Executive Summary

The greatest long-term threat to the national interests of the United States, to include national security, economic stability, and the quality of the American way of life, is climate change. Yet due to the polarization of the topic of climate change along party lines, addressing this issue has become politically intractable in U.S. foreign and domestic policy. In order to be a global leader on the issue of climate change, the United States must first focus internally on reframing climate change in terms of national interests to incentivize public support, and institute a top down approach of reform beginning at the federal level.

Background

There is certainty among the scientific community that climate change is occurring because the change of our climate is a measurable phenomenon. Decades of research from thousands of scientists map changes in atmospheric conditions directly associated with human behavior, as well as the second and third-order effects of these changes. An approximate 1.0°C rise in the average global temperature and 150-200 ppm increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations have occurred post-industrialization.[i] Resulting ocean warming, ocean acidification, and sea-level rise, as well as the net loss of permanent ice mass, compound into each other and will propagate in a negative feedback loop if atmospheric conditions are not addressed.

To understand these issues and their impact, it is critical to clearly define terminology. *Climate* is a long-term characterization of short-term conditions known as *weather.* Climate is found by averaging weather over several decades. For the climate to change, the weather would therefore have to change consistently over an extended period of time.[ii] Climate variability, which is the change in the average deviation of climate, helps explain increasing extremities of weather experienced within a short period of time. The observable phenomenon of climate change on an individual level therefore can include contrasting extremes.

Using direct language to explain climate change is scientifically prudent, but politically hazardous. The term climate change itself has become partisan in nature, making it increasingly difficult to both accurately discuss and enact policy on this issue. The changing global climate, however, is not a partisan problem but an American problem. We believe that reframing the context of climate as dire to the security and wellbeing of America will serve to unite a polarized country toward bipartisan domestic solutions, which by extension will reestablish US credibility as a global leader on climate issues.

Analysis

Given US inaction on the issue of climate change, the exacerbation of current conditions and national threats is inevitable. If we remain inactive on this issue, we anticipate the following three consequences of climate change will be most salient to United States domestic and foreign policy.

National Security

Increased natural disasters[iii] have posed threats to national security via the destruction of critical domestic and foreign infrastructure, both military and civilian. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, “more than 30 US military installations [are] already facing elevated levels of risk from rising sea levels.”[iv] Additionally, the influx of environmental refugees, destabilization of our allies[v] and melting of the Arctic ice[vi] pose domestic security risks as military resources are deployed internationally to maintain our spheres of influence.

Economic Upheaval

Consequences on domestic and international markets will be tangible through blows to the labor force and national spending. Due to anticipated depletion of fossil fuels[vii] and irreparable damage to the U.S. agricultural sector,[viii] working-class Americans will lose their jobs and costs of basic staples will increase.[ix] Moreover, we will expend significant resources on securing foreign oil,[x] repairing infrastructure[xi] and maintaining public health[xii] in response to evolving environmental conditions and an influx of environmental refugees.

Quality of Life

As the demographic and availability of resources shift domestically, quality of life will be impacted. Given continued inaction both foreign and domestic, overcrowding and natural disasters will also serve to debilitate the current infrastructure and government resources, causing direct impacts on U.S. citizens.[xiii] Negative effects caused by environmental factors will further widen regional inequality of public health, cost of living, and access to public services.[xiv]

Policy Recommendations

The recommendation of this collective is to pursue a tripartite regulatory policy that places the United States at the forefront of global sustainability. This policy is aimed at three distinct groups: the U.S. government writ large, its domestic partners, and its foreign partners. The intent is that the U.S. government adopt a fiduciary policy that requires sustainability as a bona fide for federal expenditure. Essentially, green dollars should only be spent in green places.

The U.S. government must lead this effort through self-regulation. Federal agencies and recipients of federal money should immediately transition to the best sustainability practices as endorsed by an expert panel that is apolitical and possesses sufficient power to regulate political entities. The panel will holistically determine and direct the implementation of sustainability practices throughout the U.S. government.

A. A diverse coalition of experts be formed to guide government sustainability standards
B. The US government adopts said standards holistically, with regular auditing.

Domestic recipients of federal dollars, as a condition of their receipt, are to be held to the same sustainability standards determined by the aforementioned expert panel. These recipients include subordinate governments, government contractors, and any agencies not categorized that are subject to the influence of the federal purse.

C. By 2025 all domestic organizations that implement sustainability practices as stated by the expert panel will be granted preference in all contracts awarded by all federal government agencies
D. By 2030 all contracts awarded by the government must go to organizations compliant with the sustainability best practices created by the expert panel (reference subsection A)
E. An executive order or act of Congress order that stipulates all government agencies must implement sustainability best practices in all expenditures of funds

Foreign partners are to be compelled to follow the example of the United States as it leads the way in sustainability. These foreign partners, regardless of politics, will be held to the same standards. US aid, trade, and assistance should require sustainability compliance. The following recommendations are made specifically to support the practical implementation of this policy:

F. Divert a greater proportion of existing foreign aid funding to develop partner-nation environmental security policies

G. All foreign aid from USAID will require receiving nations to work with the US to develop climate resiliency initiatives
H. Controlled Technologies are to be traded solely with partners who comply with US sustainability standards as created by the expert panel (reference subsection A)

This "Green Dollars, Green Places," policy is intended to serve as an initial step towards a more sustainable, more secure United States. The virtues of this policy include its potential for bipartisan support as it is entirely apolitical and can be introduced by either the executive or legislative branch. This policy also leverages the federal expenditure to move industry instead of embroiling government in the free market. Abroad, this policy leverages the global presence of the United States to leverage change and lead while preserving sovereignty. This policy has a novel advantage over previous international climate agreements in that compliance is tangible.

---

[i] USGCRP (2018) "Impacts, Risks, and Adaptations in the United States: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume II: Report-in-Brief [Reidmiller, D.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, K.L.M. Lewis, T.K. Maycock, and B.C. Stewart (eds.)]. U.S. Global Research Program, Washington, DC, USA, 186 pp. Available from https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/

[ii] Brian Vaeni, "SCUSA 71 Roundtable Paper: Climate Change" (unpublished typescript, United States Military Academy West Point, West Point, NY, 2019), 2.

[iii]"Climate Change, Natural Disasters, and Wildlife," Natural Wildlife Federation, last modified October 2018, https://www.nwf.org/-/media/Documents/PDFs/Environmental-Threats/Climate-Change-Natural-Disasters-fact-sheet.ashx.

[iv] "Climate Change and U.S. Military Bases," American Security Project, https://www.americansecurityproject.org/climate-energy-and-security/climate-change/climate-change-and-u-s-military-basing/.

[v] "Climate and Conflict," *Stanford University,* date accessed: November 1, 2019, https://web.stanford.edu/~mburke/papers/Burke%20Hsiang%20Miguel%202015.pdf

[vi]"Report to Congress Department of Defense Arctic Strategy," *Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy,* last modified June 2019, https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jun/06/2002141657/-1/-1/1/2019-DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY.PDF

[vii] "How Long Before We Run Out of Fossil Fuels?," Our World in Data, last modified August 8, 2017, https://ourworldindata.org/how-long-before-we-run-out-of-fossil-fuels.

[viii] "Agriculture, *U.S. Global Change Research Program,* accessed November 1, 2019, https://nca2014.globalchange.gov/report/sectors/agriculture.

[ix] "Agriculture," National Climate Assessment, https://nca2014.globalchange.gov/highlights/report-findings/agriculture.

[x]"The Military Cost of Defending the Global Oil Supply," *Securing America's Future Energy,* last modified September 2018, http://secureenergy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Military-Cost-of-Defending-the-Global-Oil-Supply.-Sep.-18.-2018.pdf

[xi]"Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters: Overview," *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association,* accessed November 1, 2019, https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/

[xii] "Disastrous Spending: Federal Disaster-Relief Expenditures Rise amid More Extreme Weather," *Center for American Progress,* last modified April 29, 2013, https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/reports/2013/04/29/61633/disastrous-spending-federal-disaster-relief-expenditures-rise-amid-more-extreme-weather/

[xiii] "Infrastructure," *U.S. Global Change Research Program*, 2014, https://nca2014.globalchange.gov/highlights/report-findings/infrastructure

[xiv]"Climate Effects on Health," *Centers for Disease Control*, last modified September 2019, https://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/effects/default.htm