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SHUT IT DOWN: How the U.S. war machine poisons the world

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People's Mobilization to Stop the U.S. War Machine and Save the Planet in New York, Sept. 22. SLL photo: Greg Butterfield

For years, Pentagon officials have been discussing, assessing and reporting on climate change.

They consider its implications for imperialist military tactics and strategy. They cite the possibilities of mass migration due to water and food shortages. They stress the need to prepare to deal with possible mass uprisings. They've written reports that assess the vulnerability of their military installations to extreme weather events – drought, flooding, wildfires, etc.

But like the proverbial elephant in the room that everyone pretends not to notice, one pertinent fact gets omitted from every discussion, report or study by the top military brass: that the U.S. military itself is by far the single worst polluter in the world.

Many studies over the last decade rate countries based on how much their economy contributes to the rising amount of carbon dioxide (CO2) in the atmosphere. In 2016, the U.S. was the third largest polluter behind Saudi Arabia and Australia, emitting 15 metric tons per capita.

But greenhouse gases take decades or even centuries to dissipate. [Historical records kept by the World Resources Institute](#) show that since 1850, the U.S. and Europe are responsible for nearly two-thirds of the heat-trapping contaminants currently in our atmosphere.

But many contemporary studies exclude some or all of the emissions caused by armed forces.

How bad is the pollution from the U.S. military? The information is not easy to get. The authors of a study called "[U.S. Military Pollution](#)", published on TheEcologist.org, point to the efforts of the U.S. Department of Defense to conceal information and resist any restrictions:

"It's no coincidence that U.S. military emissions tend to be overlooked in climate change studies. It's very difficult to get consistent data from the Pentagon and across U.S. government departments.

"In fact, the United States insisted on an exemption for reporting [military emissions in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol](#). This loophole was [closed by the Paris Accord](#), but with the Trump administration [due to withdraw from the accord in 2020](#), this gap will return.

“Our study is based on data retrieved from multiple Freedom of Information Act requests.”

It isn't only CO2 emissions. [Mint Press News reported](#) that the Defense Department is responsible for more toxic waste than the five largest U.S.-based chemical companies combined.

Pentagon's environmental racism

The military is guilty of leaving toxic waste behind in various forms: contaminating drinking water with perchlorates and other components of jet fuel; the horrors of depleted uranium, used in Iraq and other countries attacked by the imperialist military, that has radiated the ground and air, causing cancer rates to spike; nuclear tests that displaced entire populations and destroyed islands in the Bikini Atoll and destroyed First Nations lands in Nevada; mining for uranium that poisoned Navajo lands in the Black Hills; the mass destruction of the island of Vieques in Puerto Rico – the list goes on and on.

Of the 1,300 Superfund sites-areas so contaminated that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) lists their cleanup as urgent and directs funds toward their cleanup-more than 900 are the consequence of U.S. military activity. Many are abandoned military bases.

Since its initiation in the 1980s, the Superfund program has only claimed success in cleaning up about 15 to 20 percent of contaminated sites.

But the Pentagon is also the single largest consumer of oil. If it were compared to countries showing the volume of CO2 they send into the atmosphere, it would be listed somewhere around the 50th worst — more than 140 countries.

A June 2019 [Brown University study](#) calculates that between 2001 and 2017, all branches of the U.S. military emitted 1.2 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases.

That amount included 400 million metric tons from the U.S. wars against Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, as well as attacks in Pakistan.

In an article on Pentagon pollution posted on [ClimateAndCapitalism.com](https://climateandcapitalism.com), H. Patricia Hynes describes consumption of fuel by the airforce alone: “The U.S. Air Force (USAF) is the single largest consumer of jet fuel in the world.

“Fathom, if you can, the astronomical fuel usage of USAF fighter planes: the F-4 Phantom Fighter burns more than 1,600 gallons of jet fuel per hour and peaks at 14,400 gallons per hour at supersonic speeds. The B-52 Stratocruiser, with eight jet engines, guzzles 500 gallons per minute; ten minutes of flight uses as much fuel as the average driver does in one year of driving!

“A quarter of the world’s jet fuel feeds the USAF fleet of flying killing machines; in 2006, they consumed as much fuel as U.S. planes did during the Second World War (1941-1945) — an astounding 2.6 billion gallons,” Hynes reported.

Since the first U.S. attack on Iraq in 1990, the majority of U.S. military activity has remained in the Arab world to maintain control over oil markets. [According to PressTV](https://www.presstv.com), U.S. troops are stationed in 14 countries in the Middle East and North Africa, there is a huge U.S. base in Qatar, the Fifth Fleet is stationed in Bahrain, and there is a U.S. military airport in Oman. We can now add Al-Tanf in Syria, illegally occupied by the U.S. There may also be illegal bases in occupied Palestine.

It may seem ironic that the oil-guzzling U.S. military has killed, by some estimates, over 500,000 people since the first Gulf War, and destroyed the infrastructure and poisoned the land in several countries in order to maintain control of oil markets. In this era of capitalism in the stage of imperialism, the drive for profit isn’t guided by logic and knows no bounds.

The horror wrought by U.S. imperialism and its military domination will only end

with the abolition of both.

