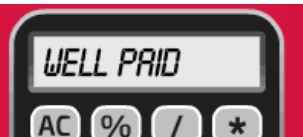


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CIA spooks investigate geoengineering to fix climate

12:26 19 July 2013 by [Peter Aldhous](#)

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You could say the US National Academy of Sciences (NAS) is late to the geoengineering party – at least compared to its British counterpart. But it has now arrived, with an influential friend in tow: the CIA.

This week in Washington DC, a panel of experts convened by the NAS met for the first time to [embark on a study](#) that will consider the risks and benefits of engineering solutions to dangerous climate change by [sequestering away carbon dioxide or reflecting solar radiation back out into space](#).

The [Royal Society](#) delivered a similar report in 2009, so it should come as no great surprise that the NAS is considering [the pros and cons of geoengineering](#). But the fact that the study's funders include the CIA has caused a media buzz. "Conspiracy theorists, rejoice!" [noted Mother Jones](#), invoking memories of the Vietnam war when the US military seeded clouds in an attempt to turn the Vietcong's supply lines into a quagmire.

In fact, the CIA's main interest in geoengineering does not lie in any offensive use. Rather, the [US intelligence community sees climate change as a potential threat to global geopolitical stability](#), and so wants a thorough analysis of the mitigation options. "On a subject like climate change, the agency works with scientists to better understand the phenomenon and its implications on national security," says Ned Price, a CIA spokesperson.

Rogue actors

Given the CIA's interest, the study may consider the danger of nations starting geoengineering projects unilaterally, benefiting themselves but posing problems for others. "An important issue to address is the question of rogue actors," suggests panel member [Ken Caldeira](#) of the Carnegie Institution Department of Global Ecology, based at Stanford University in California.

But the main focus of the final report, due in the second half of 2014, will be a scientific assessment of the feasibility of three or four [proposed geoeengineering technologies](#) – such as scattering [sulphate aerosols high into the atmosphere](#) to reflect the sun's energy, or [storing carbon dioxide in the deep ocean](#). The panel will also consider the risks, which in the latter case would include accelerating [ocean acidification](#).

In addition to the NAS and the CIA, the project is backed by the two leading US government agencies that monitor the changing climate: NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Caldeira, who also worked on the [Royal Society report](#), hopes the NAS study will break some new ground. "One thing the [Royal Society](#) didn't do is map out what a geoengineering research programme would look like," he says. "That's one gap I would hope we can fill."

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Climate change has consequences for geopolitics, hence the intelligence community's interest (Image: [Andrew Harner/Bloomberg via Getty Images](#))

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