

War Threatens Our Environment

A major motivation behind some wars is the desire to control resources that poison the earth, especially oil and gas.

Oil can be leaked or burned off, as in the Gulf War, but primarily it is put to use in all kinds of machines polluting the earth's atmosphere, placing us all at risk. Some associate the consumption of oil with the supposed glory and heroism of war, so that renewable energies that do not risk global catastrophe are viewed as cowardly and unpatriotic ways to fuel our machines.

The interplay of war with oil goes beyond that, however. The wars themselves, whether or not fought for oil, consume huge quantities of it. One of the world's top consumer of oil, in fact, is the U.S. military.

The U.S. military burns through about 340,000 barrels of oil each day. If the Pentagon were a country, it would rank 38th out of 196 in oil consumption.



The environment as we know it will not survive nuclear war. It also may not survive “conventional” war, understood to mean the sorts of wars now waged. Intense damage has already been done by wars and by the research, testing, and production done in preparation for wars.

Wars in recent years have rendered large areas uninhabitable and generated tens of millions of refugees. War “rivals infectious disease as a global cause of morbidity and mortality,” according to Jennifer Leaning of Harvard Medical School.

Perhaps the most deadly weapons left behind by wars are land mines and cluster bombs. Tens of millions of them are estimated to be lying around on the earth, oblivious to any announcements that peace has been declared. Most of their victims are civilians, a large percentage of them children.

The Soviet and U.S. occupations of Afghanistan have destroyed or damaged thousands of villages and sources of water. The Taliban has illegally traded timber to Pakistan, resulting in significant deforestation. U.S. bombs and refugees in need of firewood have added to the damage. Afghanistan's forests are almost gone. Most of the migratory birds that used to pass through Afghanistan no longer do so. Its air and water have been poisoned with explosives and rocket propellants.



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