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National Security Not a Good Argument for Global Warming Legislation

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The Waxman–Markey cap-and-trade bill has engendered tremendous controversy. Concerns abound about the legislation’s adverse economic consequences as well as skepticism of its affects on world climate trends. Faced with mounting opposition, the bill’s supporters are increasingly making the case that creating a new law is a national security imperative. They are wrong.

Indeed, passing the bill would create far more severe, dangerous, and imminent global crises. A better approach is to simply allow nations to adapt to the national security challenges implied by long-term global climate changes.

Fighting Air. The premise behind Waxman–Markey is that the United States must create a government-run program to reduce the emission of “greenhouse gases,” including carbon dioxide (CO₂). The bill would establish a complex energy tax scheme to penalize businesses and industries that emit these gases.

Despite passage in the House, the bill has become increasingly controversial as the economic consequences of the legislation have become more apparent. For example, a study by The Heritage Foundation’s Center for Data Analysis finds that the law would make the United States about \$9.4 trillion poorer by 2035. Much of this decline would be from reduced economic productivity and job loss. In particular, under Waxman–Markey there would be 1.15 million fewer jobs on average than without a cap-and-trade bill.¹

Carbon Wars. Faced with mounting opposition, proponents have turned to arguing that passing the bill is an imperative for national security. Without the law, proponents argue, adverse climate changes will cause nations to fail, natural disasters that will yield unprecedented humanitarian crises, and states chronically going to combat over the remaining resources.

The problem is that the catastrophic predictions—such as massive sea-level increases and declining food production that would lead to global unrest—are poorly supported by the evidence. To make the national security arguments, global warming legislation advocates must embrace the most alarmist scenarios.

Nonetheless, connecting the dots between human-caused global warming and global conflict has become a popular theme as proponents prepare to take up the bill in the Senate. Last week, Foreign Relations Chairman John Kerry (D–MA) called a hearing on the subject. This tactic is nothing new. Last year, Congress directed the Pentagon to address the national security impacts of climate change in its Quadrennial Defense Review, due this December.

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The more opposition grows against the bill, however, the shriller these warnings have become. “Global warming alarmists,” notes Senator James Inhofe (R–OK), “see a future plagued by catastrophic flooding, war, terrorism, economic dislocations, droughts, crop failures, mosquito-borne diseases, and harsh weather—all caused by man-made greenhouse gas emissions.” Proponents of Waxman–Markey conclude that without such laws, the world will become unmanageable.

Doubtful Impact. Arguing that the law will make the world safer is deeply flawed. First, there are significant doubts that the cap-and-trade system described in the 1,500-plus-page bill will even have a significant and positive impact on global climate trends. According to climatologist Chip Knappenberger, Waxman–Markey would moderate temperatures by only hundredths of a degree after being in effect for the next 40 years and no more than two-tenths of a degree at the end of the century.²

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson concurred, recently saying, “U.S. action alone will not impact world CO₂ levels.”³

Additionally, the impact of “managing” greenhouse gases on the environment also remains a subject of great controversy. For example, as Senator Inhofe noted in a floor speech, S. Fred Singer, an atmospheric scientist at the University of Virginia, who served as the first director of the U.S. Weather Satellite Service and more recently as a member and vice chairman of the National Advisory Committee on Oceans and Atmosphere, said that “no one knows what constitutes a ‘dangerous’ concentration. There exists, as yet, no scientific basis for defining such a concentration, or even of knowing whether it is more or less than current levels of carbon dioxide.”⁴

Additionally, viewing climate change as a national security crisis makes little sense. The global climate has always been changing. Adapting to these changes and human efforts to manage their surrounding environment is a permanent feature of human competition. The environment does not cause wars—it is how humans respond to their environment that causes conflicts.

Thus, climate change does not necessarily ensure that there will be more or less conflict. For example, as the Arctic ice melts and the environment becomes more benign, Arctic waters will become more available for fishing, mineral and energy exploitation, and maritime transport. Nations will compete over these resources, but it is how they choose to compete—not the change in the weather—that will determine whether war breaks out.

Furthermore, any changes in the climate, for better or for worse, will occur gradually over decades. Thus, there will be ample time to adjust national security and humanitarian assistance instruments to accommodate future demands.

Finally, if the Senate really wants to get serious about how global warming affects national security, it should closely examine the rules and regulations under Waxman–Markey and similar government-driven efforts. These rules would stifle economic growth, create energy scarcity, and make fragile states even more fragile.

For example, a collapse in U.S. economic growth would result in even more draconian cuts to the defense budget, leaving America with a military much less prepared to deal with future threats. Indeed, if America’s military power declines, there would probably be more wars, not fewer. Likewise,

1. William W. Beach, David Kreutzer, Karen Campbell, and Ben Lieberman, “Son of Waxman–Markey: More Politics Makes for a More Costly Bill,” Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 2450, May 18, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/EnergyandEnvironment/wm2450.cfm>.
2. Chip Knappenberger, “Climate Impacts of Waxman–Markey (the IPCC-Based Arithmetic of No Gain),” MasterResource, May 6, 2009, at <http://masterresource.org/?p=2355> (August 3, 2009).
3. Press Release, “Jackson Confirms EPA Chart Showing No Effect on Climate Without China, India,” U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, July 7, 2009, at http://epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Minority.PressReleases&ContentRecord_id=564ed42f-802a-23ad-4570-3399477b1393 (August 3, 2009).
4. Senator James M. Inhofe (R–OK), “The Science of Climate Change,” Senate floor statement, July 28, 2003, at <http://inhofe.senate.gov/pressreleases/climate.htm> (August 3, 2009).

a steep drop in American economic growth would lengthen and deepen the global recession. That in turn will make other states poorer, undermining their ability to protect themselves and recover from natural disasters.

World Without Peace. Congressional proponents continue to press for the passage of Waxman-Markey. If they are successful, they will almost certainly create the world they want to avoid. The law would ensure a steep decline in U.S. economic competitiveness and military preparedness. The consequences of a weak America would inevitably lead to a string of national security crises and an undermin-

ing of the nation's capacity to deal with natural disasters here and abroad.

Congress should reject climate change legislation that creates national security problems rather than strengthening the capabilities of the U.S. to deal with the challenges of the future.

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