

THE ECOLOGICAL COSTS OF MILITARIZATION

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Militarization is the single most ecologically destructive human endeavor. Funding the military-industrial complex requires enormous levels of surplus economic production for diversion to destructive ends. Roughly 50¢ on every tax dollar since the 1940s has been dedicated to military expenditures, effectively halving funding for education, health care, poverty alleviation and environmental. To fund militarization, the labor product of workers is expropriated for negative redistribution to transnational corporations (TNCs), lining the pockets of defense contractors.

Defense corporations influence elected officials through campaign donations, who in turn take money from taxpayers and give it to those corporations who can then fund additional elected official influence. After leaving office, the elected officials take lobbying positions for those corporations in support of further military expenditures. This is what President Eisenhower called the “military-industrial complex” in his prescient farewell warning to the American people. The military redistribution of wealth from workers to elites requires increased levels of worker production to sustain families, artificially increasing levels of ecological withdrawals and additions per capita. Wages stagnate so that the only hope for larger net incomes is tax relief. Tax relief (rarely aimed at working people) leads to reduction of public services, but not reductions in military spending. As a result, militarization becomes a larger share of the total that government does.

Military production is largely exempt from environmental protection legislation in the name of national security. That exemption has made military production facilities the

most ecologically devastated locations on Earth. Military production also requires extraction and production of the most hazardous materials, generating the most pernicious threats to human health and the environment. The “marquis” weapons systems are of course weapons of mass destruction. The U.S. has been the world’s leading producer of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, the same weapons we are told present the greatest threat to humanity and global security. These weapons represent a primary thrust of the U.S. technological trajectory. While they are marketed to civilian populations as environmental, medical and economic benefits in the form of civilian nuclear power, gene therapy, and food production enhancing pesticides, their origins in military research and application are telling. From an ecological and human health standpoint, these are the highest risk technologies currently in widespread application. Covering the Earth in chemical biocides, genetically modified organisms, and strontium 90 are the combined results of the military and corporate application of these high-risk technologies, and it is a mistake to view the corporate and military applications as separable. The contaminants resulting from the production of weapons of mass destruction are some of the most persistent pollutants. The areas surrounding weapons factories including Hanford, WA, Savannah River, GA, Oak Ridge, TN, and Rocky Flats, CO are technically uninhabitable despite the continuing human presence in these ecological sacrifice zones.

One reason why military production and deployment zones have been allowed to become enormous environmental and public health disasters is the secrecy with which such operations are conducted. Again in the name of national security, civilian workers and their families have been systematically denied access to information that would

permit them to make informed decisions as to what level of health risk they are willing to accept. Community Right to Know laws have been non-existent, weakly enforced or simply denied to protect military secrets. The results have been a series of nightmares where communities discover that they have been systematically exposed to the most pernicious carcinogens and mutagens across generations. From Fernald, OH to Oak Ridge, TN, the military has knowingly devastated the health of civilians while giving repeated assurances that no significant health risks exist. The post-9/11 state decision to further reduce civilian access to information about military technology and public health risks has made it far less possible for people to act to protect their families, thus decreasing their security.

Storage and deployment of military products disperses these threats throughout the U.S. and the world. The transportation of weapons, and weapons of mass destruction in particular, present even more dispersed dangers to civilian populations and local ecosystems, as places with no military production, testing or deployment facilities are put at risk with even less civilian awareness. That lack of awareness of transportation risks is made even more problematic by the post-9/11 decisions to reduce civilian access to information.

Weapons get field tested from Vieques, PR to Fort Drum, NY, producing water contamination, land contamination and resultant health problems. Leaking weapons of mass destruction, like nerve gas shells stored in populated areas such as Berea, KY threaten to annihilate communities at a moment's notice. Unexploded nerve gas shells litter the islands of Panama, currently under development for ecotourism. And the testing of weapons systems is not limited to designated bombing ranges and military bases.

Unknowing domestic and foreign civilian populations have historically been used by the military to test the health effects and dispersment patterns of weapons of mass destruction, with devastating long-term health consequences.

In a best-case scenario, all of this ecological destruction is for naught. The weapons produced go unused presenting enormous, and thus far insolvable, long-term disposal problems, and all of that labor productivity and capital is simply discarded. Efforts to safely store or dispose of weapons of mass destruction from nuclear warhead cores to nerve gas shells have universally failed. In-situ vitrification in Oak Ridge, nerve gas incineration on Johnson atoll, and other such disposal schemes have generated new ecological risks.

In a worst case scenario, military production is actually utilized to destroy other environments, labor and capital, resulting in the worst forms of ecological and social disorganization. A combination of agent-orange defoliant and napalm incendiary was used to eliminate much of the rainforest of Vietnam, after initial use in Guatemala. The remaining ecosystems of most of Europe were finally lost to WW1 and WW2. The endangered snow leopard was indigenous to the mountains and caves of Afghanistan. It is worth noting that two of the leading causes of refugee status, now at epidemic proportions globally, are war and environmental degradation. The mass movement of refugees generates tensions that can lead to even more violent conflict.

The battlefield environment also becomes an ecological hot zone for G.I.s and those who may re-inhabit the. Agent Orange produced devastating multigenerational health problems for U.S. troops and their families, not to mention the Vietnamese peasantry that has been farming in contaminated soils for 40 years. The Gulf War

produced Gulf War Syndrome, likely the result of exposure to some combination of U.S. and Iraqi weapons of mass destruction or efforts to defend against them. And the military enthusiasm for covering the Earth in depleted uranium shells has unknown long-term implication for human health and the environment. Later post-war efforts to remediate the environment, both natural and built, require further ecological withdrawals and additions.

Thus militarization destroys ecosystems numerous times and at numerous levels including extraction, production, distribution, testing, transportation, disposal, implementation, and reconstruction. Militarization remains the only form of human production the aim of which is to destroy environments and more socially and ecologically benign forms of production. It is therefore the most socially and ecologically regressive human enterprise, and one to which the U.S. State has been deeply committed for more than half a century.

Militarization is necessary to protect Americans' ecologically destructive way of life and the economic interests of TNCs. The primary use of U.S. military production has been to secure access to natural resources and markets for U.S. based TNCs. That is, military production is essential to keep unsustainable levels of domestic production and consumption going, and to maintain outlets for unsustainable surplus production. The U.S. economy is completely dependent on ecological imperialism for its survival. Oil is only the highest profile example of America's dependence on expropriating the natural resources of other nations. Occasionally, other nations seek to use their natural resources to support their own populations, demand a higher price for external access to their resources, or simply refuse to make their resources available to support U.S.-based

transnational corporations. The threat of America's military limits the occurrence of such instances. In cases where the threat is insufficient, military force is needed to overthrow uncooperative governments and replace them with those that will prioritize America's needs over those of their domestic populations. Similarly, where other nations seek to reduce access to domestic markets for American goods, coercive force may be necessary.

Perhaps the only social and ecological benefit of the transition from colonialism to corporate dominated globalization is that economic coercion has largely replaced military coercion in the process of expropriating resources and securing markets. Nevertheless, the threat of military action if economic coercion fails remains quite tangible and quite necessary.

As resource scarcity increases globally, incidents of violent conflict over vital and strategic resources are likely to increase. Oil wars are already quite common. Water wars are certainly in our near future. As economic growth continues, resource-scarcity related violence will generate increased state and corporate demand for further militarization to take or defend resource access. Increased militarization will deepen scarcity, resulting in a cycle of escalating violence and ecological decay.