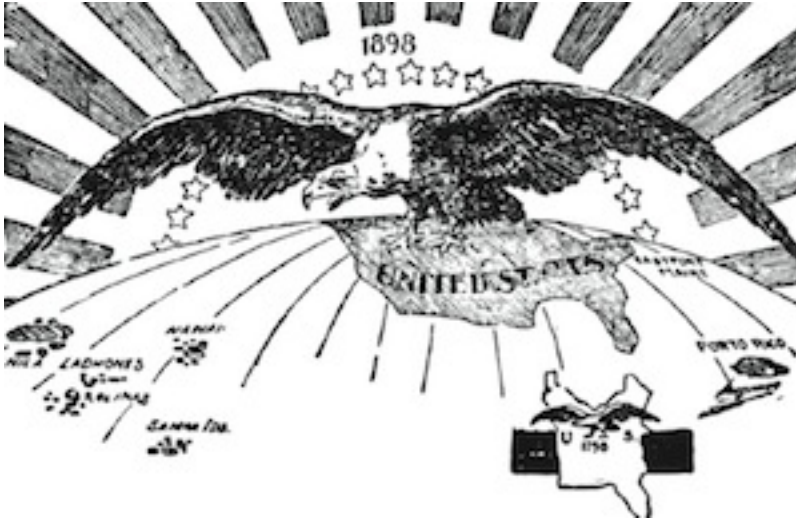


The U.S. Military & Climate Change

By Bill Adamski



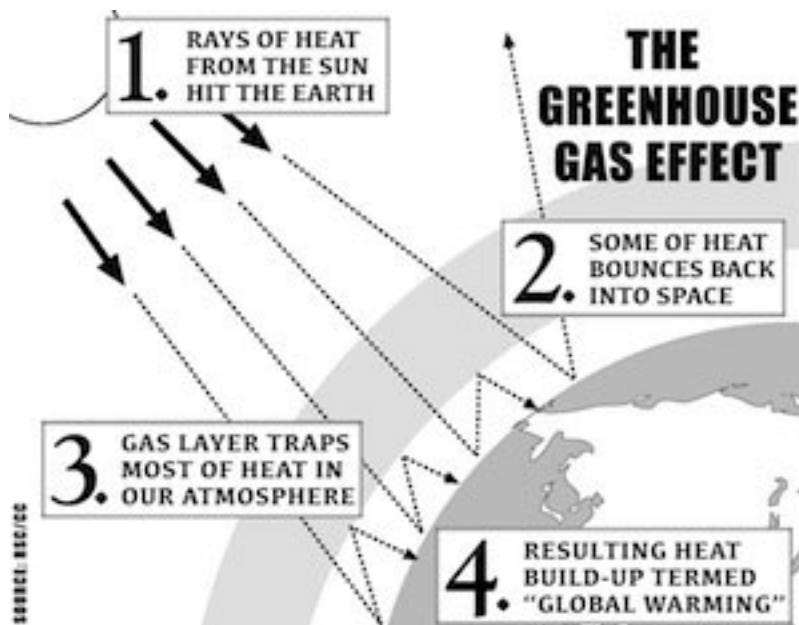
Political cartoon from Infrogmation, original source: an 1898 book on the Spanish American War. The bald eagle symbolizes the expanding U.S. empire and contrasts it with the U.S. 1798 land mass (lower right) 100 years earlier.

The U.S. military is a behemoth. We are all too aware that it inflicts massive destruction and death to whatever foreign populations are unlucky enough to witness its enormous and unforgiving wrath, even though none of these countries (15 countries since 1989(1)—most located in the Middle East) had even the remotest thoughts of invading the U.S. And we also know that funding these wars, and preparation thereof, have taken an unimaginable financial toll on American taxpayers for decades—i.e., during 1988-2014: about 18 TRILLION dollars.(2) The Department of Defense (DoD) 2015 budget (599 billion dollars) was 54 percent of total federal discretionary spending.(3)

Not as well known, but also frightening is that U.S. military operations are massively adding to the increased deterioration of our climate and to many subsequent catastrophes around the world.

Global temperatures are increasing at an accelerated rate. In November 2015, climate scientists revealed that the Earth's temperature is one degree Celsius (almost two degrees Fahrenheit) higher than in the pre-industrial era.(4) Recently it was confirmed that 2015 was the warmest year globally by far, in the 136 years of weather record keeping—exceeding the previous warmest year, 2014. Indeed, the 15 warmest global years have occurred since 2000.(5) And our planet is already suffering the ravages of higher temperatures. Stark examples include:(6)

- rising sea levels, which will eventually displace tens of millions of people.
- vegetation shifts and subsequent conservation and agricultural challenges.
- increased occurrences of extreme weather (major storms, hurricanes, etc.)
- floods, fires, and droughts are becoming more frequent.
- many more of the Earth's species threatened with extinction.
- increased health risks, especially among the most vulnerable populations.



Consequently, it is of major concern that DoD operations are monstrosly contributing to the emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) —primarily carbon dioxide (CO₂), which is largely responsible for global warming. The U.S. military empire (1.4 million active duty personnel(7) deployed at hundreds of bases in the U.S. and about 750 bases overseas)(8) —needs to burn immense amounts of fossil fuels to keep its 50,000 armored fighting vehicles (including 8,900 tanks), approximately 14,000 aircraft, and 473 ships all running.(9)

The DoD burned about 350,000 barrels of oil per day, which made it the single largest institutional oil consumer in the world, according to a 2012 estimate.(10) There were only 35 countries in the world that burned more oil than the U.S. military.(11) Oil accounted for nearly 80 percent of the DoD's energy consumption.(12)

Despite this unbelievably massive carbon footprint, the Pentagon has had a blanket exemption in all international climate agreements, including the Kyoto Climate protocol,(13) which the U.S. Senate never ratified anyway.

In a 2015 DoD(14) report the agency does recognize that global warming "...can aggravate existing international issues, including environmental degradation, social

tensions, poverty, ineffectual leadership, and frail political institutions...[which] could threaten peace and stability in a number of nations.”(15)

However, this self-serving report frames the dire consequences of global warming narrowly as only a challenge to U.S. national security. This restricted premise gives the Pentagon a seemingly plausible excuse to exert an increased presence (and influence) in many countries under the guise of providing some general contingencies in trying to help mitigate any nation’s climate-enhanced instabilities.



Air Force Senior Airman Crystal Cash refuels an F-15 during exercise Vigilant Shield 15 over the United States, Oct. 20, 2014.

Photo: U.S. Department of Defense.

Additionally, this report fails to acknowledge that the U.S., including its military had for decades been the world's largest (by far) greenhouse gas (GHG) emitter (recently overtaken by China for that dubious title). Consequently, our country bears much of the blame for this ever-evolving environmental catastrophe. It fails to recognize that the U.S. military has both participated in and provided logistical support to others for many wars in the oil-rich Middle East. This has been—and continues to be--“in large part dedicated to controlling the fossil fuel energy sources on which [the U.S.] model of global economic development and endless growth depend.”(16)

The DoD enforces this U.S. corporate carbon energy model by maintaining approximately 44 military bases in the Middle East--all at a humongous cost to U.S. taxpayers.(17)

Consequently, the DoD report makes no mention of the fact that in order to reduce any increasing geopolitical instabilities brought on by global warming, it is absolutely necessary to quickly make substantial reductions in GHG emissions, especially from major GHG emitters the U.S. and its military.

Such a universally urgent necessity was recognized by almost 200 countries at the Paris climate summit in December 2015—in order to prevent the Earth’s temperature from increasing by another 0.5 degrees Celsius (previously noted: the planet has already increased by one degree Celsius [almost two degrees Fahrenheit] from pre-industrial levels.).(18) In view of this, the nearly 200 nations at the Paris climate summit were able to come together on signing a United Nations climate agreement to begin the expedited conversion to a fossil free world.(19) In order to get 195 countries to sign the Paris climate agreement, compromises were needed, including that there are no enforcement mechanisms to ensure that country-specific GHG emission reduction targets are being met. Another major weakness of the accord is that there are no specific commitments to finance the work needed to achieve the substantial emission reduction targets.(20)



U.S. Army Spc. Dustin Atkins brings a set of fuel hose back to a CH-47 Chinook helicopter after fueling a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter in Tapita, Liberia, Dec. 19, 2014.

Photo: U.S. Department of Defense

Over the past few years the Pentagon has taken a few modest planning steps towards reducing its carbon footprint in operating its bases. Namely, setting a goal of 3 gigawatts (GW) of renewable electrical energy to power military facilities by 2025, "...eventually achieving at least 25 percent of any DoD facility energy needs coming from renewable energy sources."(21) However, these prospective energy conservation plans pertain only to electricity, which is only 11 percent of the DoD’s overall energy use.

The Pentagon with its expanding military continues to be a monstrous consumer of oil. In the military, burning these gigantic amounts of oil-derived fuels (gasoline, diesel, and especially aviation fuel) is done almost completely for a single purpose—namely, to keep its immense fleets of equipment (ground vehicles, ships, and particularly bombers, jet fighters, and helicopters) in operation worldwide—to either prepare for war or conduct it.

Furthermore, the U.S. military's perpetual worldwide strategy, and the outrageous carbon footprint that comes with it, is only getting worse:

Europe: On Feb 1, 2016, President Barack Obama announced plans to "...substantially increase the deployment of heavy weapons, armored vehicles, and other equipment [\$3.4 billion cost] to NATO countries in Central and Eastern Europe [for the stated reason to] deter Russia from its further aggression in the region."(22)

Asia Pacific: President Obama has repeatedly announced his "pivot" to the Asian Pacific region for foreign trade purposes. This agreement is primarily through the extremely harmful (for citizens) Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which he just signed in early February--but which still needs Senate ratification.(23) This renewed emphasis on the U.S. increasing its already massive trade influence in the region will be backed up with an enlarged military presence there. Consequently, the U.S. is planning to greatly expand its military base on Okinawa and will be a major tenant of the new South Korean naval base on Jeju Island.(24) The U.S. already maintains some form of presence (troops, ships, aircraft), if not bases, at dozens of locations in the western Pacific countries of Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Thailand, Australia, and Taiwan.(25)

Africa: U.S Africa Command (U.S. AFRICOM) is headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, and is responsible for U.S. military operations and military relations with 53 African nations. While its activities on the huge continent are unknown to most Americans, it maintains subcommands in many parts of Africa including combined task forces and Special Operations. The U.S. military is reported to have carried out 674 military operations in Africa in 2014.(26) It is likely that these military interventions will only increase in this resource-rich continent, particularly to counter the growing presence of China there.(27)

All in all, the Pentagon recognizes that climate change is a real danger to the planet, as mentioned in the 2015 Dept of Defense report "National Security Implications of Climate-Related Risks and a Changing Climate." However, the immense hubris of enforcing U.S. influence (if not outright hegemony) worldwide through military means overrides almost all responsibility that it must take to greatly reduce its carbon footprint—an urgent and crucial action to fight this truly greatest of all threats to our planet.

Bill Adamski worked in air pollution control for the State of Wisconsin for many years. Now retired, he is active in the antiwar movement, a member of the WAMM End War Committee, and is engaged in opposing climate change with MN350.org.

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