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A Green New Deal Needs to Fight US Militarism

BY

[PHYLLIS BENNIS](#)

We can't heal the climate if the US war machine keeps raining destruction, absorbing resources, and gobbling up fossil fuels all around the world. Here's how to stop it.

The US warship USS Harry S. Truman is pictured anchored in The Solent on October 8, 2018 near Portsmouth, England. Matt Cardy / Getty Images.

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This article is part of *Jacobin's* Green New Deal series. The rest of the pieces in the series can be read [here](#).

The war on terror unleashed in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attack has led to almost two decades of unchecked militarism. We are spending more money on our military than at any time in history. Endless wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Syria and elsewhere are still raging, more wars are threatened against Iran and beyond, costing the US trillions of dollars and creating humanitarian disasters. Treaties to control nuclear arms are unraveling at the same time that conflicts with the major powers of Russia and China are heating up.

[The Green New Deal must have anti-militarism at its core](#). Wars and the military render impossible the aspirations contained in the Green New Deal. And slashing the out-of-control military budget is crucial to provide the billions of dollars we need to create a sustainable and egalitarian economy.

To fund the Green New Deal, with all of its component parts, we must transition away from the current war economy that pollutes the planet, distorts our society, enriches only the war profiteers. An end to US wars across the globe and massive cuts to the military budget will provide funds for green jobs, public education, health care for all, green infrastructure development. And we will transition our nation's security away from failed and failing wars into a new foreign policy based on peace and diplomacy, not war.

The Military and the Environment

The United States' militarized war economy plays a major role in the destruction of our planet's vital life support systems. The military uses enormous amounts of fossil fuels and other chemicals that poison the air, water, and land human beings depend, both within US borders and across the globe where US forces, planes, drones and other war machines go to war. Where the US military establishes bases abroad, the local environment always suffers. As David Vine noted in his seminal book *Base Nation*, the carbon footprint of military bases is enormous. They house carbon-spewing tanks and aircrafts, and use tremendous energy for climate control and electricity. "The military's thirst for petroleum," Vine writes, "is so great that on a worldwide basis, the US armed services consume more oil every day than the entire country of Sweden." To make matters worse, in many countries, Status of Forces Agreements (SOFAs) with the host government prohibit local authorities from investigating environmental destruction caused by US military bases.

As documented by the [Institute for Policy Studies and the Poor People's Campaign](#), US wars have left a toxic legacy in their global wake, poisoning soil and water and polluting air for decades after the formal end to hostilities. And the military sows environmental destruction within the US, as well. The IPS/PPC report notes that "the Pentagon is directly responsible for 141 Superfund sites" — *ten percent of all such sites, far exceeding any other polluter* — while "760 or so additional Superfund sites are abandoned military facilities or sites that otherwise support military needs." The carbon footprint of the military industrial complex is also staggering: In 2016, the Department of Defense (DoD) emitted 66.4 million metric tons of carbon dioxide, representing over two-thirds of the entire emissions of the US government. Tellingly, however, the military's *overseas* emissions are exempted from the U.S. government's carbon accounting — despite representing a majority of the DoD's emissions.

Slash the Military Budget, Fund Green Jobs

The US military is clearly an obstacle to a safe climate — so any comprehensive climate justice policy must confront US militarism head on. What would the Green New Deal’s peaceful foreign policy look like?

Since fifty-four cents of every discretionary federal dollar goes to the military, we must massively cut the military budget, starting with at least a 50 percent cut. We should close most of the 800-plus US military bases around the world, which are destructive to people’s rights, land, water, and international law. We should bring home most of the hundreds of thousands of troops deployed overseas, including the thousands of Special Forces operating in 149 countries. We should end the air and drone wars that are responsible for so much death and destruction, and move towards abolition of nuclear weapons. And the money saved from the demilitarization of our foreign policy should be immediately redirected to fund green jobs and infrastructure programs, health care and education for all, new diplomatic initiatives, and significant support for reparations, reconstruction and rebuilding in the countries our wars and economic and environmental policies have so profoundly damaged.

Since most US troops do not stay in the military for their whole career, most troop cuts could come through attrition rather than lay-offs. And the majority of the US military budget does not go to pay for troops (it is weapons systems and maintenance of bases and beyond that take up the bulk of the funds). Undoubtedly there would be some jobs lost among both active-duty troops and in communities surrounding military bases scheduled for closure, as well as those dependent on large military manufacturing plants. There will clearly be a need for transitional assistance in those situations, similar to the kind of “just transition” being anticipated for workers in environmentally-destructive industries, who will need to be provided with re-training and access to new jobs. Funding and staffing of the Pentagon’s Office of Economic Assistance should be dramatically increased for this purpose. Writing in 2018, military budget analyst [Miriam Pemberton described the OEA’s work](#). “Though most communities treat the prospect of losing their base like the coming of a plague, there are plenty of good outcomes to report. When the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard closed in 1995, 10,000 jobs were wiped out. Today, with the OEA’s help, it has more than replaced those jobs with a thriving mix of housing, retail, and light manufacturing, with a special focus on green businesses.”

Just *one percent* of this year's \$716 billion military budget is enough to fund 128,879 green infrastructure jobs instead. \$1 billion in military spending creates approximately 11,200 jobs — but the same amount of money would create 26,700 jobs if invested in education, about two-and-a-half times as many. Or 16,800 jobs in clean energy, or 17,200 in health care. Most of the military budget doesn't go to “support the troops.” Thousands of active-duty service people and their families qualify for food stamps because military pay is so low; forty-five percent of children in Department of Defense schools qualify for free or reduced cost lunch. Most of the military budget goes instead to the major military contractors, whose CEOs' salaries average almost \$20 million. And those hundreds of billions of dollars going to weapons manufacturers kill thousands of civilians abroad, and do not keep us safe.

Dismantle the Global War on Terror

What George W. Bush first called “the global war on terror” is still raging almost eighteen years later, in different countries using different forms of killing and resulting in different casualty counts. Today's reliance on airstrikes, drone attacks and thousands of “trainers” and special forces has replaced the hundreds of thousands of US and allied ground troops, and today very few US troops are being killed, while civilian casualties are skyrocketing. We need diplomatic solutions and strategies instead of military ones. We need a rapid and safe withdrawal of the thousands of US troops still deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the closure of US bases remaining there. In Syria, we must withdraw troops, cease airstrikes and drone attacks, and call for an arms embargo on all sides, as well as supporting the UN's and other internationally-sponsored de-escalation efforts, and engaging seriously with Russia and others towards a permanent ceasefire. In Yemen, we must immediately end all US involvement, including all logistical, refueling, targeting and other assistance to the Saudi-led coalition, and end all arms sales to Saudi Arabia. And we need to cut US military aid to Israel, turn over real control of Palestinian-Israeli diplomacy to the UN, and recognize that, particularly since the “two-state solution” has largely been rendered impossible by Israel's settlement expansion and land and water appropriation, we need a policy based on rights and equality for all. We must end the anti-Iran obsession that has been at the center of

Washington's Middle East strategy for far too long, and the US should re-join the Iran nuclear deal. The sanctions that are crippling Iran's economy and destroying the lives of everyday people must be cancelled, and the threats of military strikes against Iran, including by the US-brokered Israel-Saudi anti-Iran alliance, must be ended.

Across Africa, Washington's militarized "anti-terrorism" policies and escalating deployments of AfriCom have worsened, rather than ending the myriad of security, economic, climate, political and other challenges facing the continent. A new policy approach is needed, reversing the overall militarization of Africa policy. The US must end its unauthorized and largely secretive special operations ranging across the continent that violate not only international law, but U.S. domestic law as well.

U.S. policies regarding Russia, Latin America and Asia must be retooled away from military threats (including those against China, Venezuela and North Korea) and towards new diplomacy-based approaches grounded in international law and human rights, respect for other countries' sovereignty, and multilateral cooperation.

Aid to Refugees from War & Climate

Around the world, the sites of US wars, as well as US environmental and economic policies, have helped create crises of violence, climate catastrophe and privation threatening people's lives. They thus become areas from which migrants are forced to flee their homes, causing the refugee crises continuing to erupt in and around the war zones and climate crisis zones of the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere. The refugees seeking asylum in Europe, and the far fewer trying to come to the United States, most of whom are fleeing violence and economic crises in Central America directly rooted in earlier US interventions, are fleeing as a consequence of that wide range of disastrous policies.

We need a massive expansion of funding for these victims of US wars and US environmental and economic policies, including humanitarian support in their home countries and regions, and a welcoming acceptance of far greater numbers of refugees into the United States. We need to challenge the xenophobic policies of

the Trump administration that include the Muslim Ban, the separation of children from their families at the border and the vast reduction in refugees accepted into this country. We need to cut funding for ICE or eliminate the institution altogether. Immigrant rights advocates are linking movements for sanctuary and against ICE with opposition to the wars and other policies that force people to become refugees in the first place. Those include local and statewide campaigns to reject the training of US police by Israeli police and military forces, and challenges to local law enforcement agencies to stop accepting Pentagon offers of weapons and equipment left over from US wars in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

The Green New Deal can only succeed when it is grounded in peace with justice and an end to militarism. Aggressive wars and a giant military created to maintain global dominance render our vision of a truly new kind of society impossible. We will need serious education campaigns to convince people bombarded daily with military propaganda that permanent war does not make us safer. And that to pay for the visionary components of our Green New Deal we will need to slash the military budget and re-direct those hundreds of billions of our tax dollars away from the Pentagon to sustainable green jobs, health care for all, free education through university, a rebuilt green infrastructure, new diplomatic initiatives and more. Our fight for the Green New Deal must include — from the beginning — the fight to do just that.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phyllis Bennis is a fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies.