

### Opportunity Cost: What Else Could We Be Doing?

An obvious opportunity cost of waging war is that instead of working for a cleaner, cooler future, our tax dollars are being spent on human death and environmental destruction. Money spent on endless war is money not spent reducing our dependence on fossil fuels or supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy. The U.S. currently has a plan to spend \$1 trillion dollars modernizing the U.S. nuclear weapons program over the next 30 years, which could lead us into new nuclear arms race. The military budget and growing deficit take taxpayer dollars away from the development of renewable energy technologies, and limit spending on programs to reduce the insecurity caused by climate change.

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# VETERANS FOR PEACE



The environmental impact of war: In Kuwait in 1991, after the Gulf War ended, the retreating Iraqi forces torched hundreds of oil wells. Photograph: Per-Anders Pettersson/Corbis

## ENVIRONMENTAL COSTS OF WAR:

*The environment has long been a silent casualty of war and armed conflict. If we are going to win on climate, we must make the connections between the environment and militarism.*

**Exposing the True Costs of War  
and Militarism Since 1985**



## What Are The Environmental Costs of War?

For centuries, war has not only involved the annihilation of human life, but also environmental destruction, in the forms of both 'collateral damage' and deliberate damage to environments. Modern day warfare and technological advances have increased the ecological disturbances associated with war, both in the manufacturing and development of weapons. The use of weapons, the destruction of oil fields, fires, military transport, and chemical spraying are all examples of the lasting impact war has on the environment.

## Oil Consumption and Carbon Emissions

The U.S. military is widely thought to be the world's biggest institutional consumer of crude oil, although obtaining exact usage numbers is an ongoing challenge. Military emissions are not captured in the national greenhouse gas inventories that all industrialized nations, including the United States, report under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It is a loophole big enough to drive a tank through.

The Iraq war was responsible for 141m tons of carbon releases in its first four years, according to an Oil Change International report. On an annual basis, this was more than the emissions from 139 countries in this period, or about the same as putting an additional 25 million cars on U.S. roads for a full year. Around the world, climate activists are seeing the connections between militarism and the environment.

## Depleted Uranium

During the 1991 Gulf War, the U.S. bombed Iraq with 340 tons of missiles containing depleted uranium, which has increased the cancer rates in Iraq. Depleted Uranium is almost twice as dense as lead, and researchers have suggested the radiation from these weapons has poisoned the soil and water of Iraq, making the environment carcinogenic. The U.S.-led bombing campaign during 1991 destroyed the infrastructure of Iraqi society, destroyed water and sewer systems, and contaminated the surrounding ecosystems.

***"If we're going to win on climate we have to make sure we are counting carbon completely, not exempting different things like military emissions because it is politically inconvenient to count them. The atmosphere certainly counts the carbon from the military, therefore we must as well."***

**Stephen Kretzmann, Director of Oil Change International**

## Nuclear Weapons

Besides the significant loss of human life and subsequent radiation sickness and birth defects, environmental impact of nuclear weapons is profound. When the U.S. dropped bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the water supply was contaminated, the ecosystem was damaged, and the natural habitat was completely destroyed. The production, testing, and transport, and use of these weapons also has extreme negative effects on the environment. Despite a nuclear proliferation treaty that was signed in 1970 by 190 countries, many nuclear countries (including the U.S.) continue to invest in modernizing their nuclear weapon programs. The Arms Control Association reports that the United States currently has 1,597 deployed and 2,800 non-deployed strategic nuclear warheads, and 500 tactical nuclear warheads.

## Agent Orange

Probably the most infamous of chemical weapons, Agent Orange has had long-lasting effects on Vietnam's water supply and ecosystem. The defoliant was used extensively during the U.S. conflict in Vietnam. Overall, at least 35% of South Vietnam's forests were sprayed with Agent Orange at least once over a nine-year period. A mid-1980s study by Vietnamese ecologists documented just 24 species of birds and 5 species of mammals present in sprayed forests and converted areas, compared to 145-170 bird species and 30-55 kinds of mammals in intact forest.

***"More than 20% of South Vietnam's forests were sprayed at least once over a nine year period"***

