



No Warming, No War

How Militarism Fuels the Climate Crisis— and Vice Versa

Lorah Steichen and Lindsay Koshgarian
National Priorities Project
at the Institute for Policy Studies



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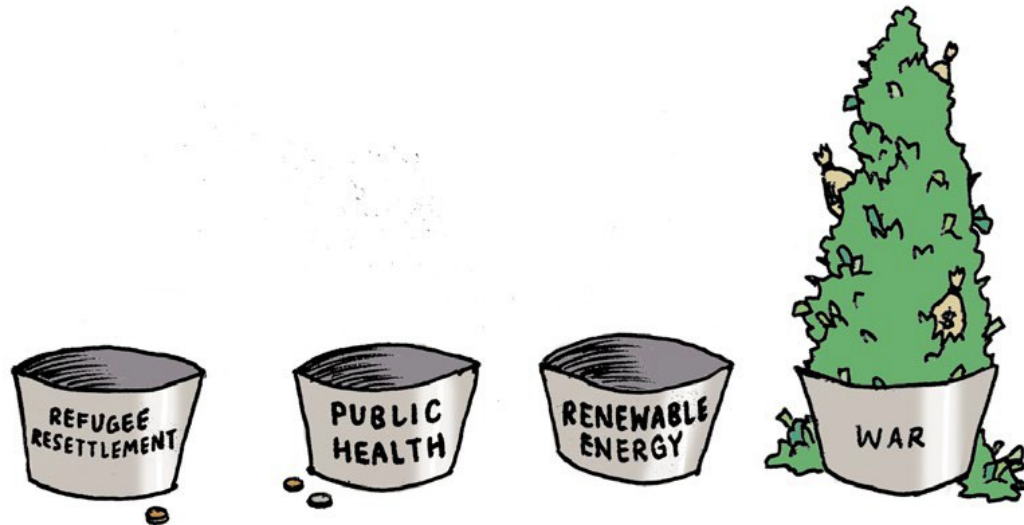
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Report design, illustrations, and graphics by Sarah Gertler

Foreword



The world of April 2020, when we publish this guide, is unrecognizable from the world of just a few weeks ago. The COVID-19 pandemic has utterly changed life as we know it, and even as we yearn for a full return to human connection and community, we must not return to “normal.”

Our old normal was defined by unfettered capitalism that thrives on the devastation of our planet, the devaluation of human life, and the use of military force to perpetuate both. On a local and global scale, humanity and community have been co-opted by profit and violence. This “normal” has now brought us to the brink of an existential crisis as climate change continues nearly unabated. In a strange twist, it has taken a global pandemic to [significantly reduce](#) the world’s fossil fuel emissions.

In the face of both COVID-19 and the climate crisis, we urgently need to shift from a culture of war to a culture of care. While meaningful climate action has stalled on Capitol Hill, planners at the Pentagon have been quietly preparing a militarized, [“armed lifeboat”](#) response to climate chaos for years. Not only do we face ever-increasing militarism and conflict in a climate-changed world, but the tendency by decision makers to understand climate change as just another national security issue has misdirected resources away from the programs that we need to mitigate and adapt to a warming climate.

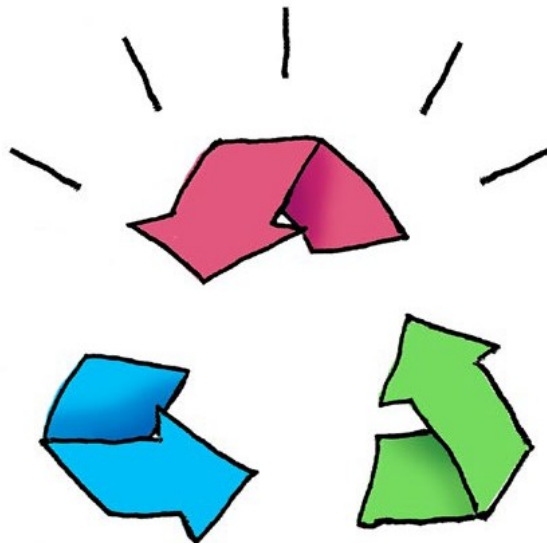
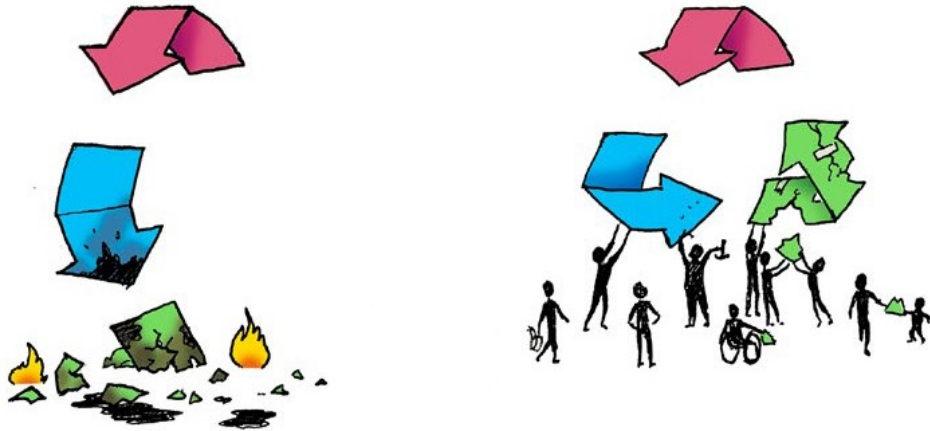
This has left our country woefully unprepared for the looming crisis. As we publish this resource in the midst of another crisis for which we are not prepared, the COVID-19 pandemic, the devastating impact of misplaced budget priorities and an overly adversarial approach to foreign policy is laid bare. It is clear that funneling trillions of dollars into the military to wage endless wars and project military dominance has prevented us from investing in true security and cooperation that actually meets human needs and keeps us safe.

From a global perspective, the corona crisis illuminates the troubling ways that the United States and other world powers might respond to future climate shocks. Predictably, the response to the health and economic crises of COVID-19 has been discriminatory, with those in already precarious socioeconomic positions [faring the worst](#). The [dehumanizing treatment](#) of migrants [in the midst of this crisis](#) should be a cautionary tale for how those forced to move due to climate change might be treated. In the United States, ICE has continued [business as usual: raids, detentions, neglect, deportations](#), and terror.

The status quo was already an emergency. A global pandemic only accelerates the urgency to reverse course. As we outline in this paper, climate change and migration are [deeply connected](#). The scale of human movement will be staggering with climate change. If we don't transform our society and the way we confront crises, we will face even more unjust and inhumane realities in a climate-changed future.

Just as we [reject](#) a military take-over of the COVID-19 pandemic, we refuse to accept a militarized response to the climate crisis. Our response to COVID-19 is a dress rehearsal for the unprecedented level of [global cooperation](#) and sharing of resources that will be needed to adequately address the climate crisis. To be able to do so, we need to fundamentally restructure our broken economy. Instead of deepening our violent and unequal society, and leaning into militarized "solutions" motivated by fear, the current public health crisis demonstrates the necessity of a [Just Transition](#) from a ["Banks and Tanks"](#) economy to one rooted in cooperation and care.

Introduction: From a Culture of War to a Culture of Care



We're at a critical moment in history, where meaningfully addressing the climate crisis requires an unprecedented response rooted in global cooperation, collaboration, and care. In contrast, dealing with climate change is increasingly seen as a security issue rather than a matter of upholding human rights and advancing justice. To achieve climate justice, we must restructure the extractive economy we have now that is harming people and ecosystems. Such aspirations and militarism are fundamentally at odds. True climate solutions must have antimilitarism at the core.

Recognizing that the impacts of climate change will dramatically increase instability around the globe, this paper examines the role of militarism in a climate-changed world. As outlined in the pages that follow, climate change and militarism intersect in a variety of alarming ways:

The Pentagon is a major polluter.

U.S. Militarism degrades the environment and contributes directly to climate change. Plans to confront climate change must address militarization, but “greening the military” misses the point entirely. Militarism and climate justice are fundamentally at odds.

The United States has a well-known history of fighting wars for oil.

The fossil fuel industry relies on militarization to uphold its operations around the globe. Those who fight to protect their lands from extractive industries are often met with state and paramilitary violence.

Climate change and border militarization are inextricably linked.

It is clear that on a warming planet, cross-border migration will rise. As the U.S. continues to ramp up border security, so do threats to all people’s freedom to move and stay. Immigrant justice is climate justice, and challenging militarism is critical to achieving both.

Over-investment in the military comes at the high cost of under-investing in other needs, including climate.

For decades, the U.S. has invested in military adventurism and prioritized military threats above all other threats to human life. The bloated U.S. war economy presents an opportunity to redirect significant military resources, including money, infrastructure, and people, toward implementing solutions to climate change.

Workers need a way out.

The fossil fuel and military sectors mirror each other in the way that workers frequently end up funneled into lethal work due to limited options. We need a Just Transition for workers and communities in both sectors. In order to rapidly transition to a green economy, we must fund millions of jobs in the green economy.

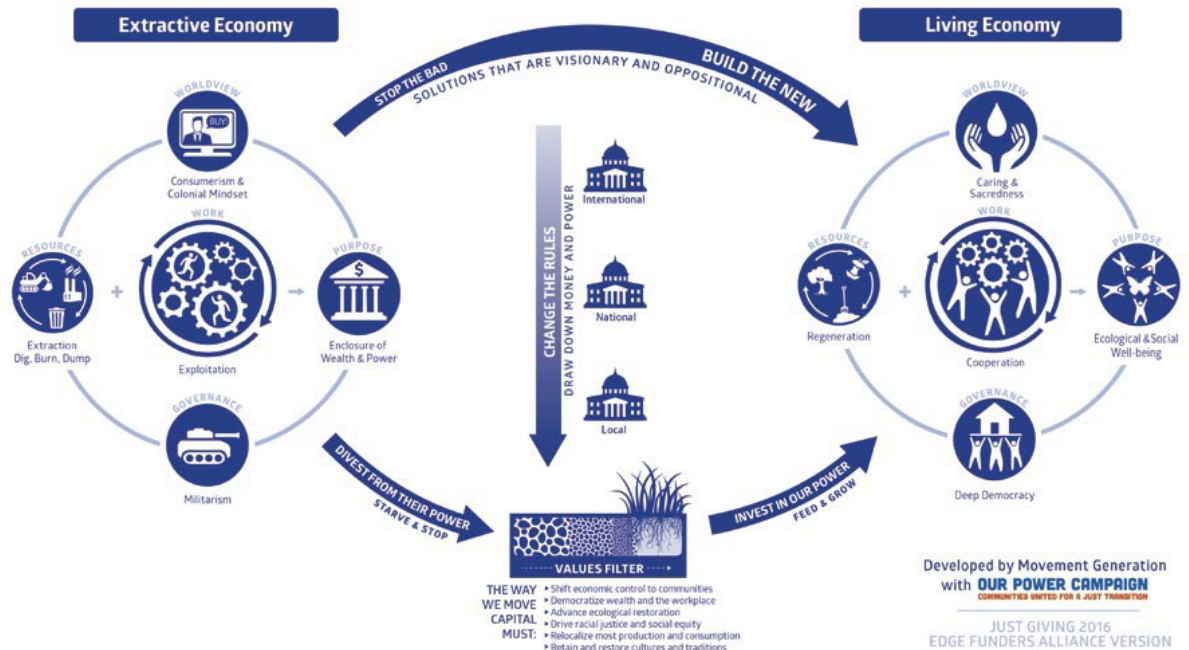
Racism and racial oppression form the foundation for both the extractive fossil fuel economy and the militarized economy.

Neither could exist without the presumption that some human lives are worth less than others, and racial justice would undermine the foundations of both.

A Just Transition is a Peaceful Transition

In the climate justice movement, the concept of [Just Transition](#) is well-known.¹ It is a process of transforming an unjust, extractive economy that exploits and harms people and the planet, to a just, regenerative economy with healthy, thriving communities and ecosystems. The process must be just for the outcome to be just.

A STRATEGY FRAMEWORK FOR JUST TRANSITION RESIST — RETHINK — RESTRUCTURE



Graphic from Movement Generation, https://movementgeneration.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/JTFramework_EDGE2016-01.jpg

People have always resisted the exploitation of the extractive economy, but violence and the threat of it keep the economic system in operation.

The economic system that extracts finite resources (such as fossil fuels), generates pollution and causes climate change, and exploits communities and workers, is also a militarized economic system that profits from war and violence, whether in distant lands like Afghanistan or in over-policed Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities at home. And, just as with extractive industries such as the fossil fuel industry, militarized industries—like weapons manufacturing—create economic dependence, with workers as well as entire communities lacking economic self-determination and finding their future tied to the well-being of the industry.

Militarism is the coercive arm of the extractive economy. People have always resisted the exploitation of the extractive economy, but violence and the threat of it keep the economic system in operation. This plays out on a global scale: the military yields such power internationally, increasingly militarized police employ brute force against communities in the United States, and immigration enforcement violently

patrols national borders. As articulated by Movement Generation’s [Strategic Framework for a Just Transition](#), “If the acquisition of resources, including labor, are through extraction, then the ultimate mechanism of governance must be militarism: structural, well-organized, systematic violence—diverse in forms and methods—but always brutal.”²

A Just Transition demands a reimagining and a restructuring of economic systems that works for people and the planet. Such a Just Transition demands solutions that are visionary and oppositional to what we have now. A truly transformative Just Transition must demilitarize our economy at the same time that it moves us away from fossil fuels and extractivism.

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National Security or Planetary Emergency?

In an era marked by monumental challenges, the climate crisis poses an existential threat of unmatched urgency and scale. Communities around the globe are already experiencing the impacts of a warming climate—including severe drought, intense storms, oppressive heat waves, and recurring crop failures. With increasing intensity and occurrence, climate change poses an immediate threat to tens of millions of people around the world.

Yet, climate change doesn't affect everyone equally. Indigenous people, people of color, and people with lower incomes are confronting its impacts first and worst. The relationship between the devastating impacts of climate change and the potential for violent conflict are well documented and are discussed in the sections that follow. And while we should take care not to oversimplify such links, [it is clear](#) that over time increasing bouts of extreme weather will make the planet a less ecologically, socially, and politically stable place.³

Recognizing the catastrophic impacts of a warming climate and the massive response that this crisis demands, climate change is sometimes understood as a “national security threat.” While some hope that a national security frame might push policymakers to take climate change seriously and address the root-causes, this militarized framing invites a search for military “solutions” that legitimize U.S. militarism instead of challenging it.⁴ At a time when the United States needs to shift public resources from funding war and weaponry to instead building the green infrastructure that is required to prevent climate chaos, it is critical that we see through false solutions that conflate climate fixes with national security.⁵ Rather than understanding it as a national security crisis, characterizing climate change as a “planetary emergency” may help to see beyond a militarized worldview and instead foster a spirit of global cooperation. Choosing solidarity over security, real safety comes when we care for each other and our environment.

The Military and Climate Change



**“Fuel is the ‘blood of the military’...
and is critical to the life of the theater of operation,”**
U.S. Army Petroleum and Water Department, Fort Lee.⁶

“Energy is the lifeblood of our warfighting capabilities,”
General David Petraeus⁷

The Carbon Intensive U.S. Military

Comprised of more than two million people and funded by an annual budget of more than \$700 billion, the United States has a massive military presence across the globe. With extensive infrastructure and operations both domestically and abroad, the largest industrial military in the history of the world is also among the biggest polluters. The U.S. military produces about [fifty-nine million metric tons](#) of greenhouse gas emissions annually.⁸ To put that in perspective, that's more greenhouse gas emissions than entire industrialized countries, such as [Sweden, Denmark, and Portugal](#).⁹ According to [a recent study](#) from Brown University's Cost of War Project, "The [Department of Defense] is the world's largest institutional user of petroleum and correspondingly, the single largest producer of greenhouse gases in the world."¹⁰

Domestic and overseas military installations account for about 40% of the DoD's greenhouse gas emissions.

Maintaining an expansive military sprawl requires significant investment in carbon-intensive infrastructure and gas-guzzling equipment. Domestic and overseas military installations account for about [40% of the DoD's greenhouse gas emissions](#).¹¹ There are [800 U.S. military bases](#) in 90 countries and territories across the globe. The associated carbon footprint is tremendous. Massive, city-sized bases are equipped with everything from ports, airfields, and nuclear weapons installations to schools and shopping centers. A constellation of smaller sites across the map house drones, surveillance aircraft, and weaponry.¹² Land for military bases is often violently

taken. The U.S. military has a long history of forcibly displacing Indigenous people to claim land and create bases.¹³ People and places that bear the brunt of U.S. militarism are often the same ones that bear the brunt of climate change, including Native and Indigenous people, poor people, and the Global South.

Warfare is an extremely carbon-intensive aspect of the United States' militarized economy. Military operations, which include moving troops and carrying out missions, account for [70% of the U.S. military's energy consumption](#).¹⁴ Just one of the military's jets, the B-52 Stratocruiser, [consumes about as much fuel](#) in an hour as the average car driver uses in seven years.¹⁵ According to the [best available estimates](#), the U.S. military has emitted more than 1.2 billion metric tons of greenhouse

gases into the atmosphere since the present era of American conflicts began with the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. To put that in perspective, that is the rough equivalent to the annual emissions of 257 million passenger cars, which is nearly twice as many cars than are on the road in the U.S. About one-third of those emissions, more than four hundred million metric tons of greenhouse gases, are directly due to war-related fuel consumption.¹⁶ Beyond a significant carbon "boot print," U.S. military operations wreak havoc on the environments where it wages war. Toxic munitions and the burning of military



waste in Iraq, for example, [contributed to widespread poisoning of the Iraqi environment](#) that is linked to elevated rates of cancer and birth defects [described as](#), “the highest rate of genetic damage to any population ever studied.”¹⁷

“Greening the Military” and Climate Justice are Fundamentally at Odds

The military’s carbon footprint has garnered attention from some progressive policymakers, including Senator Elizabeth Warren. She [released a plan](#) to reduce the military’s carbon emissions by requiring the Pentagon to achieve net-zero emissions for all its non-combat bases and infrastructure by 2030 and commit billions of dollars to new Pentagon energy efficiency research.¹⁸ And yet, even while characterizing the U.S. military as a major climate actor, calls to “green the military” should give us pause.

The U.S. military is deeply entwined with the fossil fuel industry. Jet fuel is the military’s [most heavily-used fuel](#) and a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. Each air mission produces hundreds of tons of CO2 pollution.¹⁹ The U.S. wars against ISIS in Syria and Iraq, for example, have entailed [tens of thousands](#) of air missions since 2014, from reconnaissance, to airlift, refueling, and weapons strikes.²⁰ While it may be possible to power

Plans to make the U.S. war machine more fuel-efficient miss the point entirely... Solar energy, electric vehicles, or aspirations of “carbon neutrality” may promise fuel-efficiency but do nothing to make the U.S. military any less violent or oppressive.

military bases or even drones with solar energy, there is no viable prospect for electrifying a majority of the military arsenal. Decarbonizing aviation is particularly challenging, as there is [no comparable alternative to energy-dense jet-fuel](#), and at current trends, climate chaos far outpaces technological innovation in the electrification of air travel. Among the most ambitious attempts to transition military machinery from fossil fuels, the so-called “[Great Green Fleet](#)” is made up of planes, submarines, and ships powered by biofuels and nuclear power—which may be alternatives to fossil fuels but not without their own ecological footprint and hefty price tag.²¹ [Considerable controversy](#) surrounds the extent to which biofuels can even be characterized as carbon neutral, undermining the supposed benefits of a biofuel-powered-arsenal.²²

What’s more, plans to make the U.S. war machine more fuel-efficient miss the point entirely. Besides the fact that such proposals tend to only address a fraction of the U.S. military’s fossil fuel consumption and emissions, the reality is that solar energy, electric vehicles, or aspirations of “carbon neutrality” may promise fuel-efficiency but do nothing to make the U.S. military any less violent or oppressive. The climate justice movement calls for a restructuring of an extractive economy that is harming people and ecosystems. Such aspirations and militarism are fundamentally at odds.

It’s also worth examining the motivations of the U.S. military’s supposed climate leadership. The Pentagon has published reports documenting climate risks since 2003. Describing climate change as an “[urgent and growing threat to our national security](#),” the Department of Defense’s concern with climate change is rooted in a desire to sustain its own operations rather than meaningfully confront the causes or impacts of climate chaos.²³ According to a [2016 Department of Defense Directive](#) that requires climate change considerations to

be included in all military strategic planning, “The DoD must be able to adapt current and future operations to address the impacts of climate change in order to maintain an effective and efficient U.S. military.”²⁴

The U.S. incorporates climate change into military planning in three significant ways. First is accounting for climate impacts—like rising sea level and wildfires—on military infrastructure. Second is the development of “green fuels” to power the military arsenal. As the world’s largest institutional consumer of petroleum, keeping military machinery fueled-up can be a major vulnerability to military operations. The military’s strategic interest revolves around safeguarding fuel transit routes and reducing the military’s soil dependency. Third, the military is preparing for new “security threats” in a warming climate. The DoD projects resource scarcity and climate destabilization to cause more armed conflict and mass migrations to follow. Each of these problems are rooted in concerns about the military’s operability and invite “solutions” that justify expanded militarization and bigger military budgets, not a renegotiation of priorities to shift funds away from the war-machine and towards climate solutions.

The Department of Defense’s concern with climate change is rooted in a desire to sustain its own operations rather than meaningfully confront the causes or impacts of climate chaos.

With a record of capitalizing on insecurity rather than seeking to resolve it, the industries who profit off of war and militarization are also motivated by commercial opportunities in the growing field of environmental security. The arms industry thrives on insecurity and perceptions of it, and has already begun promoting itself as a solution to climate chaos. With tight collaboration between the military and the corporations who profit off its expansion, climate chaos offers new business opportunities in expanding markets.

The DoD’s Destructive Environmental Legacy

While the Department of Defense publicizes a supposed commitment to addressing climate change, it keeps a record of environmental destruction out of the spotlight. The U.S. military leaves contamination in its wake wherever it goes. As military base expert [David Vine explains](#), “By definition, most bases store large quantities of weapons, explosives, and other inherently dangerous tools of war; nearly all of them contain toxic chemicals and other hazardous waste. Pollution, contamination, and other forms of environmental harm are found at nearly every base.”²⁵ In the United States alone, there are tens of thousands of polluted sites linked to military contamination in every U.S. state and territory. The total amount of land affected by military contamination is [larger than the entire state of Florida](#)—and that’s not even accounting for the toxic legacy left abroad where there is often little-to-no oversight or accountability.²⁶ Some of the worst cases are in U.S. territories, which lack the full protections of the Constitution but are also denied the possibility of a sovereign government to stand up for its people.

There’s a long history of “[colonial contamination](#)” in Guam, for example, where unremediated environmental damage dates back to WWII.²⁷ Since then, the military has used the island in the Pacific to store toxic materials and dump toxic waste with known carcinogens or that is otherwise harmful to humans. There are clear correlations between illness and base pollution for the people in Guam and across the Marianas Islands. The Chamorros

people, who are Indigenous to the Marianas islands, have significantly higher cancer rates than other ethnic groups.²⁸ With two major U.S. military complexes, the DoD maintains about [30% of Guam's land](#) today.²⁹ Across the 30-mile long island there are [26 military installations](#) with at least one hazardous site, nearly half of which have been designated as medium to high risk.³⁰ As the federal government attempts to broaden control of the island by expanding military bases, Indigenous people [continue to resist the military occupation](#) of their land.³¹ Alongside militarization, the Chamorros people are also on the frontlines of the climate crisis. The island's marine ecosystem has been [ravaged by climate change](#) in recent years, as warming ocean temperatures have resulted in [significant losses](#) of the island's surrounding coral population. Coral reefs are a foundation of Guam's economy and of great cultural significance to Guam's Indigenous populations. As both are rooted in racist and colonial mindsets, militarism and climate change disproportionately impact Black, Brown, Indigenous communities, and the Global South.

The military spends [more than one billion dollars a year](#) to manage sites contaminated with its toxic waste and explosives—and still fails to adequately manage land restoration projects.³² Considering the DoD's significant environmental impact, there's no reason to believe they're motivated by real concern over climate change beyond how it affects their own violent operations.

Plans to confront climate change must address militarization. With that said, “greening the military” or finding ways to wage eco-friendly war miss the boat. As we'll outline in the sections that follow, recognizing the relationships between war and violence, imperialism, the military industrial complex, and the fossil fuel industry demands far more transformative solutions than greenwashing militarization. Instead, let's find ways of framing climate change and national security that challenge old conceptualizations of national security and national interest. Let's dramatically shift budget priorities.

Killing for Oil



“Of course it’s about oil, we can’t really deny that,”

Gen. John Abizaid, former CENTCOM Commander³³

“Resource-extracting corporations operate behind military shields,”

Nnimmo Bassey, of Environmental Rights Action Nigeria and Chair of Oilwatch Africa³⁴

Why We Fight: The Struggle for Oil

Beyond accounting for fossil fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, the U.S. military’s contributions to the climate crisis are even greater when considering what most military forces are mobilized for. The vast military infrastructure around the world is strategically positioned in oil- and resource-rich regions and along shipping lanes that



keep the fossil-fuel economy in operation around the globe. Oil is the leading cause of war; an estimated one-quarter to one-half of all interstate wars since 1973 have been linked to oil.³⁵ By far the greatest militarization has been in the Middle East, where more than half of the world’s oil reserves are located. The U.S. military spends an estimated \$81 billion a year to protect the world’s oil supplies—even before accounting for the Iraq war.

Climate Change is a “Threat Multiplier”

Climate change accelerates pre-existing crises. Described by the Pentagon as a “threat multiplier,” climate change makes already precarious social and political conditions worse. Climate change arrives in a grossly unequal world, and amplifies the crises of poverty and violence already impacting so many communities and regions of the world. Sociologist Christian [Parenti describes](#) this collision of crises as “the catastrophic convergence.”³⁶ According to the [2019 World Peace Index](#), “The effects of climate change pose a major challenge to peacefulness in the coming decade.”³⁷ That study estimates 971 million people live in areas with high or very high exposure to climate hazards. Of this, 400 million or 41% live in countries that already have low levels of peacefulness. As the climate crisis worsens, more ecological disasters and wars will continue to fuel mass migration.

The Complicated Web of Drought, Politics, and War in Syria

While a range of factors influenced the ongoing conflict in Syria, which began in March 2011, there is [empirical evidence](#) that climatic conditions played a significant role in exacerbating the conflict.³⁸ Likely caused by climate change, Syria experienced a severe drought between 2007 and 2010 that resulted in a dramatic reduction in groundwater supply. The prolonged drought conditions coupled with poor resource management policy led to multi-year crop failures, a dramatic increase in food prices, economic crisis, and the mass displacement and migration of rural farming families to urban areas. The rapid increase in urban population exacerbated unemployment and political unrest and helped trigger a civil war. [Researchers conclude](#) in the *Journal for Global Environmental Change*, “Climatic conditions, by affecting drought severity and the likelihood of armed conflict, played a significant role as an explanatory factor for asylum seeking in the period 2011-2015.”³⁹

Violent Responses to Dissent

In addition to causing war, the fossil fuel industry also relies on militarized state violence to uphold its operations around the globe. Those who fight to protect their lands from extractive industries and the infrastructure—like pipelines—used to bring oil, gas, and coal to market are often met with state and paramilitary violence. Land and environmental defenders are routinely intimidated, criminalized, and murdered. According to [data from Global Witness](#), more than three people were murdered on average each week in 2018—and even more criminalized—for defending their land and the environment.⁴⁰ This tally is almost certainly an undercount, as limited press freedom and other forms of information suppression results in some land and environmental defender deaths going unrecorded. Indigenous peoples are disproportionately subject to this violence. While Indigenous people make up about 5% of the world’s population, they [account for about a quarter of those murdered](#) for defending land and the environment.⁴¹



Branded as “eco-terrorists,” activists and everyday people protecting the well-being of their communities are often exposed to counterinsurgency operations that mirror the violent military tactics of war zones. In the [coal mining states of India](#), for example, Indigenous communities increasingly face exploitation and suppression of their basic rights as mining companies expand operations and evict Adivasi communities from their land. Those who peacefully resist human rights abuses face criminalization and suppression from mining companies and the Indian government. Another pertinent example is Brazil where new President Jair Bolsonaro was elected on a campaign [pledge to open Indigenous land for commercial development](#) like mining and agribusiness. This has already led to a [series of violent invasions](#) of Indigenous lands by armed bands of land grabbers.

Silencing Dissent in Guatemala

“They say we are terrorists, delinquents, assassins and that we have armed groups here, but really they’re just killing us,” Joel Raymundo, member of the Peaceful Resistance of Ixquis Movement⁴²

Latin America has the highest rate of murders of environmental and land defenders in the world. According to reporting by Global Witness, Guatemala was the world’s deadliest country per capita in 2018 for activists defending land and the environment. At least [sixteen activists](#) were murdered that year.⁴³ The crisis in Guatemala [stretches back decades](#), “When a long-running civil war ended in 1996, new economic integration policies opened the country to a boom in private and foreign investment.”⁴⁴ Violent land grabs and forced evictions disproportionately impacted Indigenous communities. In the decades that followed, industrial projects have been imposed without community consent and despite widespread opposition, including destructive mining and hydroelectric mega-projects on the ancestral land of the Ixquis people.

Resistencia Pacífica de la Microregión de Ixquis, Peaceful Resistance of the Microregion of Ixquis, was formed by Indigenous communities in response to human rights violations in Guatemala committed in the name of economic development. The group is often the target of violent retaliations. Members of the peaceful resistance group have suffered years of harassment and attacks from local police, soldiers, and company security guards. The violence escalated in 2018 when hundreds of armed police attacked community members during a demonstration against the dams, employing tear gas canisters and other projectiles against protestors. In December 2018 brothers Neri and Domingo Esteban Pedro were found dead near the San Andrés hydroelectric project with bullets in their heads. The brothers were both vocal opponents of the hydroelectric project, which is linked to one of Guatemala’s wealthiest and most powerful families and is also generously funded by international development banks.

Across Latin America, killings of environmental defenders often occur after individuals have been framed as criminals or terrorists through the legal system. In Guatemala, land and environmental defenders are targeted by both state and corporate forces with both physical and legal attacks to silence dissent. Meanwhile, despite well-documented accounts of the surge in attacks against environmental defenders, the state has failed to investigate or even acknowledge the problem. On the contrary, the [government is complicit](#) in the violence, publically referring to prominent environmental rights groups as criminal organizations.⁴⁵

Suppressing Dissent in the Land of the Free

In what is currently the United States, violent land dispossession and resource extraction have posed major threats to Indigenous sovereignty and survival. Indigenous territories have been exploited for nuclear weapons testing, to mine uranium, coal, and other metals, as sites for petroleum wells and pipelines, and as grounds to dump military toxic and radioactive waste. In almost all cases, such developments have not directly benefited Indigenous communities, but extracted wealth alongside resources. Indigenous resistance is met with harsh, often militarized, repression.

Recognition of such practices grew in 2016 when months of peaceful protest from Indigenous water protectors and their allies against the construction of the 1,172-mile Dakota Access Pipeline was met with a [heavy militarized police apparatus](#). Law enforcement agents, including local and out-of-state police and sheriff's deputies, Bureau of Indian Affairs police, and National Guard troops, used tear gas, rubber bullets, sound cannons, and water cannons in freezing temperatures against peaceful protestors.

As policing continues to be militarized, state legislatures around the country increasingly criminalize dissent.

Some of this equipment [was likely obtained](#) through a Department of Defense program that gives riot gear, weaponized vehicles, and other military equipment to local police. This is the same system of military transfers, the 1033 program, that [armed police in Ferguson, Missouri](#) with assault rifles and armored vehicles and enabled an aggressive, militarized response to Black Lives Matter protests after the police killing of Black teenager Michael Brown. In addition to the 1033 program, other federal agencies including the Department of Homeland Security transfer surplus equipment and provide grants for equipment purchases to local police departments.

Policing Peaceful Protest in the U.S.

Local police in [at least five states collaborated](#) closely with private security firm TigerSwan, which originated as a U.S. military and State Department contractor, to target Indigenous resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL).⁴⁶ At the behest of its client Energy Transfer Partners, the company building the Dakota Access Pipeline, TigerSwan used military style counterterrorism measures to respond to the Indigenous-led movement against the pipeline. [Internal TigerSwan communications](#) compare anti-pipeline water protectors to “jihadist fighters” and warn, “While we can expect to see the continued spread of the anti-DAPL diaspora... aggressive intelligence preparation of the battlefield and active coordination between intelligence and security elements are now a proven method of defeating pipeline insurgencies.”⁴⁷

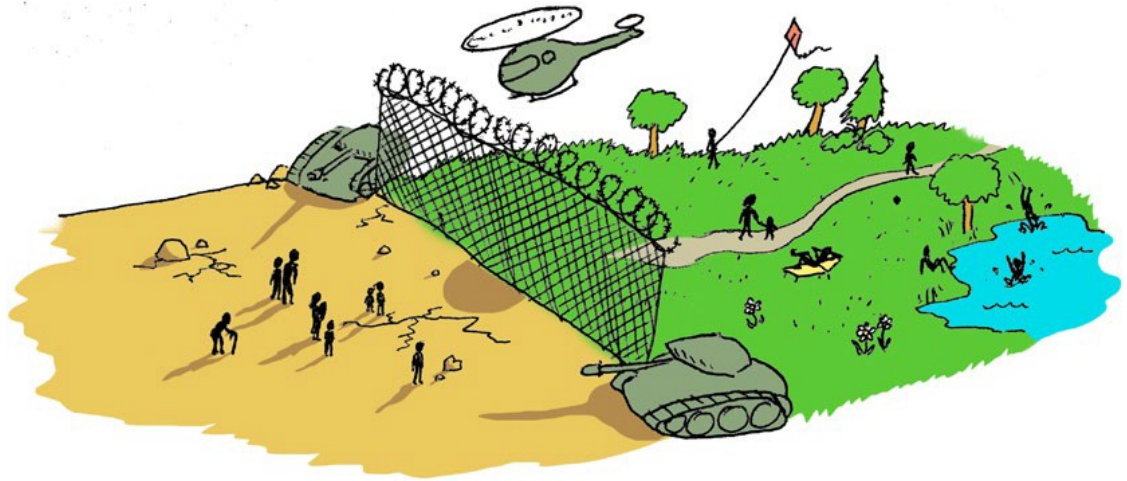
As policing continues to be militarized, state legislatures around the country increasingly criminalize dissent. Since 2016, [over 180 bills](#) have been introduced across the United States to restrict the right to peaceful assembly and suppress protest.⁴⁸ Considering these realities, and the fact that a Fortune 500 oil and gas company coordinated with law enforcement agencies to violently suppress the protest movement of water protectors, we should take seriously the potential for increased militarization in a climate-changed world.

An “Armed Lifeboat” Approach to Climate Security

In their 2014 Climate Change Adaptation Roadmap, [the DoD projected](#) that their “unique capacity to provide logistical, material and security assistance on a massive scale or in a rapid fashion may be called upon with increasing frequency.”⁴⁹ The report builds on previous DoD publications that characterize the effects of climate change as creating “[conditions that can enable terrorist activity and other forms of violence](#)” and outline plans to respond to the “security threats” associated with climate change through war-gaming scenarios.⁵⁰ Journalist Christian Parenti aptly describes such plans as an “[armed lifeboat](#)” approach to climate adaptation. On a violently unequal planet, the lifeboat attempts to keep the global elite afloat while those who are most impacted by climate change—including Black, Brown, Indigenous, and poor communities—are left off the lifeboat. As [Parenti explains](#), this sort of “climate fascism,” is “a politics based on exclusion, segregation, and repression.”⁵¹ Considering the violent tactics of U.S. militarism, it is troubling to imagine a future where the U.S. military is called on to address the destabilizing impacts of climate change. Particularly in the context where a bloated military budget leaves climate change mitigation and adaptation severely underfunded, the realities of a militarized response to climate change are not hard to imagine. A climate-changed world will certainly be less stable, but if we are to seek solutions that minimize harm and prioritize caring for each other then we must see through security frameworks that positions some needs and some lives as more worthy than others.

A climate-changed world will certainly be less stable, but if we are to seek solutions that minimize harm and prioritize caring for each other then we must see through security frameworks that positions some needs and some lives as more worthy than others.

Climate Change, Immigration, and Militarization



“The United States and Australia are likely to build defensive fortresses around their countries because they have the resources and reserves to achieve self-sufficiency,”

2003 Pentagon Commissioned Report

“Just like super-typhoons, rising seas, and heat waves, border build-up and militarization are by-products of climate change,”

Journalist Todd Miller

Climate Change Compounds Instability and Influences Migration

Policymakers have long denied the urgency of the climate crisis, but people around the world are already experiencing its devastating impacts. In coming decades, drought, resource scarcity, extreme weather events, rising sea level, major flooding, and other climate impacts will make corners of the globe increasingly uninhabitable.

These new ecological realities will compound existing conflicts, cause more political instability, and dislocate unprecedented quantities of people. Commonly cited [estimates project](#) that around 200 million people will be displaced by the middle of the century due to climate change.⁵² Other studies suggest [that number may be far higher](#)—possibly reaching as high as one billion people by 2050.⁵³ Regardless of the exact number of people that will be on the move in the coming decades, it is clear that climate change will force people to

migrate at staggering rates. Thus, climate change and border militarization are inextricably linked. As the U.S. continues to ramp up border security and border enforcement expands beyond U.S. boundary lines, so do threats to all people's freedom to move and stay. Especially in light of extreme inequality, border closures, walls, and harsh immigration policies are a violent, militarized response to human need.

Climate change is already impacting flows in migration. Between 2008 and 2015 an average of [21.5 million people were displaced annually](#) from the "impact and threat of climate-related hazards."⁵⁴ [According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre](#), the largest annual increases in displacements are due to weather or climate-related causes.

Between 2008 and 2015 an average of 21.5 million people were displaced annually from the "impact and threat of climate-related hazards."

In fact, a person is more likely to be displaced by environmental forces than war, although as climate-driven conflict intensifies, it will become ever-harder to distinguish between the two.⁵⁵ As the compounding impacts of a warming climate continue to worsen, this trend will magnify.

Despite the growing recognition of the relationship between the global impacts of climate change and migration, contemporary international law is ill equipped to accommodate the huge numbers of climate-migrants. Existing immigration laws are narrow and restrictive and there is currently no legal framework for climate refugees.

"The only real preparations for such a world are grim ones: walls and the surveillance technology that goes with them," [writes journalist Todd Miller](#) whose work documents the relationship between climate change and border militarization. "Most climate-displaced people traveling internationally without authorization will sooner or later run up against those walls and the armed border guards meant to turn them back."⁵⁶

What We Can Learn from the Dust Bowl's "Bum Blockade"

It's worth noting that so far, most climate displacement has occurred within national borders. Since 2008 extreme weather has displaced an average of [21.4 million new people](#) annually within their own countries.⁵⁷ Communities in the U.S. have already experienced the impacts of climate change; take for example people forced to flee their homes in California in the face of annual [fire seasons made-worse](#) by climate change. In the years ahead, some parts of the United States will be more vulnerable to climate change than others. A [study by NASA](#), for example, predicts a devastating drought to hit the Southwest and plains states by the end of the 21st century.⁵⁸

The Dust Bowl of the 1930s is a harrowing historical parallel for how militarization could stifle movement within the United States. Those who fled the drought and dust storms ravaging the Great Plains region during the Dust Bowl-era met armed authorities along the Californian state border. The Los Angeles Police Department [positioned officers along the border](#) with Arizona, creating a "bum blockade" to ward off dust bowl migrants who were predominantly poor and often white. Resembling [immigration enforcement today](#), a border apparatus largely premised on profiling those passing through it was constructed to obstruct people's mobility. Colorado declared martial law along its southern border to "repel" people described as "aliens" and Florida instituted a "poverty quarantine" that sought to keep those with little money out.⁵⁹

The so-called “bum blockades” created in response to Dust Bowl migration demonstrates that borders can be easily constructed tomorrow in places where they are not today, even within national boundaries. This is a powerful reminder that borders are not natural, and they block our collective freedom to move and stay. The reality that people within the United States will have to move from their homes because of climate change should inspire a spirit of solidarity with those facing climate displacement around the world.

It is clear that on a warming planet, cross-border migration will rise. But instead of responding with solidarity or compassion and sharing the resources that could provide safe refuge to those forced to travel across borders, migrants are met with expanded border enforcement. This dynamic is visible along the United States southern border, where migrants and asylum seekers increasingly cite crop failure and food insecurity as a driver of migration. The Central American northern triangle—Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras—has been characterized as “ground zero” for climate change’s impact in the Americas.⁶⁰ Here, a deadly combination of devastating hurricanes and extended drought hits already precarious populations hard. According to the [2018 World Risk Index](#), both El Salvador and Guatemala are among countries most at risk from natural disasters due to frequent exposure and limited response capacity.⁶¹ In a region marked by high levels of violence and extreme inequality, where a third of all employment is linked to agriculture and huge percentages of the population live in conditions of acute poverty, such climate impacts have devastating consequences that can significantly influence the choice to leave. In addition to driving the climate crisis, U.S. interventionism has also [played a defining role](#) in the region’s history of violence and inequality. As is the case in regions around the globe, in Central America a convergence of interlinked conditions motivate migration. In the first eight months of the 2019 fiscal year alone, [an estimated 508,000 people](#) from Central America’s Northern Triangle left home and migrated north.⁶²

Instead of responding with solidarity or compassion and sharing the resources that could provide safe refuge to those forced to travel across borders, migrants are met with expanded border enforcement.

Fortress America: The U.S. Military’s Plans for Climate-Related Migration

The relationship between climate change and migration has been well-documented by the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security, who have long been preparing for global instabilities and associated dislocations of people. A report commissioned by the Pentagon nearly two decades ago, called [An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and Its Implications for United States National Security](#), projects that in a future afflicted with climate cataclysms,

“The United States and Australia are likely to build defensive fortresses around their countries because they have the resources and reserves to achieve self-sufficiency... Borders will be strengthened around the country to hold back unwanted starving immigrants from the Caribbean islands (an especially severe problem), Mexico, and South America.”⁶³

Since this xenophobic report was issued, U.S. border and immigration enforcement has undergone unprecedented military escalations. Transforming the border into an imagined

“Borders will be strengthened around the country to hold back unwanted starving immigrants from the Caribbean islands (an especially severe problem), Mexico, and South America.”

- 2003 Pentagon-commissioned report on climate change

war zone, a bloated border budget funds increasing numbers of armed border patrol agents and surveillance technologies from drones and sensors to facial recognition and human detection technologies. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has [the largest U.S. drone fleet of its kind](#) outside the Department of Defense, including 36-foot-long, nearly 5,000-pound Predator B drones that were built for military use but have been used by CBP since 2006.⁶⁴ These military-grade drones, which run around \$17 million each, cost the federal government \$32,000 every time they’re used to apprehend an individual.⁶⁵

U.S. border militarization was born out of a transfer of surveillance technologies used by the U.S. Military in Vietnam to the U.S.-Mexico border in the 1970s, and were significantly enhanced in the

1980s under the guise of drug-enforcement efforts (the same efforts that increasingly militarized domestic law enforcement and ultimately helped justify mass incarceration). After the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) passed in 1993 there was another surge in border militarization alongside a significant increase in the border security budget. [Technologically advanced equipment](#) from infrared night scopes to thermal-imaging devices and in-ground sensors populated the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.⁶⁶ After 9/11 such practices turbo-charged. In the past two decades, the budget for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which houses Immigration Criminal Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), has [more than doubled](#).⁶⁷ The ballooning budget helps the agencies acquire more military-grade equipment. DHS purchased \$108,464 worth of ammunition [in response to the so-called migrant caravan](#) from Central America in 2018, for example.⁶⁸ It also fuels the deportation machine.

As a result of this expansive immigration enforcement app-

aratus, undocumented communities become the target of the racist and for-profit detention and deportation machine. Thousands of immigrants are unnecessarily locked up every year, tearing families apart and imposing heavy social costs. The cost to taxpayers is also significant; the cost of incarcerating so many people is [estimated to be over \\$1 billion dollars a year](#).⁶⁹ In 2017 there were [more than \\$19,500 Border Patrol agents](#), who have helped facilitate the deportation of more than 5 million people since the DHS was founded in 2003.⁷⁰ In 2017, the [budget for the ICE](#) division known as Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) was \$3.7 billion and the Border Patrol budget was more than \$4.2 billion.



The Militarized Border Extends Far Beyond International Boundaries

The force of the “war on migrants” extends beyond the borderlands, as something akin to a “virtual border” follows immigrants—particularly those who are undocumented—wherever they go. Beyond international boundary lines themselves, CBP operates in a far more expansive zone that stretches 100 miles inland from any land or sea border. Encompassing entire states such as Florida and Maine, and almost all of the country’s most populous metropolitan areas, the [area covers](#) territory where two-thirds of the U.S. population lives, including where many undocumented people live and work.⁷¹ By design, the extended border zone expands the militarization of the border well beyond the actual international boundary line. To that end, the physical barriers along the actual boundary line are [just one layer of immigration enforcement](#), followed by virtual technology walls, roadside checkpoints, and roving patrols far away from the southwest border.⁷²

The [ACLU has characterized](#) the Border Patrol’s policing practices as often amounting to a “de facto policy of ‘stop and frisk’ for border residents.”⁷³ ICE and CBP have a track record

Climate adaptation by “armed lifeboat” is only possible in the context of narrow presumptions that some human lives are more worthy than others.

of systematic violence that terrorizes immigrant communities across the United States. For undocumented communities, the threats of detention and deportation loom heavily as ICE employs increasingly nefarious tactics to surveil immigrant communities. These methods are designed not only to arrest, detain, and deport, but also to create confusion and fear in undocumented communities. Climate adaptation by “[armed lifeboat](#)” is only possible in the context of narrow presumptions that some human lives are more worthy than others. As climate change drives

more state failure in the Global South and more authoritarian state hardening in the Global North, such xenophobic regimes are emboldened.⁷⁴

While efforts to pressure local law enforcement not to cooperate with ICE have been successful in some “sanctuary” areas, in many communities within—and increasingly, beyond—the 100 mile zone, collaboration with police and private contractors exacerbates the criminalization of immigrant communities. One DHS program known as [Operation Stonegarden](#) provides money for local and state police to do border enforcement, which includes [funds for police agencies to buy equipment](#) for border-enforcement purposes.⁷⁵

The United States’ strategy to militarize borders to keep migrants out extends globally. Expensive paramilitary technologies along Mexico’s southern border, from underwater motion sensors to Black Hawk helicopters, are compliments of a military aid package from the United States known as the Merida Initiative. A convergence of the racist so-called “war on drugs” and exclusionary anti-immigrant sentiment, [the Merida Initiative](#) is a bilateral anti-narcotics initiative funded by the U.S. and Mexico. Police training is a key strategy of the

Not only have U.S. homeland security agents trained Mexican immigration authorities, police, and military in border policing, but they are physically working in immigration detention centers along the Mexico-Guatemala border.

Merida Initiative and also a long-standing instrument in the U.S. foreign policy arsenal.⁷⁶ Not only have U.S. homeland security agents trained Mexican immigration authorities, police, and military in border policing, but they are physically working in immigration detention centers along the Mexico-Guatemala border.⁷⁷ While failing to reign in the country's powerful criminal groups, violence in Mexico spiked alongside spending increases for U.S. and Mexico security cooperation. [Five years after the Merida Initiative](#) was signed in 2007, drug-related homicides spiked from around 2,000 annually to more than 12,000.⁷⁸ On the frontlines of both climate and borders, for those in the Global South, expanding borders and the militarized systems that keep them in place reinforce global systems of social and economic exclusion and widens the gulf between the “environmentally secure and the environmentally insecure.”⁷⁹

Solidarity Over Security

Knowing that climate change will force more people to migrate across borders, border militarization and fortification is a gross display of inhumanity. By turning climate change into a security issue, those who have contributed the least to the crisis not only suffer the most from its consequences, but are also targeted with security responses to those very climate impacts.

The United States has emitted more metric tons of greenhouse gas pollution than any other country since the Industrial Revolution—nearly a third of the excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere today. Still today, the [U.S. is among the world's highest](#) per capita carbon emitters.⁸⁰ Having played such an outsized role in causing the crisis, the United States bears a disproportionate share of the responsibility to address it, including a debt to displaced people around the world. Instead of accounting for this reality, the United

Having played such an outsized role in causing the climate crisis, the United States bears a disproportionate share of the responsibility to address it, including a debt to displaced people around the world.

States (alongside other heavy emitters like the European Union) has characterized climate migrants as “security threats” and invested unprecedented amounts in border fortification to keep them out. As climate law professor Michael Gerrard [wrote in a 2015 op-ed](#) on the topic, “Rather than leaving vast numbers of victims of a warmer world stranded, without any place allowing them in, industrialized countries ought to pledge to take on a share of the displaced population equal to how much each nation contributed to emissions of the greenhouse gases that are causing the crisis.”⁸¹

We need to fundamentally change our societies and economies to be more just and caring. We need a massive expansion of funding for victims of U.S. wars and economic and environmental policies that have left tens of millions in need of humanitarian support. We also need to defund hate by doing away with the militarized agencies that terrorize immigrant communities in the United States. In the face of a climate-changed future, we must reverse our decades-long trend in border militarization and all anti-immigrant operations carried out by ICE and CBP and in doing so uphold our collective freedom to move and stay. [Immigrant justice is climate justice](#), and challenging militarism is critical to achieving both.

The Federal Budget and Militarized Spending



“Our spending on war and violence is arresting our ability to provide true security and well-being at home,”

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II and Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis, [Poor People’s Moral Budget](#)

Our Indefensible Budget Priorities

While policymakers in the United States have failed to prioritize the federal policies necessary to stop worsening climate change, they have not found it difficult to secure huge amounts of funding for the military and other “security” needs.

In fact, the United States is the single biggest military spender in the world: U.S. military expenditures are roughly the size of the [next seven](#) largest military budgets combined. According to records kept by the National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies, in any given year, military spending accounts for [over half](#) of the federal government’s annual discretionary budget—the budget that Congress sets each year during its annual appropriations process. In 2020, military spending accounted for 54% of all federal discretionary spending, a total of \$756 billion. By comparison, the federal discretionary budget in 2020 included only \$2.7 billion for energy efficiency and renewable energy. The military budget in 2020 was 272 times larger than the federal budget for energy efficiency and renewable energy.⁸²

As a further statement of national priorities, the U.S. Department of Energy in fact deals more in nuclear weapons—the other great existential threat to humankind, beside climate change—than in energy. The Department of Energy budget for 2020 was \$38 billion, of which \$24 billion, or 62%, was for nuclear weapons.

The military budget in 2020 was 272 times larger than the federal budget for energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Since September 11, 2001 an all-encompassing “war on terror” has ushered in a seemingly limitless military spending spree. According to [Brown University’s Cost of War Project](#),

an estimated \$6.4 trillion has been spent on the U.S. War on Terror since 2001.⁸³ Originally defined as a mission to defend the United States against future terrorist threats from al Qaeda and affiliated organizations, the “global war on terror” has expanded from fighting in Afghanistan to wars and military occupations in more than 80 countries. On top of an expansion of wars abroad, the Department of Homeland Security was created in 2002 in large part to coordinate the “defense of the homeland” against terrorist attacks, ushering in significant increases in militarized domestic spending. Compared to the \$6.4 trillion spent on war in the past two decades, [the cost of shifting the U.S. power grid to 100% renewable energy over the next ten years](#) is an estimated \$4.5 trillion.⁸⁴ Instead of funding endless wars, we could have transformed our fossil-fueled energy system, with money to spare.

The endless wars in Iraq and Afghanistan haven’t made anyone safer. They have [claimed 800,000 human lives](#) and displaced an estimated 21 million more, all while further destabilizing the region.⁸⁵ These violent wars cost \$70 billion per year.

[For every dollar spent](#) on diplomacy and humanitarian aid in 2020, the U.S. spent \$16.65 on the military.⁸⁶ This underfunding of diplomacy has dire implications for the climate crisis, given its nature as a truly global problem: any solution must depend on international cooperation and negotiation - in other words, on a robust diplomatic effort.

The infographic features a green background with a central image of a nuclear explosion on the left and a renewable energy farm (solar panels and wind turbines) on the right. Two yellow callout boxes contain the following text:

- The U.S. has spent \$6.4 trillion on war in the past two decades.**
- The cost of shifting our national power grid to 100% renewable energy over the next decade is estimated at \$4.5 trillion.**

Below the images, a larger yellow callout box states: **Instead of funding endless wars, we could have transformed our fossil-fueled energy system, with money to spare.**

At the bottom, logos for the **NATIONAL PRIORITIES PROJECT** and **Institute for Policy Studies** are shown, along with the text: **Sources: Brown University Cost of War Project, Wood Mackenzie Deep Decarbonization Report**

The U.S. military budget alone encompasses a huge percentage of discretionary spending. When we account for militarized spending across the budget, however, militarization occupies an even greater piece of the pie. On top of the traditional military budget, the [broader militarized budget](#) includes discretionary spending on veterans’ affairs, homeland security, and law enforcement and incarceration. Non-traditional segments of the militarized budget add tens of billions in spending per year. A 2016 calculation of the militarized budget found that it accounted for a whopping 64% of discretionary spending. In the past few decades, militarized spending on incarceration and immigration enforcement—now at \$25.6 billion in 2020—has skyrocketed to more than 11 times what it was in 1976, after adjusting for inflation. Of course, this is also nearly ten times the \$2.7 billion in federal funding for energy efficiency and renewable energy.⁸⁷

Who Profits from the Militarized, Extractive Economy?

As the federal government increases military spending, they also prop up the power and influence of military corporations, which then use their influence to help draft and pass policies from which they further profit.

Nearly half of the military budget [goes to contractors](#) every year.⁸⁸ In 2019, the Department of Defense had obligated \$381 billion in contracts, with a budget of \$688 billion. These contracts are incredibly lucrative, with CEOs of the top five DoD contractors—Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics, Raytheon, and Northrop Grumman—being paid

a combined \$100 million per year.

The [average Pentagon contractor salary](#) is close to \$200,000, compared to an entry level [pay for a soldier](#) which is \$20,172.⁸⁹ While thousands of active-duty service people and their families qualify for food stamps, most of the military budget pads the pockets of major military corporations.

The same goes for border security, where corporations make millions of dollars in profit to monitor, arrest, incarcerate, and deport people. As U.S. budgets for border and immigration control has grown

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massively since the 1980s, so have corporate profits associated with border militarization. Between 2006 and 2018 ICE, CBP, and Coast Guard together issued [more than 344,000 contracts](#) for order and immigration control services worth \$80.5 billion.⁹⁰ The same corporations that reap huge financial rewards from high levels of US military spending also dominate the border security business. Take Lockheed Martin, for example. In 2009 the largest military contractor in the world landed a contract potentially worth more than \$945 million for the maintenance and upkeep of 16 surveillance planes. This single contract was [equal to the entire border and immigration enforcement budgets](#) from 1975 to 1978.⁹¹ Compared to the money paid to corporations, humanitarian groups supporting refugees and migrants along the U.S.-Mexico border receive pennies in federal spending.

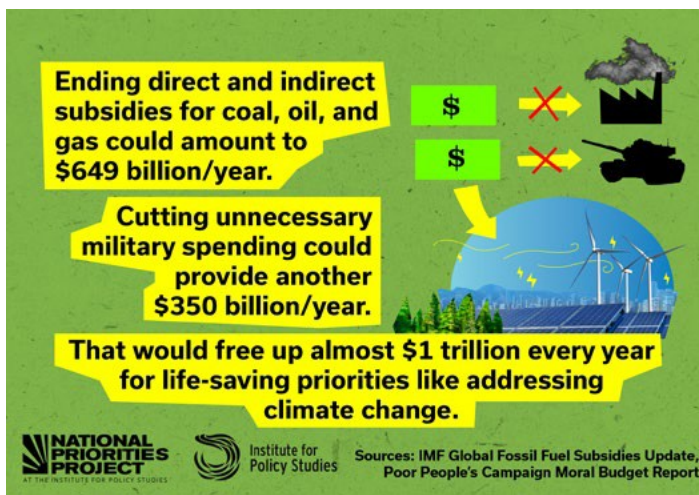
Like the military industrial complex, the fossil-fuel industry thrives on the corporate drive for profits. As their business model brings the world to the brink of climate chaos, [BP, Shell, Chevron, and Exxon](#) have made almost \$2 trillion in profits since 1990.⁹² Mirroring the tactics of the beneficiaries of the military industrial complex, the big four fossil fuel corporations have used their tremendous wealth and power to safeguard policies that would protect their profit-margin even with the knowledge that such policies were driving the climate crisis. Both the fossil fuel industry and military industrial complex--which rely on one another to remain in operation-- follow the paradigms of the [extractive economy](#), premised on the accumulation, concentration, and enclosure of wealth and power.

The same corporations that reap huge financial rewards from high levels of U.S. military spending also dominate the border security business.

Trade-Offs of the Militarized Economy

Proposals to meaningfully address the climate crisis at the rate and scale necessary are often characterized as unrealistic pipe dreams. The same scrutiny is seldom applied to ever-expanding military spending. The reality is that there's no shortage of funds for a Just Transition to a green economy.

Enforcing fair taxes on the wealthy, corporations, and Wall Street could yield [\\$866 billion](#) estimated annual revenue; ending direct and indirect subsidies for coal, oil, and gas could amount to another [\\$649 billion](#); and the U.S. could safely redirect [at least \\$350 billion](#) from the Pentagon's current spending per year and achieve true security by ending wars, reducing our aggressive posture overseas, and reining in military contracts that drain public coffers for private gain - all measures that would actually increase our security.⁹³ Among the most ambitious proposals to address the climate crisis is Senator Bernie Sanders' [Green New Deal proposal](#), which calls for \$16.3 trillion over ten years in public investment.



Regardless of the specific price tag, cutting military spending could fund at least a significant portion of the Green New Deal.

The Pentagon monopolizes the funding we need to meaningfully address the climate crisis. For instance, just 11% of the Pentagon's 2019 budget—about \$80 billion—[could produce enough wind and solar energy](#) to power every one of the almost 128 million households in the United States. As renewable

energy prices continue to fall, the fraction gets smaller.⁹⁴ One percent of 2019's military budget could have funded over 125,000 infrastructure jobs instead. Reallocating funds across the militarized budget broadens the possibilities. Instead of the \$25 billion spent on immigration and border enforcement in 2020, tax dollars could have paid for 337,000 clean energy jobs.

Besides the dire consequences for people and the planet, continuing business as usual will also have significant economic costs. Inaction on climate change [could cost up to 16% of GDP](#) per year--that's equivalent to wiping out \$3.3 trillion from the U.S. economy.⁹⁵ Then there's the lost opportunity cost. By spending money on militarization, we lose the opportunity to invest our federal dollars in other ways that would actually benefit our communities, like education, social work, healthcare, infrastructure and clean energy.

The reality is that there's no shortage of funds for a Just Transition to a green economy.

Paying for war isn't an investment, it's a loss. If we adjust our spending priorities, there's so much to gain. Our government's enormous and unnecessary military expenditures have warped our sense of what's possible, tricking us into believing we can't afford to improve our lives or keep our planet livable. When we take back our resources from elites who profit off violent wars, weapons, and walls we can reinvest trillions of dollars back into our communities and begin to repair the harm inflicted on people and the planet by militarization at home and around the world.

Green Jobs and a Just Transition for Workers and Communities



“The job of the conversion movement, therefore—workers, unions and allies in peace and civil rights and community organizations—is to mount a political struggle that will advance government action on conversion,”

Lance Compa, on the 1980s Military Economic Conversion Movement

The Military is the Only Major Federal Jobs Program in the U.S.

Understanding that climate disruption is an outcome of our broken economic system, climate threats cannot be separated from other forms of insecurity that people experience in their daily lives. Vast economic insecurity and inequality are outcomes of the financially extractive, fossil-fueled economy.

The U.S. military has long capitalized on economic precarity, [recruiting poor people](#) who lack other options and middle-class populations faced with significant debt and instability. As a matter of practicality, the prevalence of militarized jobs in communities remains a key political blockade to reducing military funding. As such, solutions to the climate crisis must also address the absence of an adequate number of well-paying jobs, poverty, inequality, and other prevalent socioeconomic concerns of our time. At the same time, we must convert a major share of U.S. manufacturing and engineering from building weapons of war to building a 100% clean energy economy by 2030.

While official estimates are known to be too low, the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) counted about six million people as unemployed and actively seeking work in 2019—a figure now rendered obsolete by the coronavirus crisis, but indicative of our economy under “good” circumstances.⁹⁶ This figure does not include all working age people who are unemployed and more comprehensive methods of calculating unemployment often double the standard unemployment rate.

Even in the best of times, unemployment rates also vary drastically by geography, race, and age; rural workers, Black workers, Latinx workers, and young people all have higher than average rates of unemployment. In normal times, forty percent of the U.S. workforce is [employed in insecure positions](#), such as temporary, part-time, and “on-call” workers, contractors, and the self-employed.⁹⁷ While employment statistics can help illustrate the economic crisis, they can also minimize the lived-realities for the tens of millions of people living in poverty in the United States. In the richest country in the world, even prior to the coronavirus pandemic and its associated economic implosion, there were 140 million poor and low-wealth people. That’s over 43% of the population of the United States. Low pay, job scarcity or inaccessibility, and attacks on unionization work together to keep people in poverty.

Do We Have a Poverty Draft in the United States?

Mandatory military service ended in 1973, and by the 1980s the term “poverty draft” gained prominence as [a term used to describe](#) “the belief that the enlisted ranks of the military were made up of young people with limited economic opportunities.”⁹⁸ In the context of vast economic precarity in the United States, military service often functions as a “draft-like system” that attracts low-income and other marginalized groups into enlisting because of a lack of other job, income, and educational opportunities available in their communities. [Half of all young people who join the military](#) do so as a means to pay for future education.⁹⁹ Military recruiters have historically recruited among middle and lower classes. [Reporting by the Seattle Times](#) in 2005 found, for example, that nearly half of new recruits came “from lower-middle-class to poor households.”¹⁰⁰ Native Americans, who have the [highest poverty rate](#) of any racial or ethnic group in the United States, also serve in the country’s armed forces at the highest rate of any ethnic group in the country.¹⁰¹

Despite such vast economic insecurity, the military is the only major federal jobs program in the United States. [Over 1,300,000 Americans](#) are on active military duty and over 800,000 more are in the military reserves. Another 1,600,000 Americans work for companies contracted by the U.S. military not only to supply weapons of war, but also the goods and services that support military operations.¹⁰² The Department of Defense [calls itself](#) America’s largest employer - larger than Walmart, even.¹⁰³ Since the military industrial complex is spread across the United States, some members of congress justify military spending by the jobs it provides their states or districts. War spending is often perceived as an effective way to increase employment, but there are far better ways besides a massive military jobs program to employ Americans.

Funding Green Jobs and the Care Economy Yields Net Benefits

In fact, compared to alternative uses for those funds, military spending is one of the least effective sources of job creation. According to [Brown University’s Cost of War Project](#), a total of 6.9 jobs are created per \$1 million of federal military spending. By comparison,

spending the same amount in wind creates 8.4 good-paying jobs and in solar 9.5. For the same level of spending, clean energy and infrastructure create over 40% more jobs. Investing the same amount in energy efficiency retrofits creates nearly twice the level of job

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For the same level of spending, clean energy and infrastructure create over 40% more jobs.

creation by military spending.¹⁰⁴ Across the board, funding the green economy instead of a bloated military budget would be a net job creator.

Shifting excess military spending to green manufacturing in particular creates opportunities for targeted job creation in regions of the United States that have been hardest hit by declines in manufacturing over the last two decades. [If we shift \\$125 billion](#) from military spending to green manufacturing, an additional 250,000 jobs would be created.¹⁰⁵ In

order to rapidly transition to a green economy, we must fund millions of jobs to dramatically scale-up clean energy production and transition to one hundred percent renewable energy, overhaul the U.S. transportation systems to build and run mass public transportation, and prepare communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis to adapt to the realities of a warming planet.

Then there's the care economy. The lowest carbon jobs are those that don't extract anything from the land or create waste and have a limited environmental impact. Jobs that include teaching, nurturing, and caring, often referred to as care work, are invaluable to our society and to the economy at large. The [National Domestic Workers Alliance](#) describes care work as, "the work that makes all other work possible." Direct public investment in these jobs also has a greater impact on the economy than military spending. Compared to the 6.9 jobs created in the military, \$1 million dollars in education produces an average of 15.2 good-paying jobs.¹⁰⁶ A dramatic expansion of these jobs, and ensuring that the standards and conditions of this work are raised, is a critical component of the transition away from extractive, destructive, and often violent work and towards an economy of care.

Endeavoring to address the climate crisis and economic inequality simultaneously, a federal jobs guarantee is a key component of the Green New Deal. A federal jobs guarantee promises a job—at a living wage and with full benefits—to anyone who wants one. A public job guarantee isn't a new concept, in fact it was a key demand of the Civil Rights Movement. In the Forward to the 1966 publication A "[Freedom Budget](#)" for All Americans, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. states, "We shall eliminate unemployment for Negroes when we demand full and fair employment for all." The first of the seven demands outlined in the Freedom Budget was "To provide full employment for all who are willing and able to work, including those who need education or training to make them willing and able."¹⁰⁷ Direct public investment in a program that competes for labor with competitive wages and good benefits isn't unheard of in the United States. A jobs guarantee could look a lot like the military does currently, an expense we deem necessary that serves

A jobs guarantee could look a lot like the military does currently, an expense we deem necessary that serves the public good.

the public good. While providing alternatives to low-paid work in carbon-intensive supply chains, a federal jobs guarantee could offer better-paying jobs that improve communities while supporting a Just Transition to a green economy.

We Need a Just Transition for Workers and Communities

The fossil fuel and military sectors mirror each other in the way that workers frequently end up funneled into lethal work due to limited options.

Communities across the United States depend on employment in the military and various sectors of the military industrial complex. Like the workers who extract, process, transport and use fossil fuels will need to transition into new jobs, there must be alternative pathways to good employment for individuals and communities whose livelihoods are tied to the military. The leadership of labor unions, which have long organized to advance the interests of low-income workers, is critical to [advancing a worker-led](#) Just Transition movement. When the peace and climate justice movements stand in solidarity with organized labor, the possibility of a powerful, coordinated, and truly transformative movement emerges.

The fossil fuel and military sectors mirror each other in the way that workers frequently end up funneled into lethal work due to limited options.

The Green New Deal has been described as an “all hands on deck” kind of policy. If we do it right, the Green New Deal will be a mass mobilization that would radically restructure the fossil-fueled economy as we know it. This kind of comprehensive program will require a wide range of jobs not only in manufacturing and the energy sector, but across the economy. For those who will lose work in the fossil fuel industry or military industrial complex, a job guarantee provides an employment safety net during economic transition.

A job guarantee is one measure among many that can be taken to phase out extractive industries with care and prevent adverse and unjust outcomes for workers and communities relying on those industry jobs. Such outcomes can be prevented if we plan and invest federal resources accordingly. [As articulated](#) by the climate justice movement, “Just Transition to

When the peace and climate justice movements stand in solidarity with organized labor, the possibility of a powerful, coordinated, and truly transformative movement emerges.

us represents a set of aligned strategies to transition whole communities toward thriving economies that provide dignified, productive and ecologically sustainable livelihoods that are governed directly by workers and communities.”¹⁰⁸

Resembling the calls for a Just Transition from the climate justice movement in the last decade, the economic conversion movement led by anti-war activists in the 1980s sought to plan and implement a

transformation from a war economy to a peace economy. Recognizing that every recession during the Cold War was met with an increase in military spending, [many in the peace movement concluded](#) that in order to end the arms race, it must be separated from jobs and economic prosperity.¹⁰⁹ As labor law professor [Lance Compra articulated](#) in a paper on the topic in 1985, “Conversion planning to move from military to non-military production can tear down the barrier--fear of job loss--that blocks broad rank-and-file support for disarmament initiatives and a non-interventionist policy.”¹¹⁰

Much like contemporary conversations around economic transition, the 1980s economic conversion movement called for national policy dedicated to retraining and re-employing affected workers. Calling for significant military spending cuts, the movement sought to redirect tax revenues away from the military in order to spend the money on social programs, education, public transportation, health care, housing, and other socially beneficial industries. The effort linked Peace movement activists with labor unions, launching a Jobs with Peace Campaign with referendums in 85 cities around the United States. This cross-movement collaboration for planned-economic-conversation helped lay the groundwork for the contemporary conceptions of a Just Transition. It's past time we realize the vision put forth by movements for decades to redefine industries and transition whole communities and whole economies.

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Conclusion



Principles for Collective Action

To achieve climate justice, we must transform the extractive economy we have now that is harming people and ecosystems. Resisting militarization is core to building an economy that works for people and the planet. As such, we must pursue solutions to the climate crisis that challenge the violent and oppressive systems that have fueled war and warming for generations. In solidarity with the movements on the frontlines of U.S. militarism and the climate injustice, we offer the following principles for collective action:

1. All human life has equal value.

- a. Old structures that have devalued human life based on race, ethnicity, assigned gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, place of origin, wealth, different abilities, and other factors, have been upheld and promulgated by both militarism and the extractive economy. These structures cannot be dismantled unless both militarism and the extractive economy are dismantled.
- b. Enforcement of restrictive immigration policies devalues specific human lives by condemning people to suffering and death. When all lives have equal value, all people can freely move around the globe, and no one is shut off from safety and abundance.
- c. The inequitable effects of climate change and militarism are overwhelmingly borne by those whose lives have been chronically undervalued, including but not limited to Black and Brown people, poor people, the Global South, and others. In a just world, no one bears an unequal burden for environmentally destructive or militaristic practices, and no one benefits from these practices at the expense of others.

2. Economies are only as healthy as people and the planet.

- a. Protecting extractive industries, militaristic industries, and those who profit from them places values like wealth and collective productivity above the value of human life.
- b. Work is a fulfilling part of life that can grant a sense of meaning as well as a means of material support, but no one's work should deprive another person of their life or well-being. Both the global and U.S. economies are overly dependent on extractive industries and militarism, demeaning the lives of those most directly harmed but also the lives of those who work within those industries. Every person should have the opportunity to work in a life-affirming capacity.

3. All people have a right to self-determination.

- a. Extractive industries, war, and militarism are joined by their collective denial of self-determination to both communities that suffer their effects, and communities whose economies are captive to these industries. Deep democracy that puts people in control of the decisions that affect their daily lives must replace militarism as the means through which we govern the economy.
- b. Too often, one nation's resources are the source of another nation's riches. Oil and fossil fuels are the prime example of this extractive economy, and militarism is the mechanism by which one country exploits another country's land, resources, and labor. Nations must not use force to dominate or exploit natural resources.
- c. The United States is unique among nations and has been at the forefront of both fossil fuel consumption and emissions, and military adventurism and force. Both roles diminish self-determination for peoples around the world, as they are forced to struggle against the consequences of U.S. emissions and U.S. militarism.

4. There is enough for everybody.

- a. We have enough to live well, without living better at the expense of others.
- b. There is enough to support everyone in the world, no one needs to be left behind. Nations and groups that have benefited disproportionately from the extractive economy must make reparations to nations and peoples that have historically been harmed.

5. We are all interconnected and so are our movements.

- a. No country or people can stop climate change alone. Any solution must be built on negotiation, cooperation and diplomacy – the antithesis of military antagonism and war. Full collaboration between nations and peoples will not be possible under conditions of perpetual military conflict.
- b. Interdependence is the defining feature of all living systems. We are interconnected to each other and the world. No economy stands in isolation. The global economy must make room for all people, be built on mutually beneficial relationships, and the distribution of resources must reflect the need for healthy, regenerative economies in all nations.

Next Steps

True climate justice must have antimilitarism at the core. We hope that this resource will contribute to existing conversations about climate change and militarism by highlighting the ways that the two fuel each other. We also hope that this resource will spark new questions and help facilitate dialogue—and coordination—across movements. When we come together we can build the just future we deserve:

- Use our discussion guide to host a virtual discussion on climate change and militarism.
- Use our op-ed template and [online trade-offs calculator](#) to write to your local newspapers about how cutting military spending could make us safer and fund a transition to a clean energy economy.
- Contact us at info@nationalpriorities.org to sign-up to attend one of our webinars or to schedule a webinar or training specifically for your group or organization.
- Add anti-militarism to your climate justice platform. Need help? [Contact us](#).
- Center impacted people—are you a member of a community disproportionately impacted by militarism and climate change? [Contact us](#) and we'll work to help amplify your voice.
- Support organizations that fight both climate change and militarism, including:

[Climate Justice Alliance](#)

[Global Grassroots Justice Alliance](#)

[The Leap](#)

[The Red Nation](#)

[Dissenters](#)

[Peace Action](#)

[United We Dream](#)

[Code Pink](#)

[Friends Committee on National Legislation](#)

[Poor People's Campaign](#)

[Justice is Global](#)

[Movement for Black Lives](#)

Additional Resources

[Just Transition: A Framework for Change](#) by Climate Justice Alliance
[From Banks and Tanks to Cooperation and Caring: A Strategic Framework for a Just Transition](#) by Movement Generation for Change
[The Red Deal Part One](#) and [Part Two](#), The Red Nation
[Indigenous Principles of a Just Transition](#), Indigenous Environmental Network
[Climate Change, Capitalism and the Military](#) by Nick Buxton of Transnational Institute
[10 Ways That the Climate Crisis and Militarism are Intertwined](#) by Medea Benjamin of Code Pink
[War is Not Green Campaign](#), Code Pink
[Pentagon Fuel Use, Climate Change, and the Costs of War](#), Cost of War Project
[Cut Military Spending, Fund Green Manufacturing](#), Cost of War Project
[Costs of War, War Spending and Lost Opportunities](#), Cost of War Project
[Armed Lifeboat: Government's Response to Natural Disaster](#), by Sam Ross-Brown and Utne Reader on UTNE
[Climate Change and Migration](#) by The Leap
[More Than a Wall: Corporate Profiteering and the Militarization of the US-Mexico Border](#) by Todd Miller for the Transnational Institute
[Storming the Wall: Climate Change, Migration, and Homeland Security](#) by Todd Miller
[Sunrise Movement Green New Deal](#)
[A Green New Deal Needs to Fight US Militarism](#) by Phyllis Bennis in Jacobin

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