

Graphic Design: Kanat Bolazar, Elaine Denton

## WAR AND WARMING: WE CAN'T SAVE THE PLANET WITHOUT TAKING ON THE PENTAGON

By H. Patricia Hynes

*"If we are not united in peace, we cannot save the planet."*

*—Thich Nhat Hanh*

Looking out on my audience of young climate change and older peace activists gathered by 350.org-Connecticut for a talk and discussion on "war and warming," I saw the generational difference that many peace activists perceive. Peace, war, militarism, and nuclear weapons are an agenda of another era—an earlier era—while progressive activist energy today is galvanized by climate change. One climate

activist explained that in his lifetime, no nuclear weapons had been used while climate change has worsened. Thus, our movements largely work in isolation from each other, despite the actuality that war and fossil fuels have been fatally co-dependent since the Second World War.

Oil is indispensable for war and militarism. Think of it as the lifeblood coursing through our foreign policy that is based on maintaining superpower status and confronting those whom we perceive as challenging us. The 1980 Carter Doctrine, which stated that the United States would use military force if necessary to defend its national interests in the Persian Gulf,

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## **War and Warming**, *continued from cover*

formalized the toxic nexus between access to oil and war. Since the late 1970s, the US has spent \$8 trillion protecting oil cargoes in the Persian Gulf region through ongoing naval patrols.

Keeping oil and gas supply sea lanes in the South China Sea open, in the face of China's expansionism there, is a factor in the US pivot to Asia. This foreign policy pivot has involved engaging Australia and Southeast Asian allies in military training exercises, opening new and previously closed bases to the US military, and selling new weapons systems to counter North Korea and the rising power of China.

War for oil has come home. Militarized North Dakota police attacked non-violent water protectors protesting the Dakota Access oil pipeline with rubber bullets, tear gas, concussion grenades and water cannons in sub-freezing temperatures. One medic treating injuries described it as a "low grade war."

A thumbnail sketch of recent US spending confirms the axiom that war culture is a defining feature of US politics. Between 2010-2015, the federal government invested \$56 billion in clean energy internationally, while in 2016 it committed to \$1 trillion for modernizing nuclear weapons, their infrastructure and their delivery systems by 2030.

### **Militarism: An Engine of Climate Change**

In 1940 the US military consumed one percent of the country's total fossil fuel energy usage; by the end of World War II the military's share rose to 29 percent. Militarism is the most oil-intensive activity on the planet, growing more so with faster, bigger, more fuel-guzzling planes, tanks, and naval vessels. At the outset of the Iraq War in March 2003, the Army estimated it would need more than 40 million gallons of gasoline for three weeks of combat, exceeding the total quantity used by all Allied forces in the four years of World War I.

The frequency and prevalence of US armed conflict since World War II is another factor in the combustible mix of war and warming. Numerous sources have documented up to 150 instances of US armed forces engaged in conflict abroad from 1945-2004. This count, though, does not include covert military missions in which US Special Operations Forces (larger in number than the active-duty militaries of many countries) operate in 135 countries. Nor do the 153 military conflicts since 1945 include US occupation forces stationed abroad since World War II, military participation in mutual security organizations such as NATO, and military base agreements for the estimated 800 US military bases across the planet.

In 2003, the Carter Doctrine was implemented with "shock and awe," in what was the most intensive and profligate use of fossil fuel the world has ever witnessed—the Iraq War. The projected full costs of that war (estimated \$3 trillion) could have covered all global investments in renewable energy needed between now and 2030 to reverse global warming trends.

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Between 2003 and 2007, the Iraq War generated more carbon dioxide equivalent in greenhouse gas emissions each year than 139 of the world's countries release annually. Re-building Iraqi (and Syrian and Yemeni) schools, homes, businesses, bridges, roads, and hospitals pulverized by the war will require millions of tons of cement, among the most fossil fuel intensive of all manufacturing industries.



Graphic: [climateeye.org/what-do-wars-have-to-do-with-climate-change](http://climateeye.org/what-do-wars-have-to-do-with-climate-change)

After an unprecedented investigation into military use of fossil fuels, Barry Sander, author of *The Green Zone*, calculated that the US military consumes as much as one million barrels of oil per day and contributes five percent of current global warming emissions. Only a few dozen countries use more oil than the Pentagon, according to Dr. Neta Crawford of Boston University.

Nor do Sander's and Crawford's calculations include the fossil fuels used by civilian weapons makers. The weapon industries' greenhouse gas emissions comprise not only those from manufacturing and testing weapons but also the intensive cleanup of hazardous waste produced in the manufacturing process.

### **Climate Change in an Increasingly Militarized World**

Climate change is inevitably an issue of peace because the Pentagon is the single largest institutional contributor of climate change emissions in the world. And as the Pentagon goes, so go the military budgets of other major powers. "We are not your enemy," a Chinese strategist told journalist John Pilger, "but if you [in the West] decide we are, we must prepare without delay."

Growing global militarization portends greater military buildup in Russia, China, NATO and the Middle East with greater climate change emissions, and it heightens the potential for nuclear war, risking another kind of climate change—nuclear winter. The US expends 37 percent of the global military budget, and its military is estimated to contribute five percent of climate change emissions. Can we not, then, assume that the rest of world's military spending, weapons manufacturing, military exercises, and conflicts combine to bring military-related fossil fuel emissions near 15 percent of global climate change pollution? Intensifying military tensions will drive it higher.

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## Climate Change, Water Shortage and Conflict: Syria

Climate change is necessarily an issue of peace. One quarter to one half of wars since 1973 have been fought over oil. Oil is both indispensable to war and heavily responsible for our climate crisis.

The worst Syrian drought on record, from 2006- 2011, caused agriculture to collapse and food prices to rise, thus aggravating poverty; and it drove more than 1.5 million farm workers and families to cities for survival. Simultaneously, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees from the US-led war in their country fled to Syrian cities. The extreme and rapid swelling in urban population from war and climate change-related water scarcity, combined with the lack of support from the Assad government for basic needs and services, added fuel to the fire of civil conflict and the current war in Syria.

The entire Middle East inexorably faces a hotter, drier climate from climate change that will further stress competition for water resources, agriculture, food prices and existing conflicts.

## Concluding Reflections

War mirrors the culture of a country. US militarism—from its training, tactics, and logistics to its reasons for going to war and its weapons of war—is distinctly shaped by core elements of American identity. These determining cultural forces are, according to military historian Victor Hanson: manifest destiny; frontier mentality; rugged individualism; unfettered market capitalism; and what he calls a “muscular independence” (power projection in Pentagon-speak). These eminently masculinist qualities converge to generate bigger, “better” and more destructive war technology. And these qualities have delivered up a bullying, white nationalist, law-breaking billionaire and sexual predator as president.

The US habit and competence for war, with its origins in the past annihilation of Native Americans, will be our society’s nemesis unless we do critical soul-searching about our cultural and personal values, and actively engage in transforming them. Let us remember and honor the plentitude of non-violent activist movements—confronting sexism, racism, environmental destruction and militarism in our society—that have profoundly

confronted the dominant patriarchal profile of our culture described by Hanson.

The challenge is how to build voice, social cohesion and public influence for our shared values of human community, our core connection with nature, our empathy with the exploited and our thirst for equality and justice for all.

In these times of overt authoritarian and corporate control, our hope for turning the tide arises from local, community-based campaigns and actions. These comprise anti-fracking ordinances, town by town; the fight for a \$15 minimum wage city by city; churches and cities providing sanctuary for undocumented workers; children suing their government for their right to clean energy and a livable future; campaigns against all forms of violence against girls and women; using community media to promote equal rights for all; and electing people to local and regional office, and hopefully national office, who champion these issues and campaigns.

Working together, we must turn the tide on the destructive forces of militarism and the climate and biodiversity crises by seeking enduring peace on earth and enduring peace with earth.

**We’re thrilled to invite you to a talk by Pat Hynes:**

### “Can We Save the Planet Without Taking on the Pentagon?”

Sunday, April 19, at 2pm


All Saints Catholic Church  
1340 Lancaster Ave., Syracuse

Free and open to all. All Saints is an accessible facility.

Sponsored by Beyond War and Militarism Committee, a joint committee of the Syracuse Peace Council and the CNY Solidarity Coalition

More info: 315-472-5478, [spc@peacecouncil.net](mailto:spc@peacecouncil.net)

Note that this could change given the circumstances when we are closer to the date.



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