



Background Sheet 4: Environment and Climate Change

People's Inquiry: Exploring the Case for an Independent and Peaceful Australia

What are the costs and consequences of Australia's involvement in US-led wars and the US-alliance?

Military Contribution to Climate Change and other Environmental Damage

Australia's environment is being seriously damaged by climate change and gross mismanagement, for example, the continuing rejection of serious action on climate change, continued logging of old-growth forests and loss of habitat from mining and other developments. The climate change exacerbated bushfires of last summer and this mismanagement is putting human health and many species at risk of extinction.

Climate change has wide-ranging impacts on the environment. The Pentagon is the world's biggest consumer of fossil fuels—and agent of climate change. Since 2001, the U.S. military has produced 1.2 billion metric tons of greenhouse-gas emissions, or as much as 257 million passenger cars annually, roughly as many registered vehicles as there are in the entire U.S. That's a higher annual output than whole countries like Morocco, Sweden, and Switzerland. The total emissions from

war-related activity in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Syria is estimated at more than 400 million metric tons of carbon dioxide alone.

The M-1 Abrams (US main battle) tanks burn 250 gallons of fuel per hour. The F-4 Phantom Fighter burns more than 1,600 gallons of jet fuel per hour and peaks at 14,400 gallons per hour at supersonic speeds. The B-52 Stratocruiser, with eight jet engines, uses 55 gallons per minute.

In 2006, the US spent more on the war in Iraq than the entire world spent on renewable energy investment. The reporting each country is required to make to the UN on their greenhouse gas emissions excludes any fuels purchased and used overseas by the military. This has been the case since 1997.

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 often about controlling oil-rich regions and



defending the key shipping supply routes that carry half the world's oil and sustain our consumer economy.

One of the loudest voices calling for action on climate change is coming from the military. However, their focus is on securing borders, protecting trade supply-routes for corporations, controlling conflicts around resources and instability caused by extreme weather, and repressing social unrest. They regard the victims of climate change as 'threats' to be controlled or combated. There is no critical examination of the military's own role in enforcing a corporate-dominated 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.

All wars create widespread destruction and require reconstruction afterwards. The resources used and emissions produced in the reconstruction phase (which might last for many years), are also an environmentally-destructive consequence of war. Wars also can have catastrophic consequences for animal and plant species in the war zone – sometimes deliberately, in denying resources to an enemy.

Climate Change and Environmental Damage as a Major Contributor to War

Environmental and climate change resource conflicts do not cause wars in a simplistic linear way, but there is plenty of evidence of exacerbation of pre-existing instability, both internally and internationally. Water and energy resources are the strongest elements in such conflicts.

Among the reasons that favoured the outbreak of the Syrian conflict is an ancient one: water. In fact, between 2007 and 2010 Syria was hit by a severe drought, the worst registered in the country over the last century, which left a million small farmers unemployed, and caused the migration of rural population towards cities. Drought in

Syria intensified social uprising, exacerbating the pre-existing political instability.

Water supplies, both aquifer and river-based, also intensified regional rivalries in the Middle East, in particular dam-building and irrigation water scarcity on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. These involve Turkey, Syria and Iraq. In addition, water conflicts are significant between Palestinians, Israel and Jordan.

Climate-change-driven refugee flows will certainly increase greatly, especially from heavily-populated riverine countries such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Iraq and Egypt. And conflicts over refugees over refugees are already in evidence (and being manipulated) in the current Greek-Turkish disputes.

The Ultimate Climate-Change – Nuclear Winter

Even a small-scale, regional nuclear war could disrupt the global climate for a decade or more. In a regional nuclear conflict scenario where two opposing nations in the subtropics would each use 50 Hiroshima-sized nuclear weapons (about 15 kilotons each) on major population centres, the researchers estimated as much as five million tons of soot would be released, which would produce a cooling of several degrees over large areas of

North America and Eurasia, including most of the grain-growing regions. The major nuclear powers, the US and Russia, have arsenals of nearly 13,000 nuclear weapons, of which approximately 3,300 are deployed.





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