

War is Warming the World

A zine about militarism and the climate accountability gap

Introduction

The climate crisis is one of the greatest threats we face, yet one of its largest contributors remains largely ignored: militarism.¹

Effective climate action depends on accurate emissions data, but under the Paris Agreement, reporting military emissions is voluntary. This leads to major underreporting. Wars and military operations produce emissions, destroy ecosystems, and displace communities, yet remain outside meaningful accountability.

Without addressing militarism, climate solutions will always be incomplete.

The Question

If the military is such a major polluter, why is it excluded from climate frameworks?

Militaries consume vast amounts of fossil fuels in both war and peacetime. In 2024, 92 countries were involved in armed conflict.²

Yet emissions reporting systems often exclude overseas bases, supply chains, and international operations.³ This hides the true environmental cost of war.

War on Gaza: 32.2 million tonnes of CO₂ in 15 months.⁴

War on Ukraine: 230 million CO₂ in three years.⁵

Militarism

Militarism is the normalization of preparing for and sustaining war.⁶

It shapes government spending, foreign policy, and definitions of security. Even in peacetime, militaries operate continuously, consuming resources and producing emissions. Individual efforts to reduce carbon footprints cannot offset this scale of destruction.⁷

Militarism locks societies into cycles of conflict and environmental harm.

“One cannot begin to address climate change and the realities of climate change without addressing militarism.”⁸

Militarism and the Environment

¹ Bera, M. N. “Militarism: A Leading Cause of Environmental and Climate Crises.”

² Gilliver, L. “EU Urged to Disclose Military Emissions to Meet Climate Targets.”

³ Venkatesh, M. “Exempted! The US Military Industrial Complex and the Climate Crisis.”

⁴ Gilliver, L. “EU Urged to Disclose Military Emissions to Meet Climate Targets.”

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Parenti, Christian. “The Catastrophic Convergence: Militarism, Neoliberalism and Climate Change.”

⁷ Inwood, J. F. J., and J. A. Tyner. “Militarism and the Mutually Assured Destruction of Climate Change.”

⁸ Ibid.

Military operations are highly fuel-intensive. Aircraft, vehicles, and weapons systems consume massive amounts of fossil fuels, producing significant emissions.⁹ Explosions damage ecosystems, release pollutants, and disrupt natural carbon absorption processes.¹⁰ Military emissions also include global supply chains, bases, and weapons production.¹¹

Most of these impacts are either unmeasured or excluded from reporting, meaning the true environmental cost of militaries is far greater than current estimates suggest.¹²

The environmental impact of war extends beyond active combat. The 1991 Gulf War oil fires contributed significantly to global emissions and caused widespread ecological damage.¹³ Peacetime military activities also generate emissions comparable to entire countries.¹⁴

Globally, militaries may account for over 5% of emissions, excluding active warfare. Because reporting is incomplete, this number is likely much higher.¹⁵

Without full accounting, the scale of military-driven climate damage remains underestimated.

In Gaza, an estimated 75,000 tons of explosives have been dropped by Israel, which have left behind approximately 42M tons of debris. Much of it is laced with unexploded bombs and hazardous materials, posing severe risks to returning civilians and reconstruction workers.¹⁶

Infrastructure

War doesn't just destroy lives – it destroys the systems we depend on.

Bombing infrastructure like power plants and industrial facilities releases large amounts of emissions. Rebuilding them requires energy-intensive materials like cement, which alone accounts for about 8% of global emissions.¹⁷

In Gaza, millions of tons of debris and hazardous materials now complicate reconstruction, and harm the health of Palestinians.

The Cycles

Militarism and fossil fuels are deeply interconnected. Militaries rely on fossil fuels while also securing access to them globally, creating a self-reinforcing system.¹⁸

At the same time, climate change increases instability, which militaries use to justify expansion.

⁹ Vuong, Q.-H., M.-H. Nguyen, and V.-P. La. “The Overlooked Contributors to Climate and Biodiversity Crises: Military Operations and Wars.”

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Inwood, J. F. J., and J. A. Tyner. “Militarism and the Mutually Assured Destruction of Climate Change.”

¹³ Bera, M. N. “Militarism: A Leading Cause of Environmental and Climate Crises.”

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Vuong, Q.-H., M.-H. Nguyen, and V.-P. La. “The Overlooked Contributors to Climate and Biodiversity Crises: Military Operations and Wars.”

¹⁶ Bera, M. N. “Militarism: A Leading Cause of Environmental and Climate Crises.”

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Vuong, Q.-H., M.-H. Nguyen, and V.-P. La. “The Overlooked Contributors to Climate and Biodiversity Crises: Military Operations and Wars.”

In 2007, U.S. military officials warned that climate change acts as a “threat multiplier.”¹⁹ Militarism both drives and responds to climate change, reinforcing cycles of conflict and environmental destruction.

(Boots) On the Ground

Militaries occupy large areas of land worldwide with minimal environmental oversight.²⁰ These lands include forests, wetlands, and other critical carbon sinks.

Military activities damage ecosystems and release stored carbon into the atmosphere.

Over the past decades, conflicts have occurred in many of the world’s most biodiverse regions, threatening conservation efforts and accelerating environmental degradation.

1% to 6% of all land on earth is occupied by a military force.²¹

Cont.

War has long-term ecological consequences. During the Vietnam War, Agent Orange, a chemical defoliants destroyed over 5,000,000 acres of forests and half a million acres of farmland.²²

In Afghanistan, decades of conflict have led to the destruction of more than half of the country's forest cover, with deforestation reaching up to 95% in some areas.²³

In Ukraine, scientists have found that elevated radiation levels in wildlife do not only stem from the Chernobyl disaster but also from nuclear weapons testing conducted before it.²⁴

“Burning a full tank of gas in a B-2 releases roughly 250 metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. That’s more than 50 times what the average car releases in an entire year.”²⁵

Loss

The impacts of war extend beyond immediate destruction.

Conflict contributes to biodiversity loss, displacement, and long-term environmental degradation.

Wildlife populations in conflict zones can decline drastically, with some species nearing extinction.²⁶ War also contributes to climate-related disasters, which now account for the majority of humanitarian crises.²⁷

¹⁹ Inwood, J. F. J., and J. A. Tyner. “Militarism and the Mutually Assured Destruction of Climate Change.”

²⁰ Bera, M. N. “Militarism: A Leading Cause of Environmental and Climate Crises.”

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Vuong, Q.-H., M.-H. Nguyen, and V.-P. La. “The Overlooked Contributors to Climate and Biodiversity Crises: Military Operations and Wars.”

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Baldwin, S., and N. Crawford. “For the US Military, Fossil Fuel Is the ‘Lifeblood.’ Here’s What That Means for the Planet.”

²⁶ Bera, M. N. “Militarism: A Leading Cause of Environmental and Climate Crises.”

²⁷ Parenti, Christian. “The Catastrophic Convergence: Militarism, Neoliberalism and Climate Change.”

If militarism is not addressed, by 2030, the worsening of floods, droughts, wildfires, and disease outbreaks could claim the lives of 500,000 people annually, costing about \$600 billion each year (Parenti, 2016).²⁸

The Accountability Gap

Military emissions are excluded from major climate agreements because of political choice.

Governments often cite national security to avoid transparency.²⁹ This shields one of the largest sources of emissions from accountability. Meanwhile, real security threats, including food insecurity, forced displacement, and environmental collapse, continue to grow.

Ignoring military emissions protects short-term interests while undermining long-term survival.

Addressing Accountability

1. Count it: Military emissions must be included in global climate frameworks, including overseas operations and supply chains.
2. Cut it: Transition away from fuel-intensive military infrastructure and production systems.
3. Replace it: Shift funding from militarization toward climate adaptation, mitigation, and public infrastructure.

Reframing Security

What if we reimagined security not as military dominance but as the conditions necessary for human survival – ecological stability, a livable climate, and collective well-being? Can any nation be truly secure on an uninhabitable planet?

This is the kind of long-term thinking that militarism lacks.

The call for peace and the call for planetary preservation are inseparable. We must acknowledge that war and military operations not only cause human tragedy but also environmental catastrophe. Promoting peace is both a humanistic & planetary imperative

Conclusion

The climate crisis cannot be solved without addressing militarism.

War and military systems produce emissions, destroy ecosystems, and divert resources away from solutions. Despite this, they remain largely unaccountable.

Recognizing militarism as a climate issue is essential. A sustainable future requires both environmental action and a commitment to peace.

²⁸ Parenti, Christian. “The Catastrophic Convergence: Militarism, Neoliberalism and Climate Change.”

²⁹ Vuong, Q.-H., M.-H. Nguyen, and V.-P. La. “The Overlooked Contributors to Climate and Biodiversity Crises: Military Operations and Wars.”

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