

Guns and Greenhouse Gases. Impacts of the War Economy on the Environment and Climate Change

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Theme: [Environment](#)

In-depth Report: [Climate Change](#)

*Nick Buxton introduces the theme of an upcoming London talk on 25 November sponsored by Global Justice Now that will launch a new book, *The Secure and the Dispossessed -How the Military and Corporations are shaping a climate-changed world**

There is no shortage of words in the latest negotiating document for the UN climate negotiations taking place in Paris at the end of November – 32,731 words to be precise and counting. Yet strangely there is one word you won't find: military. It's a strange omission, given that the US military alone is the single largest user of petroleum in the world and has been the main enforcer of the global oil economy for decades.

The history of how the military disappeared from any carbon accounting ledgers goes back to the UN climate talks in 1997 in Kyoto. Under pressure from military generals and foreign policy hawks opposed to any potential restrictions on US military power, the US negotiating team succeeded in securing exemptions for the military from any required reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Even though the US then proceeded not to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, the exemptions for the military stuck for every other signatory nation. Even today, the reporting each country is required to make to the UN on their emissions excludes any fuels purchased and used overseas by the military.

As a result it is still difficult to calculate the exact responsibility of the world's military forces for greenhouse gas emissions. A US Congressional report in 2012 said that the Department of Defense consumed about 117 million barrels of oil in 2011, only a little less than all the petrol and diesel use of all cars in Britain the same year. Deploying that oil across the globe to the fuel-greedy hummers, jets and drones has become a growing preoccupation of NATO military strategists.

But the responsibility of the military for the climate crisis goes much further than their own use of fossil fuels. As we witnessed in Iraq, the military, the arms corporations and their many powerful political supporters have consistently relied on (and aggressively pushed for) armed intervention to secure oil and energy supplies. The military is not just a prolific user of oil, it is one of the central pillars of the global fossil-fuel economy. Today whether it is in the Middle East, the Gulf, or the Pacific, modern-day military deployment is about controlling oil-rich regions and defending the key shipping supply routes that carry half the world's oil and sustain our consumer economy.

The resulting expansion of conflict across the globe has consumed ever-increasing levels of military expenditure: in 2014, global military expenditure reached \$1.8 trillion dollars. This money is a huge diversion of public resources that could be invested instead in renewable

energy as well as providing support for those most affected by climate change. When the UK government in 2014 allocates £25 billion to the Ministry of Defence but only £1.5 billion to the Department of Energy & Climate Change, it is clear where its priorities lie.

Ironically despite their role in the climate crisis, one of the loudest voices calling for action on climate change is coming from the military. US Military Head of Pacific Command Samuel Locklear III is typical of a growing chorus of military generals identifying climate change as the major security challenge of this century. The generals have been echoed by politicians. UK Prime Minister David Cameron has argued that, "Climate change is one of the most serious threats facing our world. And it is not just a threat to the environment. It is also a threat to our national security, to global security..."

This could seem a welcome development. After all who would not want one of the most powerful forces on your side in tackling humanity's greatest ever challenge? But there is a good reason also to be cautious of who we jump into bed with. A close look at military climate change strategies reveals that they are all about securing borders, protecting supply-routes for corporations, controlling conflicts around resources and instability caused by extreme weather, and repressing social unrest. They turn the victims of climate change into 'threats' to be controlled or combated. There is certainly no examination of the military's own role in enforcing a corporate capitalism and fossil-fuel economy that has caused the climate crisis.

In fact, there is evidence that many players in this corporate-military-security industrial nexus are already seeing climate change not just as a threat but an opportunity. Arms and security industries thrive on conflict and insecurity and climate change promises another financial boon to add to the ongoing War on Terror. British arms giant BAE Systems was surprisingly open about this in one of their annual reports saying "New threats and conflict arenas are placing unprecedented demands on military forces and presenting BAE Systems with new challenges and opportunities." An Energy Environmental Defence and Security (E2DS) conference in 2011 jubilantly proclaimed that "the aerospace, defence and security sector is gearing up to address what looks set to become its most significant adjacent market since the strong emergence of the civil/homeland security business almost a decade ago."

One of the critical lessons for climate change movements in recent years has been an understanding that simply pressurising politicians to do the right thing will not deliver effective change. Instead we must target, delegitimise and undermine the corporations that are blocking change. As climate change impacts start to hit home, we must now widen our focus to stop these same forces now disturbingly seeking to profit from the consequences of climate change. As the Paris climate talks take the global stage, it's time to draw attention to the military elephant in our room and demand that adaptation to climate change is led by principles of human rights and solidarity, rather than militarism and corporate profits.

*These issues will be explored at the launch of *Secure and Dispossessed - How the Military and Corporations are seeking to shape a climate-changed world* (Pluto Press/TNI) held at 6:30pm on Wednesday 25 November in Free Word Centre, 60 Farringdon Rd, London EC1R 3GA. [Book your free ticket here.](#)*

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