

Ten Essential Things to Know about Militarism and Climate Change

Seniors for Climate Action Now! in collaboration with Science for Peace

Summary: *A just green transition demands not only phasing out fossil fuels in favour of renewables but also shifting military resources and productive capacities towards human needs and climate mitigation. The United Nations has used the term “human security” to widen the understanding of security beyond the traditional understanding that state security is achieved through military power. This approach calls for major reorganization of security priorities and budgets towards non-military programs. A vicious circle currently operates: militarism and war destroy the environment and generate massive climate-warming greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The resulting climate crisis then exacerbates conflict between and within states, leading to the consideration of climate change as a national-security threat, which then provides further rationale for increased militarism. In addition, militaries consume resources that might otherwise be used for climate adaptation and mitigation, emergencies and other social needs. We must escape this destructive feedback loop.*

1. The global military is a top green-house gas emitter.

The global military is variously estimated to account for between 3.5% and 7% of total emissions. These estimates are conservative – they do not include GHG emissions from the production of military equipment or the impacts of wars. For example, just 60 days of Israel’s war in Gaza is equivalent to burning 150,000 tonnes of coal, or greater than the GHG annual emissions of more than 20 of the world’s nations most vulnerable to climate change. Military equipment, particularly fighter jets, require vast amounts of fuel. The NATO military alliance plans on buying 2,456 Lockheed-Martin’s F-35 combat planes by 2044. These aircraft consume 5,600 litres of fuel per hour compared to the F-16’s 3,500 that they’re replacing. In a telling loophole, governments, despite the huge carbon footprints of their militaries, are not required to report these emissions to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Conference of the Parties (COP).

2. Wars wreak environmental havoc.

War destroys urban centres as well as vital infrastructure, such as transport, energy, dams and ports. Not only is this destructive in itself, but major GHG emissions are released in the rebuilding process. Ukraine, for example, has lost more than 10% of its housing to date. It’s estimated that the rebuilding of Gaza will cause emissions higher than the annual emissions of over 135 countries. The UN Environmental Programme has said that environmental impacts of the war on Gaza are unprecedented, potentially causing irreversible damage to its natural ecosystem. In many regions of the world, explosive remnants of war, such as landmines, restricts access and contaminate agricultural land for decades. Resource extraction (minerals and oil used for weapon production and fuel) destroys and contaminates natural habitats and Indigenous environments. In some post-war areas, displaced people can never return home. Twenty

years after the war in Iraq, there are still 1.2 million displaced persons, and more than 2.3 million have fled the country.

3. Bloated defense budgets consume scarce resources that might otherwise be used to address social-ecological priorities.

The worldwide arms race is causing a substantial increase to military budgets. The richest countries are spending thirty times as much on their armed forces as they spend on providing climate finance for the world's most vulnerable countries.

Globally, military budgets are ballooning, while the need for spending to mitigate or repair the damage of climate emergencies and social needs is growing. The result of countries, such as in Europe, prioritizing expanded militarization over diplomacy to resolve international tensions, will precipitate an arms race and cause greater insecurity. Global military expenditures – 2,443 billion in 2023 – continues to increase. A mere 10% cut in that spending would free up US \$190 billion annually to tackle the climate emergency.

4. Climate change exacerbates inter-state and within-state conflicts, which leads to increased expenditures on weapons and the heightened possibility of war and ecological destruction.

In poorer countries climate change tends to aggravate existing tensions and destabilize states. Severe and extended droughts and extreme temperatures threaten livelihoods and shrink available resources, especially of arable land and fresh water. This is exacerbated by state sanctioned land theft and severe cuts in government spending. For example, the drought in the Amazon was partly caused by mass deforestation due to agri-business expansion. These conditions can set pastoralists against farmers where ethnicity and/or religion divide the two groups, a dynamic is playing out in such countries as Sudan, Mali and Niger.

Tensions between countries, together with augmented spending on armed forces, can result from the same dynamic. Where countries share a common water source, such as the Nile running through Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt, access to water is an issue charged with tension as droughts and high evaporation rates reduce the water flows. Egypt has threatened that any reduction in Nile's flow resulting from upstream dams would be met with military force. A similar dynamic sets India against Pakistan as both rely on the waters of the Indus River to irrigate the fields of the Punjab.

The United Nations says that by 2030, the demand for water will outstrip supply by 40%. The Southern United States are already running out of water. Canada's fresh water supply could become a bargaining chip in future trade negotiations as the current U.S. President openly talks about making water part of the Canada, United States, Mexico Agreement (CUSMA).

5. Climate change has opened a new theatre of geopolitical conflict in the Arctic, a region warming at nearly four times the rate of global warming.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that climate change is causing severe impacts in the north with more intense flooding and forest fires. Arctic

life is increasingly under threat as the permafrost melts and oceans acidify. For thousands of years, the Indigenous peoples have developed and relied on their knowledge of this fragile environment, which plays an important role in regulating the climate of the entire planet. Cooperation among countries to resolve basic environmental issues dissolves when climate change is interpreted as a national security issue. Currently Russia, Canada, and the United States are competing to control the Arctic regions as the ice melts. China has also staked a claim in determining the future of this region. Militarization of the Arctic intensifies as navigation becomes easier and as exploitation of natural resources, such as oil, gas and strategic minerals needed for a green transition and the military becomes more economically feasible. Resources and shipping routes are on Inuit land, ice and waterways. A sharp increase in “military games” is having alarming environmental effects. Canada’s publication, Our North Strong and Free, outlines the North American Aerospace Defense Command’s (NORAD) plan to purchase new weapons systems and build new military infrastructure across the northern territories and Labrador. Increased military presence means more environmental damage, more noise, and loss of biodiversity, negatively impacting the Inuit’s hunting and gathering practices and food security. The Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) continues to remain committed to the position of 1989 ICC president, Mary Simon, who called for the creation of the Arctic as a zone of peace.

6. In fragile states, such as poorer post-colonial states of the global south, extreme weather, when combined with festering conflicts and a loss of livelihoods, can lead to widespread criminality, the rise of warlordism, and state collapse,.

Climate change is an additional burden faced by struggling and fragile states. The causes of spreading criminality and violence, the rise of warlords, and state collapse in countries such as Haiti, Sudan and Mali, among others, are complex. However, there is no doubt that climate change-induced drought, floods, storms, disease, food and water shortages, and the lack of viable livelihoods play a key role. Such calamities weaken the already strained political and institutional capacity of states. Armed conflicts often ensue. As this catastrophe spreads, climate change plays a critical role in these complex dynamics.

7. Climate change aggravates the drought, extreme temperatures, and state breakdown that drive migration, and migration, in turn, raises tensions and militarization in recipient regions or countries.

Climate change worsens extreme weather, physical insecurity, and the loss of livelihoods, helping to drive people to migrate to safer regions. Most climate migrants move within their countries, though a minority migrate to neighbouring countries, or northwards to affluent continents. Globally, the European Union, the United States, and Australia are favoured destinations. Localized migrations often lead to tensions with the pre-existing populations of these regions. Northwards migration spurs spending on militarizing borders as Western governments increasingly perceive such in-migration as an economic burden and security threat.

That 'climate migrants' are not included within Canada's immigration policy needs reconsideration. Such migrants derive mainly from southern regions that are hard-hit by climate change, despite the minimal contribution made to that problem by those countries. Canada, on the other hand, bears a disproportionate responsibility for global warming owing to its relatively high per capita emissions.

8. Two existential global threats: The Climate Crisis and Nuclear Weapons

The UN adopted a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2021. With the doomsday clock set to 90 seconds to midnight, the NATO nuclear doctrine's inclusion of nuclear deterrence to maintain peace is clearly not making the world safer. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists explained that 2023 "was characterized by fraught relations among the world's great powers, who were engaged in vigorous nuclear modernization programs as the nuclear control regime collapse... Nuclear programs in China, Russia, and the United States could trigger a three-way nuclear arms race ... adding to the ever-present danger of nuclear war through mistake or miscalculation."

9. The Basis for Hope

Hope in ending the vicious circle between militarism and climate change lies in two complementary directions. The first is to lessen reliance on militarism, by moving away from relying on military power for conflict resolution and building capacity for diplomacy with the goal of peaceful co-existence. Global peace and climate activists are beginning to work together to raise awareness about the links between war, militarism and climate injustice. Secondly, hope lies in the wealthier northern countries working towards an equitable green transition and in meeting the legitimate demands for concessional financing for adaptation and mitigation by the global South. Moving to a fair eco-economy would improve living conditions world-wide, decrease poverty and therefore weaken the cycle of climate disruption and militarism.

The challenge of this century is to phase out the reliance of industrialized countries on fossil fuels both for energy and profit and escalate a transition to clean energy. The five countries producing the most GHG emissions are also those with the largest militaries and nuclear weapons (China, the United States, India, European Union, Russia). Canada, Norway and the UK too are major fossil fuel producers, which limits their motivation to phase out fossil fuels.

Transitioning to an eco-economy is hampered in capitalist countries like Canada where corporations associated with the carbon economy wield excessive influence on governments. A further political challenge arises from the rise of right-wing populist governments that are climate-denialist in orientation.

Despite these obstacles, we in civil society must work toward peaceful co-existence and cooperation with other countries in building a clean-energy economy. This process requires support for arms control treaties, peace treaties and just green transition treaties through multilateral diplomacy. Just green treaties and transitions require the

recognition, promotion, and inclusion of indigenous knowledge, tradition and national rights with regard to care of the land, building relationships and their right to be part of any negotiations.

Governments are unlikely to pursue this process vigorously unless pushed by bottom-up mobilization of social movements. We live on a finite and fragile planet, and members of civil society must fight to protect it.

10. Canada's Role

The hope for Canada's future lies in peace and climate activists joining with other progressive groups in civil society to pressure the Canadian government to:

- Play a leading role in global peaceful co-existence
- Include the operations of all Canadian military activity in GHG reduction programs and targets and push for a global accounting of military emissions of all countries at Conference of the Parties (COP)
- Adopt the UN's Fossil-Fuel Non-proliferation Treaty
- Commit to a realistic climate program, involving among other things, the reduction of carbon emissions by 80% by 2030
- Join the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons adopted 2021
- Redirect the funding from fighter jets to climate mitigation and abatement priorities
- Cancel the NATO nuclear doctrine which establishes nuclear weapons as part of the NATO arsenal
- Oppose an increase of percentage of our gross domestic product on the military and redirect resources to adapting and mitigating the effects of climate change in Canada and the global South.
- The Department of National Defense should shift its program priorities toward greater preparedness to respond to increasing climate emergencies and the implementation of aid delivery to civil authorities for adaptation efforts.
- Redistribute existing defense spending to new "human security" initiatives such as a youth climate corps or a civilian climate corps.