



Learn about the life cycle of armed conflicts and the harms to ecosystems, climate mitigation, and more

ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE BEFORE CONFLICTS

Building and sustaining military forces consumes vast quantities of resources and contributes to the climate crisis

- Militaries consume common metals, rare earth elements, water, hydrocarbons, etc.
- Military vehicles, aircraft, vessels, buildings and infrastructure all require energy, contributing greatly to CO2 emissions
- Militaries need large areas of land and sea for bases and facilities, and for testing and training, disrupting ecosystems
- Military training creates chemical and noise pollution
- Ongoing disposal of weapons creates serious environmental legacies linked to military pollution



ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE DURING CONFLICTS

Many contemporary conflicts last years and involve sustained periods of high intensity warfare

- Armed conflicts consume vast quantities of fuel, leading to massive CO2 emissions and contributing to the climate and ecological crises
- Large scale vehicle movements and intensive use of explosive ordinance can lead to widespread physical damage to sensitive landscapes and geodiversity
- Use of explosive weapons in urban areas creates vast quantities of debris and rubble, which can cause air and soil pollution
- Damage to light industry and environmentally sensitive infrastructure such as water treatment plants and pumping systems can cause pollution
- Severe pollution incidents can be caused when industrial, oil or energy facilities are deliberately attacked, inadvertently damaged or disrupted
- Other scorched earth techniques include the destruction of agricultural infrastructure like canals, wells and pumps and the burning of crops, causing air and water pollution
- Weapons and military materiel used during conflicts also leave environmental legacies (land mines, cluster munitions, military scrap) contaminating soil and water
- Small arms and light weapons can harm wildlife through facilitating increased hunting and poaching and causing harm to conservation programs
- Human displacement and camps for refugees and internally displaced peoples can have large environmental footprints (pressure on local resources, waste dumping, etc.)

ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE DURING OCCUPATIONS

Sustainable development can be held back, and pre-existing environmental programs and projects may be curtailed or replaced

- Lack of investment and development can lead to the slow collapse of critical environmental infrastructure
- Infrastructure may be damaged or degraded by periods of violence
- Military presence can impact landscapes by vehicle movements or training areas, or by the building of walls and fences
- Poor waste management at military bases can harm public health and the environment
- Resource grabs, over-extraction, and a lack of environmental oversight are common



ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE AFTER CONFLICTS

Many forms of harm are also applicable to this phase

- Weak state control, fragmented political systems, and competing social and economic priorities mean environmental governance can be impeded, limited or absent
- Immediate legacies can include dumping of rubble and debris, pollution from looting, and harmful civilian coping strategies such as overharvesting
- Environmental pressures, including deforestation, are common
- Presence of military forces and pollution issues often continue
- Practices like the use of burn pits and post-conflict clearance of landmines and explosive remnants of war can lead to soil degradation and localized pollution
- Massive urban rebuilding can require huge volumes of resources

ENVIRONMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY?

Failure to call for greater environmental protection before and during conflicts will result in damage being seen as acceptable

Ignoring the environment after conflicts will result in missed opportunities for sustainable recovery (building back greener, creating new domestic legal frameworks to sustainably manage resources, etc.) and may also be setting the stage for future resource conflicts.

*SOURCE: JUNE 4, 2020 BLOG BY DOUG WEIR, RESEARCH AND POLICY DIRECTOR
CONFLICT AND ENVIRONMENT OBSERVATORY (CEOBS)
[HTTPS://CEOBS.ORG/HOW-DOES-WAR-DAMAGE-THE-ENVIRONMENT/](https://ceoobs.org/how-does-war-damage-the-environment/)
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