



WORLD**BEYOND**WAR.org  
Fact Sheet

## War Threatens the Environment

***The ecological footprint of war and ongoing preparations for war cannot be ignored. Militarism is a top contributor to the global climate crisis and a direct cause of lasting environmental damage. And yet military activities are often exempted from key environmental regulations, such as the Kyoto Protocol.<sup>1</sup>***

### A Thirst for Oil

A major motivation behind war is the desire to control resources, especially oil and gas. In fact, foreign military intervention in civil wars does not correlate with human rights violations, lack of democracy, or threats of terrorism, but does strongly correlate with the presence of oil. Third-party intervention in a civil war is 100 times more likely when the country at war has large reserves of oil.<sup>2</sup>

### Carbon Cost

The U.S. military is one of the biggest polluters on earth. Since 2001, the U.S. military has emitted 1.2 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases, equivalent to the annual emissions of 257 million cars on the road.<sup>3</sup> The U.S. Department of Defense is the largest institutional consumer of oil (\$17B/year) in the world, and the largest global landholder with 800 foreign military bases in 80 countries.<sup>4</sup> By one estimate, the U.S.



Photo Credit: AP

military used 1.2 million barrels of oil in Iraq in just one month of 2008.<sup>5</sup> One military estimate in 2003 was that two-thirds of the U.S. Army's fuel consumption occurred in vehicles that were delivering fuel to the battlefield.<sup>6</sup>

### Poisoned Water

The U.S. military is among the top three largest polluters of U.S. waterways. It dumped 63,335,653 pounds of poison into waterways from 2010-2014, including carcinogenic and radioactive

chemicals, rocket fuel, and toxic sewage.<sup>7</sup>

A Pentagon Report released in 2018 details widespread chemical poisoning of water supplies on military bases and in surrounding communities worldwide.<sup>8</sup> The report identifies the presence of PFOS and PFOA chemicals in drinking water at levels known to be harmful to human health and linked to cancer and birth defects. At least 401 bases are known to have contaminated water. PFOA and PFOS chemicals are used in fire retardants during routine fire-training exercises on U.S. military bases worldwide.

The majority of “Superfund” sites in the U.S. are current or former military-related installations, sites designated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency where extreme hazardous waste threatens human health and the environment.<sup>9</sup>

## Traces Left Behind

The most deadly weapons left behind by war are landmines and cluster bombs. A 1993 U.S. State Department report called landmines “perhaps the most toxic and widespread pollution facing mankind.”<sup>10</sup> Millions of hectares in Europe, North Africa, and Asia are under interdiction because of tens of millions of landmines and cluster bombs left behind by war.

In Libya, one third of its land mass is considered contaminated by landmines and unexploded munitions from World War II. “Land mines accelerate environmental damage through 1 of 4 mechanisms: fear of mines denies access to abundant natural resources and arable land; populations are forced to move preferentially into marginal and fragile environments in order to avoid minefields; this migration speeds depletion of biological diversity; and landmine explosions disrupt essential soil and water processes.”<sup>11</sup>



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## Intentional Damage

Compounding the massive ecological footprint of war and ongoing preparations for war, damage to the environment is also a deliberate tactic used in warfare, such as the destruction of forests, farms, and irrigation systems during World War II.

From 1965 to 1971, the U.S. sprayed 3640 km<sup>2</sup> of southern Vietnam with dangerous herbicides and defoliants, including the infamous Agent Orange. During the Gulf War, Iraq released 10 million gallons of oil into the Persian Gulf and set 732 oil wells on fire, causing extensive damage to wildlife and poisoning groundwater with oil spills.<sup>12</sup>

***Militarism is a top global polluter and a leading contributor to the climate crisis, yet it is often exempted from key environmental standards.***

**Learn More at:**  
[worldbeyondwar.org/environment](http://worldbeyondwar.org/environment)

*World BEYOND War is a global grassroots network of volunteers, activists, and allied organizations advocating for the abolition of war and its replacement with an alternative global security system based on peace and demilitarization. Visit [WorldBEYONDWar.org](http://WorldBEYONDWar.org) to join the global movement to end all wars.*

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## References

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<sup>4</sup> Lorincz, Tamara. "The Climate & Environmental Impacts of the Canadian



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<sup>8</sup> Sullivan, Maureen. “Addressing PerfluorooctaneSulfonate (PFOS) and PerfluorooctanoicAcid (PFOA).” *Department of Defense*, March 2018, <https://www.denix.osd.mil/derp/home/documents/pfos-pfoa-briefing-to-the-hasc/>.

<sup>9</sup> Nazaryan, Alexander. “The U.S. Department of Defense Is One of the World’s Biggest Polluters.” *Newsweek*, 17 July 2014, <https://www.newsweek.com/2014/07/25/us-department-defence-one-worlds-biggest-polluters-259456.html>.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of State. “Hidden Killers: The Global Problem with Uncleared Landmines.” U.S. Department of State, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> Leaning, Jennifer. “Environment and health: 5. Impact of war.” *CMAJ: Canadian Medical Association Journal*, vol. 163, no. 9, 2000, pp. 1157-61.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*