

US Imperial Militarism, Climate Change, and Extinction

The only way to save the planet: stop the military-industrial machine!

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As it becomes increasingly clear that we're way past the point of dangerous interference with the climate system, as more and more components of the natural world that sustains our very existence collapse, revealing the breadth and depth of our destruction, as scientists openly despair at the already triggered avalanche of what they fear is the Sixth Great Extinction, the US government, at the behest of its military-industrial-banking corporate masters, is continuing its mad quest of military dominance, wars and resource grabs, all to continue a doctrine of 'economic growth/expansion', based on exploitation and the destruction of nature and its peoples.

War and military spending dominates the federal budget, drains the lifeblood of our economy, and prevents meaningful climate action. At a time when many vital social programs are cut because of 'economic hardship', and many jobless youth are driven (and actively lured) into enlisting for the military machine, the military budget soared from \$767 billion in 2009, to \$837 billion for 2011, and the total spending on current and past wars (including interest on federal debt due to past military spending, and veterans programs) amounted to \$1,167 billion, or 39.3% of the 2011 federal discretionary budget, according to analysis by FCNL.[1] The budgetary and economic costs of the Iraq war is estimated by Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, with his colleague Linda Bilmes, to reach between **\$4 trillion and \$6 trillion!**[10] Michael Nasuti of Kabul Press recently calculated that each Taliban soldier killed in Afghanistan costs an average of \$50 million to the US.[11] US accounts for 48% of the world's total military spending, and exceeds more than the next 45 highest spending countries in the world combined. Not even including spending on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, 87% of all US security spending goes towards military forces, while only 8% goes towards homeland security and 5% to non-military international engagement.[12]

By comparison, the \$18.2 billion [2] in the 2011 federal budget for 'climate spending' (which includes large spending on false solutions like nuclear power, 'clean coal', biomass energy and biofuels, etc.) is hailed as proof of commitment to climate action by the Obama administration, while concern for 'damaging the economy' is offered as the excuse for not taking any stronger, decisive actions to avert the climate catastrophe, and for the necessity of creating risky carbon markets, and relying on various other 'market mechanisms' (such as carbon 'offsets') to supposedly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The reality of these 'market mechanisms' is often no real carbon reductions, further ecosystem and biodiversity degradation, further landgrabs and economic disparity, while huge sums of money changes hands..[3]

In Copenhagen, the US insisted on no more than a paltry and woefully insufficient \$10 billion/year for 3 years, and \$100 billion by 2020, from all developed countries COMBINED, as climate aid for developing countries to adapt to climate change and for their mitigation efforts. This in spite of the US being the country responsible for most of the CO2 currently in the atmosphere, while many developing countries are already suffering disproportionate consequences of climate change. Even the promised funds consist mostly of recycled previous aid commitments, private investments (i.e., for profit!) and loans (further indebting developing countries).[14]

"American leadership" is a farce! Our wars, and our thousand military bases all over the world, serve no purpose other than to advance "American interests". We are in it for oil, for exploitation of numerous other resources, and for profit. Not only do military activities serve to exploit the rest of the world for American and transnational corporations, they are the largest, and ongoing, wealth transfer from the American taxpayers to the military-industrial-banking and other corporate interests in all of history. A 2009 report "The Military Costs of Securing Energy" found that up to 30% of United States military spending goes towards securing energy supplies around the world.[4]

Ironically, the Department of Defense is the largest institutional oil consumer in the world. As Sara Flounders writes for the IAC[5]: "Even according to rankings in the 2006 CIA World Factbook, only 35 countries (out of 210 in the world) consume more oil per day than the Pentagon." Steve Kretzmann, director of Oil Change International, pointed out that "The Iraq war ... emits more than 60 percent of all countries."

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Despite the enormous direct and indirect carbon footprint of the US military and its wars, military emissions abroad are exempt from national reporting requirements, as it is classified under international bunker fuel, which is categorically exempt. Why? Because at the time of the Kyoto Accords negotiations, the U.S. demanded as a provision of signing on, that all of its military operations worldwide and all operations it participates in with the U.N. and/or NATO be completely exempted from measurement or reductions requirements. After securing this gigantic concession, as well as forcing carbon trading into the Kyoto over the objection of EU countries, the Bush administration then refused to sign the accords. Today, the exemption still holds, and in 2007 as well as 2010, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, itself under much political influence) ignored calls from civil society organizations to demand each state release information for the purpose of estimating direct and indirect military emissions.[9]

Beyond greenhouse gas emissions, US military activities cause air, water and soil pollution of astounding scale, abroad and at home. Barry Sanders in his book, "The Green Zone: The Environmental Costs of Militarism," says that "the greatest single assault on the environment, on all of us around the globe, comes from one agency ... the Armed Forces of the United States." According to Sanders:[6]

- In the space of 2 days, the US military delivered 800 Tomahawk cruise missiles--one every four minutes, day and night, for forty-eight hours. A total of 2,400,000 pounds of **explosives, or 1,200 tons.**
- A United Nations report, dated 2005, estimated that 4 million pounds of low-level radioactive dust, the residue from spent munitions made with depleted uranium, has settled over the deserts and cities of Iraq, which means that a good deal of the country is now radioactive.
- A UN environmental report about the first Gulf War points to the damage inflicted by 70-ton tanks like the M-1 Abrams on the ecology of the desert: "Approximately 50% of Kuwait's land area has had its fragile soil surface destroyed as scores of tanks moved out of that country each day and headed for Iraq." Once the surface of the earth has broken apart, the report goes on, the wind has an easier job of eroding even more land mass (organic matter oxidizes, releasing CO₂ into the atmosphere). Iraq's lands, arable and fertile for thousands of years, have also been so devastated by the US led wars that it has become a desert wasteland.[5]
- The support vehicles that supply fuel consume over half the fuel in the battlefield. The military refers to fuel consumption in terms of "gallons per mile," "gallons per minute," and "barrels per hour."
- The world's largest oil 'spill' was in Kuwait, intentionally done by retreating Iraqi forces opening valves from wells, pipelines and several tankers. Most of the oil that washed ashore is still devastating the fragile ecosystem there. They also set fire to 700 well heads that burned in an inferno.

Even before the full length of expected latency period in the development of cancer has passed, rates of cancer (especially childhood cancer) and congenital birth defects, as well as infant mortality and abnormal sex ratio in newborns, have all dramatically increased in the Iraqi city of Fallujah, which was bombarded by US Marines in 2004.[7] Similar findings were made in other Iraqi cities like Basra, and in the Balkans and Afghanistan.[8]

Within the US, one out of every ten Americans lives within ten miles of a military site that has been listed as a Superfund priority cleanup site. The burden of health impacts and environmental destruction falls disproportionately on poorer communities, people of color and indigenous communities, women and children.[8]

US military aggression and dominance, its massive destruction to human lives and the environment of entire regions, along with its key role in preventing meaningful response to avert the climate catastrophe, means that US "national security" policies and the ongoing wars make us far less, not more, secure. Even as early as 2003, a report commissioned by the Pentagon detailed the security threat posed by abrupt climate change, which it considered a higher threat than terrorism. The report raised the prospect of nuclear war, widespread famine and riots over food and water, mass migration, and predicts: "Once again warfare would define human life".[15] But the military's solutions? Beef up the US military even more, build fortress America, develop more long range capabilities (as US military bases on small islands are lost to the rising seas), and run the military on liquefied coal and biofuels, both of which make the climate problem worse. (see www.biofuelwatch.org.uk for more on biofuels.)

The worst impacts of climate change may be how humanity reacts to it, according to a recent study.[13] Climate impacts will lead to mass migration, more and severe wars/conflicts, deeper fascism/oppression towards

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immigrants, and ecosystem decimation as people desperately seek water and sustenance. Desertification, soil loss, more massive carbon transfer from the biosphere to the atmosphere, and further disruption of the climate regulatory functions of natural ecosystems, all will contribute to pushing climate change beyond human control. Policy makers and their strategists have yet to recognize this level of interconnectedness, where failure of one part likely leads to cascading failures of the whole system. The Pentagon report calculated dispassionately, from the 'safety' of their Fortress America vantage point: "Deaths from war as well as starvation and disease will decrease population size, which overtime, will re-balance with carrying capacity." [15]

In short, aggression towards any peoples = suicide for all. No one nation/region/group can survive catastrophic climate change alone. The fate of humanity is ONE! Our only chance lies in peace and collaboration as one human family, and urgently redirecting military spending to climate and ecosystem salvation/restoration, life-affirming jobs, healthcare, education, poverty eradication, etc., worldwide. **In fact, we must confront the shared root causes of militarism, global environmental destruction, and many of the other interconnected social injustices:** a profit-driven system that disregards the value of human life and the very nature that supports human life. Indeed, the slogan on the streets of Copenhagen among the 100,000 marchers was: **"System Change, Not Climate Change!"** [16] As if to further convince us that climate activists must join forces with antiwar, antiracism, and other social justice movements, the US government and its allies are increasingly using 'anti-terrorist' laws to justify spying on and pre-emptive prosecution of activists across a wide range of political strata, including climate activists. Only when we are united and fight as one, will we stand any chance!

Actions:

1. Sign on (organizations only please) **by Dec 8, 2010**, to the "War = Climate Change" [resolution](http://tinyurl.com/2dvjz3d) (http://tinyurl.com/2dvjz3d) to be delivered to US delegates, the IPCC and others during COP16 UN climate conference in Dec 2010, and to the White House and the media. (please send organization, country, contact name, title and email address to rsmolker@riseup.net)
2. Forward this fact sheet ([pdf here](#)) and the [accompanying resolution](#) widely, use in teach-ins and other outreach.
3. Join & get out the word about the April 9, 2011 bi-coastal antiwar demonstrations in NYC and San Francisco (details soon on nationalpeaceconference.org), and especially the multi-location non-violent direct action component to show that we mean it (for the NVDA, email maggie@securegreenfuture.org).

[1] <http://www.fcni.org/budget/budget-proposal11.htm>

[2] Miriam Pemberton with Jonathan Glyn, *Military vs. Climate Security: The 2011 Budgets Compared*. Institute for Policy Studies. http://www.ips-dc.org/reports/military_vs_climate_security_the_2011_budgets_compared

[3] Many resources can be found on the various market mechanisms and other false solutions, here: www.climatesos.org/resources

[4] Anita Dancs, Mary Orisich, Suzanne Smith, *The Military Costs of Securing Energy* (National Priorities Project – October 2008)

[5] http://www.iacenter.org/o/world/climatesummit_pentagon121809/

[6] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/barry-sanders/the-green-zone-the-worst-b_70173.html

[7] <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/toxic-legacy-of-us-assault-on-fallujah-worse-than-hiroshima-2034065.html>

[8] <http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0327-21.htm>

[9] <http://www.actforclimatejustice.org/2010/03/the-impact-of-militarism-on-climate-change-must-no-longer-be-ignored/> (and personal communication with the author)

[10] <http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2010-10-27/the-economic-crisis-and-the-hidden-cost-of-the-wars/full/>

[11] <http://www.kabulpress.org/my/spip.php?article32304>

[12] <http://www.peace-action.org/Peace%20Action%20Military%20Spending%20Primer.pdf>

[13] Will R. Turner, et al. (2010). *Climate change: helping nature survive the human response*. Conservation Letters,

<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/123523083/abstract?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0>

<http://esciencenews.com/articles/2010/08/06/the.worst.impact.climate.change.may.be.how.humanity.reacts.it>

[14] <http://www.foei.org/en/media/archive/2010/developed-countries-attempt-to-launder-aid-money-through-world-bank-and-call-it-climate-funds>, <http://www.foe.org/un-advisory-group-climate-finance-report-falls-flat>, <http://www.ituc-csi.org/climate-finance-closing-the.html?lang=en>

[15] 2003 Pentagon report: http://www.climate.org/PDF/clim_change_scenario.pdf About the report authors:

http://www.historycommons.org/entity.jsp?entity=doug_randall_1

[16] <http://www.indymedia.org/pt/2009/12/932387.shtml>

More resources:

- Top 25 Censored Stories: *US Department of Defense is the Worst Polluter on the Planet* <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/articles/2-us-department-of-defense-is-the-worst-polluter-on-the-planet/>
- Al Jazeera Video: Empire - The new arms race (The world has entered a new arms race, but what justifies this global military addiction?) http://therealnews.com/t2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=5796
- Why large scale biofuels production worsens global warming, not reduce it: www.biofuelwatch.org.uk
- Cost of War Calculator <http://www.stwr.org/special-features/cost-of-war-calculator.html>