United States focused on ecological and natural security;
    - An Office of Environmental Security with the National Security Council (NSC);
    - A senior officer appointed by the NSC to infuse ecological and natural security into White House Strategic Planning.
- **Initiate an ecological and natural security research agenda.**
  - There is widespread acceptance that the global food system cannot support the planet's growing population. A robust research agenda is needed integrating sustainable agriculture and food supply into policy and science to explain the actions necessary to move the global food system away from ecological tipping points towards a safe, secure operating space for humanity.
  - Standardizing global monitoring efforts of ecological risks in low-information environments is necessary. Without standardization, illicit trade and activities, such as IUU fishing and wildlife and timber trafficking are further enabled.
  - The NSC should convene an Ecological Security Working Group that brings together relevant agencies from the security, policy, and science agencies to scope the problem and identify knowledge and policy gaps that need to be addressed. of climate change. Building on the Executive Order, addressing ecological concerns must be embedded in the U.S. Government's efforts to address security threats arising from global climate change.