Nick Deane

20210329   ND Submission 5

Environment

"War is the worst thing in the world. It's the most insane, most evil, most destructive, least sustainable thing humans do. Ending it is therefore the most urgent matter."
(Caitlin Johnstone) https://caitlinjohnstone.com/2021/03/28/corrupt-power-cantfunction-in-the-light-notes-from-the-edge-of-the-narrative-matrix/

In a recent IPAN webinar, Ian Lowe quoted ex-UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, pointing out that the environment has traditionally been one of the silent casualties of war, and that a major consequence of war has been widespread and devastating environmental destruction. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBF0R5AHzlw

Lowe also references a very telling point, attributed to Professor Catherine Lutz, that war 'changes parameters'. So that, in the face of actual or perceived threat (especially in a war situation), acts that would normally be abhorrent become acceptable and even routine. (This, of course, applies to the treatment of fellow human-beings as well as the environment.)

Even without engaging in actual, open warfare, the environmental impact of all military activity tends to be environmentally destructive. For example, the US military's carbon footprint is enormous, making it one of the largest polluters in history. It consumes more liquid fuels and emits more climate-changing gases than most medium-sized countries. It remains the single largest institutional consumer of hydrocarbons in the world. It has also locked itself into hydrocarbon-based weapons systems for years to come, by depending on existing aircraft and warships for openended operations. https://theconversation.com/us-military-is-a-bigger-polluter-thanas-many-as-140-countries-shrinking-this-war-machine-is-a-must-119269 .

In another example of destructive military activity, expansive swaths of the ocean are being set aside for year-round military exercises.

"The most egregious example is the MITT (Mariana Islands Training and Testing), a plan to **transform over a million square miles of biodiverse ecosystems into the largest-ever range complex for bombing and firing practice.** The impacted area would be larger than the states of Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Nevada, Arizona, Montana, and New Mexico combined. https://www.naturalblaze.com/2021/07/independence-day-2021-5g-concerns-onepicture-one-map-one-graph-and-81000-dead-whales-and-dolphins-per-year.html

Adding to the problem of the environmental impacts of military activity is the secrecy that surrounds them – so that, for example, the relevant figures about GHG emissions were exempt from consideration during discussions before the Kyoto Ptotocol of 1997.

The points raised above might give the impression that military forces around the globe are unaware of their impact of the environment and take no cognisance of environmental considerations, such as climate change. This is not the case, however. The military has long been aware of the possible impacts of climate change. A lengthy document published by the Centre for Naval Analyses back in 2007 identifies all its potential, adverse impacts.
https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/national%20security%20and%20the%20threat%20of%20climate%20change.pdf
A more recent report even concedes that "…the Army is an environmental disaster." This report details the likely impacts of the coming climate crisis, pointing out that global migrations have already reached historic highs and that 600 million people currently live at sea level. The scenario set out is one of chaotic, social effects.
https://climateandsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/implications-of-climatechange-for-us-army_army-war-college_2019.pdf

There is one, particular and important area of impact where the climate crisis and militarism intersect. Of great concern is what these reports describe is the 'threat multiplier', a term used by military thinkers and also recognised by the UN.
https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/fr/news/climate-change-recognized-'threatmultiplier'-un-security-council-debates-its-impact-peace The concept looks at the likely impact of the climate crisis on global, political stability. Scarcity of resources (particularly food and water) coupled with excessive heat in some parts and/or flooding in others will, in all probability, lead to conflict and the movement of peoples, probably across national boundaries, on a massive scale. The unfortunate consequence of this awareness within military circles is that these impacts are viewed as a threat to 'national security' (hence 'threat multiplier'). Military thinkers therefore express a need for increasing military assets – to cope with this threat; to counter the instability that is likely to occur.

To some extent this threat multiplier can be seen in action already. It has been argued that the civil war in Syria was, in part, the consequence of drought.
https://www.theguardian.com/environment/earth-insight/2013/may/13/1 That war, in turn, led to an influx of refugees into Europe – and a consequent, military-style hardening of the borders of some countries has taken place. (In Australia the quasimilitary character and name of 'Border Force' may indicate the direction of future developments.)

To make matters worse, a commercial component, that encourages military expansion, must also be included. For it is clear that those who are engaged in the military industry regard climate change and its threat multiplier as a business opportunity - one to be exploited for profit. For example ""I think climate change is a real opportunity for the aerospace and defense industry," said Lord Drayson, then British Minister of State for Strategic Defence Acquisition Reform, in 2009."
https://www.theguardian.com/environment/earth-insight/2014/may/30/climatechange-war-conflict-military-industrial-complex-syria-egypt-uprising

My contention is that as the climate crisis deepens, military activity (damaging enough as it is) is likely to increase. (It would be instructive to compare the trends of

global temperature rise in parallel with military spending to establish whether or not this is indeed happening.)

The world is likely to see numbers of refugees increase, whether from the direct effects of climate change or, indirectly, from resultant conflict. Furthermore, based on observed events, such as such as President Trump's wall on the Mxican border, it is likely that the wealthy (and militarily strong) nations will resist any influx of regugees onto home territory. 'Stopping the boats' seems to have popular support in Australia.

An article in the New York Times puts it like this:- "… therein lies the basis for what may be the worst-case scenario: one in which America and the rest of the developed world refuse to welcome migrants but also fail to help them at home. As our model demonstrated, closing borders while stinting on development creates a somewhat counterintuitive population surge even as temperatures rise, trapping more and more people in places that are increasingly unsuited to human life…
In that scenario, the global trend toward building walls could have a profound and lethal effect. Researchers suggest that the annual death toll, globally, from heat alone will eventually rise by 1.5 million. But in this scenario, untold more will also die from starvation, or in the conflicts that arise over tensions that food and water insecurity will bring."
https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/23/magazine/climate-migration.html

There is even a feed-back loop at play in this scenario. The military response to the crisis (i.e. more spending and greater activity) will, through its polluting effect, worsen the situation that mandated this response.

As a recent article in 'The Conversation' explains, the impact of climate change on Australian society is likely to be quite ugly.
https://theconversation.com/seriouslyugly-heres-how-australia-will-look-if-the-world-heats-by-3-c-this-century157875?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=twitterbutton
However, this of sort analysis ignores or, at least, fails to take into account, the global, political ramifications of the crisis, such as large-scale migrations and the contribution that military actions might make.

If the militarised scenario that I have outlined plays out, humanity is in danger of making the crisis very much worse than it might otherwise be.

This scenario that makes the cause of peace more urgent than ever and sets the efforts of contemporary peace activists apart from those of all previous anti-war movements. For sure, all the traditional reasons for opposing militarism and war are still with us and will never change. But we are in a new era, facing a situation mankind has never faced before. And this makes our position urgent and even extreme.

The situation demands that we confront the old ways of doing things – the ways that tend to find a military 'solution', whatever the 'problem'; that sees 'instability' as a phenomenon that must be brought under control – by military means, if necessary. Unfortunately, this sort of thinking underlies our lamentable proclivity for waging war. Ultimately, it is this way of thinking - in terms of expansion, conquest, control

and dominance, that needs to change. Instead of viewing migrations as a problem that must be combatted, humanity should be looking to ways to accommodate refugees rather than fight them off.

Dr Nafeez Ahmed expresses things this way:- "We become incapable of recognising that the fundamental obstacle to addressing our global challenges is that we see enemies everywhere." https://www.theguardian.com/environment/earth-insight/2014/may/30/climatechange-war-conflict-military-industrial-complex-syria-egypt-uprising

An alternative way must be found. Instead of responding to emergencies through use of the military (as was done, for example, in response to Covid19 and the 2019/20 bushfires), the establishment of a civilian organisation, lacking the capacity to wage war and devoted to humanitarian actions such as disaster relief, would be a good starting-point.

We must not go on as we do, always thinking in terms of the military providing the ultimate resolution. For, if we do, through our own actions we stand to make the future even worse than it might otherwise be.

ND July 2021