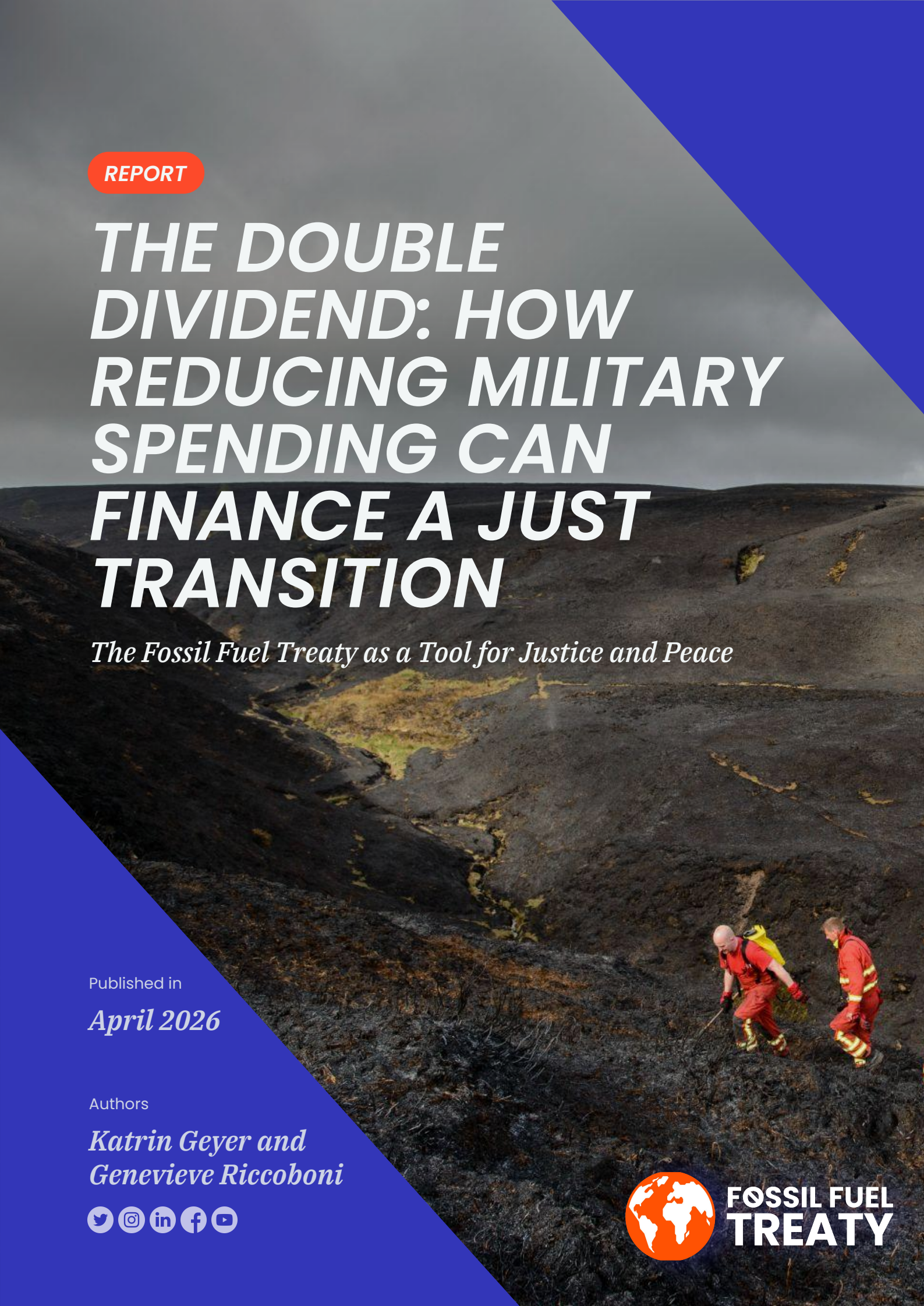
REPORT

THE DOUBLE DIVIDEND: HOW REDUCING MILITARY SPENDING CAN FINANCE A JUST TRANSITION

The Fossil Fuel Treaty as a Tool for Justice and Peace



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FOSSIL FUEL TREATY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> *"We must have a paradigm shift in resource allocation. We can meet this challenge [the climate crisis], but only if we are prepared to face the fact that bombs, guns, cluster bombs and landmines will not deter or remove the threat of a tsunami, a hurricane, a flood, a virus, or a water shortage.*[1]
>
> *WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE AND FREEDOM, 2008*

The world is at a breaking point. Armed conflict is at its highest level since the end of World War II. [2] **The planet is warming at an unprecedented rate.** Militarism directly contributes to the climate crisis and the climate crisis is further intensifying conflict and humanitarian need. **Yet, decision makers are ignoring the interconnected nature of these crises. In fact, at a time when bold leadership is needed, political imagination is narrowing, converging on a single, dangerous definition of security: military strength.**

1 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. (2008, March 6). WILPF Statement to the Conference on Disarmament on International Women's Day 2008. Reaching Critical Will.

2 Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). (2025, June 9). New data shows conflict at historic high as U.S. signals retreat from world stage. Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO).

Global military spending reached a record US$2.7 trillion in 2024 – the tenth consecutive annual increase.[3] If current trends continue, the UN Secretary-General warns it could reach between US$4.7 and US$6.6 trillion by 2035.[4] At the same time, the financing gap for a global just transition away from fossil fuels stands at trillions of dollars.[5] Climate finance pledges to the most vulnerable nations remain unmet and nearly one fifth of the Sustainable Development Goals have regressed below their 2015 baseline levels. [6]
This is a crisis of priorities.

This paper makes the case that **reducing military expenditure is a win-win in the global just transition** and that the proposed Fossil Fuel Treaty offers a concrete mechanism to advance this agenda. Built on a UN mandate, a growing civil society movement, and an increasing number of committed countries, **a reallocation framework**, such as a Global Just Transition Fund, **within the Fossil Fuel Treaty could redirect public finance from military spending toward climate action.** Member state contributions would include an agreed percentage of annual military expenditure, channelled toward making fossil fuel phase-out fiscally viable for dependent states, scaling clean alternatives, and protecting workers and marginalised communities.

This would not only **finance the transition away from fossil fuels**, but also **reduce the military's fossil fuel dependence** and the emissions it generates, and **foster the conditions of trust**, **cooperation and diplomacy** upon which a managed and equitable phase-out of fossil fuels depends.

This is **not a radical proposition**. Calls for the **reduction and reallocation of military spending have been firmly embedded within the United Nations** since its founding from the UN Charter itself [7] through decades of General Assembly resolutions,[8] UN Secretary-General reports and human rights mechanisms. What has been missing is the political will to act on them.

So far, civil society, researchers, and practitioners have rightly focused on identifying new and fairer sources to finance the just transition – from debt cancellation and tax justice to the regulation of transnational corporations. These remain essential pathways.[9] But an equally significant and **largely overlooked question is how existing public resources are currently being allocated**. The rapid and sustained **growth of military budgets** across the Global North, and increasingly worldwide, represents **one of the most significant – and most politically avoided – obstacles to financing a genuine global just transition.**

3 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). (2025, April 28). Unprecedented rise in global military expenditure as European and Middle East spending surges. SIPRI.
4 Record military spending threatens global peace and development, new UN report warns. (2025). UNDP.
5 Bhattacharya A, Songwe V, Soubeyran E and Stern N (2024) Raising Ambition and Accelerating Delivery of Climate Finance. London: Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, London School of Economics and Political Science
6 United Nations. (2025). The Security We Need Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future Report of the Secretary-General.
7 Critical Issues: Article 26 of the UN Charter. Reaching Critical Will.
8 For a comprehensive historical overview of the United Nations' efforts to reduce military spending, see UNODA Occasional Papers No. 33– United Nations Efforts to Reduce Military Expenditure- A Historical Overview (2019).
9 Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. (May 2024). Financing a Fair and Fast Energy Transition. and see also: Oil Change International, We Can Pay for It: Measures for rich countries to raise public funds for the new climate finance goal and other domestic and international public interest priorities.

The climate impacts of runaway military spending extend far beyond the diversion of financial resources. **Military activity isa major and systematically under-reported driver of greenhouse gas emissions.** The world's armed forces, if ranked as a single country, would be the fourth largest emitter on Earth.[10] The evidence is clear from Gaza[11] to Ukraine[12] and Iran:[13] Active conflicts compound this destruction further, releasing enormous quantities of carbon while destroying ecosystems and infrastructure. **As images of burning oil fields and black rain over Iran circulate globally, they throw into sharp relief the limits of individual action.** No amount of personal consumption choices can offset the emissions unleashed by a single airstrike. There is no credible pathway to greening militaries at their current scale. **Fossil fuels are the lifeblood of modern military systems** and procurement cycles lock in this dependence for decades.

False solutions promoted by or entangled with the military-industrial complex – from **carbon capture** to **geoengineering**[14] – **risk deepening the problem while diverting public finance away from genuine climate action.**

Beyond emissions, **militarisation actively undermines the conditions needed for a just transition.** Rising military spending **entrenches geopolitical competition, erodes trust, weakens multilateral institutions** and **narrows the space for the international cooperation that a global fossil fuel phase-out requires.** Meanwhile, **military demand** is **competing with** and in many cases overriding **the resource needs of the transition itself**. Military and security priorities shape which minerals are designated "critical," how they are extracted and who bears the ecological and human costs[15] with an increasing share of these minerals flowing directly into new weapons technologies, including autonomous weapon systems.

10 Parkinson, S., & Cottrell, L. (2022). Estimating the Military's Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Scientists for Global Responsibility and Conflict and Environment Observatory.
11 Neimark, B., Otu-Larbi, F., Larbi, R., Bigger, P., Cottrell, L., Lennard de Klerk, & Mykola Shlapak. (2025). War on the Climate: A Multitemporal Study of Greenhouse Gas Emissions of the Israel-Gaza Conflict.
12 Initiative on GHG Accounting of War. (2026). Climate Damage Caused By Russia's War In Ukraine.
13 Otu-Larbi, F., Bigger, P., & Neimark, B. (2026, March 21). Two weeks of war in Iran unleashed more carbon pollution than Iceland does in a year. Substack.com; Climate and Community Institute.
14 Sovacool, B. K., Baum, C., & Low, S. (2023). The next climate war? Statecraft, security, and weaponization in the geopolitics of a low-carbon future. Energy Strategy Reviews, 45, 101031.
15 Critical minerals: Once mined for renewables, now for war. (2025). Global Witness.

Momentum is building among those who challenge this trend. A growing and increasingly intersectional civil society movement is connecting the dots between militarism and climate injustice. Global South governments have raised these concerns in high-level statements at successive United Nations climate negotiations. The UN Secretary-General's 2025 groundbreaking report on military spending and sustainable development provides authoritative grounding for these demands. **The conditions are emerging for a serious, evidence-based push to place military expenditure reallocation at the centre of climate finance discussions.**

Reducing military expenditure is pragmatic, urgent and achievable. As President Lula da Silva stated at COP30:

> *"Spending twice as much on weapons as we do on climate action is paving the way for climate apocalypse. There will be no energy security in a world at war.*

The **Double Dividend** paper maps the financing gap for the Global Just Transition alongside a decade of rising military spending, examining the latter's impacts on human security, emissions, ecological destruction and international cooperation. It draws on UN resolutions and Secretary-General reports to show that calls to reduce and reallocate military expenditure have deep multilateral roots, before presenting the Fossil Fuel Treaty as a concrete mechanism for redirecting that spending toward climate justice and peace. The paper closes with recommendations for governments and civil society.

FOSSIL FUEL TREATY

INTRODUCTION

The planet is burning. 2024 was the hottest year ever recorded, followed by 2025, the third hottest on record, cementing a relentless warming trend. The past eleven years have been the eleven warmest on record.[16] If this trend continues, the probability of permanently breaching the 1.5°C limit of the Paris Agreement in the 2030s is highly likely.[17] At the same time, armed conflict is at its highest global level since the end of World War II, with 61 different armed conflicts in 36 countries in 2024[18] and over 117 million people – 1 in every 70 people on Earth – forcibly displaced due to conflict and political unrest as of mid-2025.[19] As of March 2026, more than 240,000 people were killed by conflict-related violence in the previous twelve months, with especially high risk and exposure to violence in Ukraine and Palestine.[20]

16 WMO confirms 2025 was one of warmest years on record. World Meteorological Organization. (2026, January 14).
17 Copernicus Climate Change Service. (2025, January 10). Copernicus: 2024 is the first year to exceed 1.5°C above pre-industrial level | Copernicus. Copernicus.eu.
18 Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). (2025, June 9). New data shows conflict at historic high as U.S. signals retreat from world stage. Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO).
19 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2024). Figures at a glance | UNHCR. UNHCR.
20 Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED). (2024). ACLED Conflict Index. ACLED.

Amidst this global context of insecurity and polycrisis,[21] the political imagination of world leaders appears to be zeroing in on a sole, narrow definition of security - military strength. The growing financing gap for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is currently at least US $4 trillion.[22] At the same time, **governments collectively spent US$2.7 trillion on military expenditures in 2024, with over 100 countries increasing their spending** and the top 15 spenders accounting for 80 percent of the US$2.7 trillion. The United States (US) military budget for fiscal year 2027 may be as high as US$1.5 trillion – a 66 percent increase.[23] Some intelligence assessments indicate that Russia's military spending may comprise a staggering half of its state budget as of 2025.[24] European spending overall reached US$683 billion in 2024, which is an increase of 83 percent from 2015 levels.[25] Many countries particularly across the NATO alliance have made commitments to further increasing their military spending in the years to come. The United Nations (UN) has warned that if current trends continue, military spending could reach as high as between US$4.7 and $6.6 trillion by 2035.[26]

Civil society, especially peace activists and peacebuilders, have long contested the idea that such investments can truly deliver security and instead contend that militarisation largely produces more violence, mistrust, and destruction.

This includes environmental harm. Wars have a devastating toll on the environment, including soil, water, land and agriculture degradation and militaries are major emitters of greenhouse gases (GHG).[27] Staggeringly, if the world's armed forces were ranked together as a single country, they would be the world's fourth largest emitter after China, the United States and India.[28] **Just one military jet, the B-52 Stratocruiser, consumes about as much fuel in an hour as the average car driver uses in seven years.**[29] Preparation for war, movement of militaries and weapons production also adversely impact the environment in numerous ways. Nuclear weapons are a particularly stark example as they threaten all life on the planet. The entire nuclear chain from uranium mining, production, testing, and use to radioactive waste, destroys land, water and life in areas nearby.[30]

21 Whiting, K., & Park, H. (2023, March 7). We're in a "polycrisis" - a historian explains what that means. World Economic Forum.
22 United Nations Development Programme. (2021). SDG Finance. UNDP.
23 Manning, S. (2026, March 23). Trump's Proposed Military Spending Would Be a "Bloody New Deal." The Equation; Union of Concerned Scientists.
24 Luyken, J. (2026, February 4). Russia spends half its state budget on the military. The Telegraph.
25 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). (2025, April 28). Unprecedented rise in global military expenditure as European and Middle East spending surges. SIPRI.
26 Record military spending threatens global peace and development, new UN report warns. (2025). UNDP.
27 United Nations. (2023). How conflict impacts our environment. United Nations.
28 Parkinson, S., & Cottrell, L. (2022). Estimating the Military's Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Scientists for Global Responsibility and Conflict and Environment Observatory.
29 Steichen, L., & Koshgarian, L. (2020). How Militarism Fuels the Climate Crisis — and Vice Versa. Institute for Policy Studies; JSTOR.
30 Acheson, R., Geyer, K., Riccoboni, G., & Varella, L. (2024). "Petrobromance", Nuclear Priesthood, and Police Repression: Feminist Confrontations of Violent Industries, and Movements to Abolish Them. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Not only is militarism directly contributing to the climate and ecological crises, but the climate crisis in turn is further intensifying conflict and humanitarian need. Yet, what is the response from states? More militarisation in the name of 'security'. This has led feminist and environmental movements to ask a key question again - "Security for Whom?" as discourse on the nexus between the climate crisis and security fails to center impacted and frontline communities.[31] Even for those who defend the political choice to increase military spending, it should be evident that defining militarism and arms as the primary credible provider of security has profound consequences for the ability to collectively address other global challenges. Military spending can never address threats such as pandemics, climate change, poverty or inequality. Militarism actively creates more devastation and need and simultaneously crowds out the normative, fiscal, cooperative and institutional space for these growing challenges to be addressed.

This circular, impractical and iterative logic must be interrupted and a new approach taken. However, current multilateral processes aimed at mitigating the climate crisis and preventing wars and conflict, including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) or the UN Security Council (UNSC) and different disarmament and arms control mechanisms, have not responded with the urgency, ambition and imagination required. Much of the reason for this is the elephant in the room: disproportionate influence by the same heavily militarised and high emitting states.

Against this bleak backdrop, however, there is a small yet potent window of opportunity that has the potential to turn the tide towards climate justice and peace.

The Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative,[32] a diverse global network– including 18 nations, thousands of health professionals, youth activists, social justice advocates, civil society leaders, Indigenous leaders, businesses, cities and subnational governments and more than a million individuals worldwide – has been working relentlessly to eradicate the root cause of the climate crisis and develop a global roadmap for the just transition to phase out of fossil fuels. Complementing the Paris Agreement, which only focuses on the reduction of emissions, the Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative's advocacy has culminated in Colombia and the Netherlands co-hosting the historic First International Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels in April 2026.[33] While a growing number of states are demonstrating the political will to meaningfully implement a global just transition (GJT), one key challenge remains which is the lack of finance. 'Developing' countries alone will need to scale just transition spending from about US$10 billion per year today to US$50 billion per year.[34]

31 Philipson García, D. (2023). Security for whom? New Report on Feminist Perspectives on Militarism & Climate. WEDO; Women's Environment and Development Organization and Center for Feminist Foreign Policy.
32 Fossil Fuel Treaty.
33 First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels.
34 REPORT ON THE BAKU TO BELÉM ROADMAP TO 1.3T. (2025). UNFCCC.

Civil society, practitioners, academics and researchers have identified diverse mechanisms and sources to finance the just transition and climate finance more broadly – from debt cancellation, tax justice, fair priced capital investment, regulation of transnational corporations, and more fair trade and investment rules.[35] These measures represent tangible pathways to redistribute resources to fund a GJT. Yet, while efforts have focused on mobilising new and fairer forms of GJT financing, an equally significant question lies in how existing public resources are currently allocated, including to military budgets.

***The Double Dividend** paper argues that reducing military expenditure is therefore a win-win for financing the GJT pillar of a Fossil Fuel Treaty. Reducing excessive military spending would provide the required financing while facilitating trust building, cooperation and diplomacy.*

In practical terms, redirecting military expenditure toward the Treaty's just transition framework would meaningfully expand resources for renewable energy deployment, worker retraining, community-led economic diversification, environmental remediation in frontline communities and support a system change away from extractivism and structural violence while simultaneously reducing militaries' reliance on fossil fuels. This is essential because, despite a rise in efforts to "green" or "climate-proof" militaries in recent years, there is no true alternative to militaries' dependence on fossil fuels, and war will continue to cause devastation to the environment and climate. **Far from being only a climate tool, the Fossil Fuel Treaty can be a peace tool: it can create new conditions for diplomacy, trust-building, and demilitarisation.**

35 Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. (May 2024). Financing a Fair and Fast Energy Transition
and see also:Tucker, B. (n.d.). WE CAN PAY FOR IT: Measures for rich countries to raise public funds for the new climate finance goal and other domestic and international public interest priorities. Oil Change International.

This paper first provides a brief overview of the finance needs for the GJT. It then lays out the past decade of trends in global military spending, and outlines the myriad adverse impacts of rising militarism on the climate and on the world more broadly. Grounding its analysis in UN reports, resolutions and commitments over the decades, The Double Dividend then presents concrete proposals for how military spending can be reallocated, with positive impacts for climate justice and international cooperation.

"Spending twice as much on weapons as we do on climate action is paving the way for climate apocalypse. There will be no energy security in a world at war."

PRESIDENT LUIZ INÀCIO LULA DA SILVA OF BRAZIL, THE COP30 LEADERS SUMMIT

Reducing military spending is far from radical, but rather, a necessity that has been firmly embedded in the UN since its founding, including in Article 26 of the UN Charter.[36] It is urgent, pragmatic and a necessary step for an enduring global just transition.

36 Critical Issues: Article 26 of the UN Charter. Reaching Critical Will.

2. FINANCE NEEDS FOR THE GLOBAL JUST TRANSITION

Estimating global climate finance needs is incredibly difficult, in particular because it is impossible to put a price on the loss of a life, the loss of a way of life, or the loss of culture or livelihoods.

With this caveat in mind, the Independent High Level Expert Group on Climate Finance estimates that the global projected investment requirement for global annual climate action by 2030 at around $6.3 to 6.7 trillion.[37] Of this amount, $2.7–2.8 trillion will have to be spent in 'advanced' economies, $1.3-$1.4 trillion in China, and $2.3–2.5 trillion in emerging markets other than China. The same study suggests that US$1 trillion a year will be required from external finance from 'developed' countries to 'developing countries' as categorised under the UNFCCC. The Climate Action Network (CAN), the world's largest climate justice civil society network, reaffirmed this estimate in its advocacy within the UNFCCC, asserting that such finance be in the form of grants and grant-equivalent finance.[38] This amount reflects thematic needs across three areas, in which US$400 billion is required for loss and damage, at least US$300 billion for adaptation and a minimum of US$300 billion for mitigation, measured in grant-equivalent, meaning non-debt creating, terms.

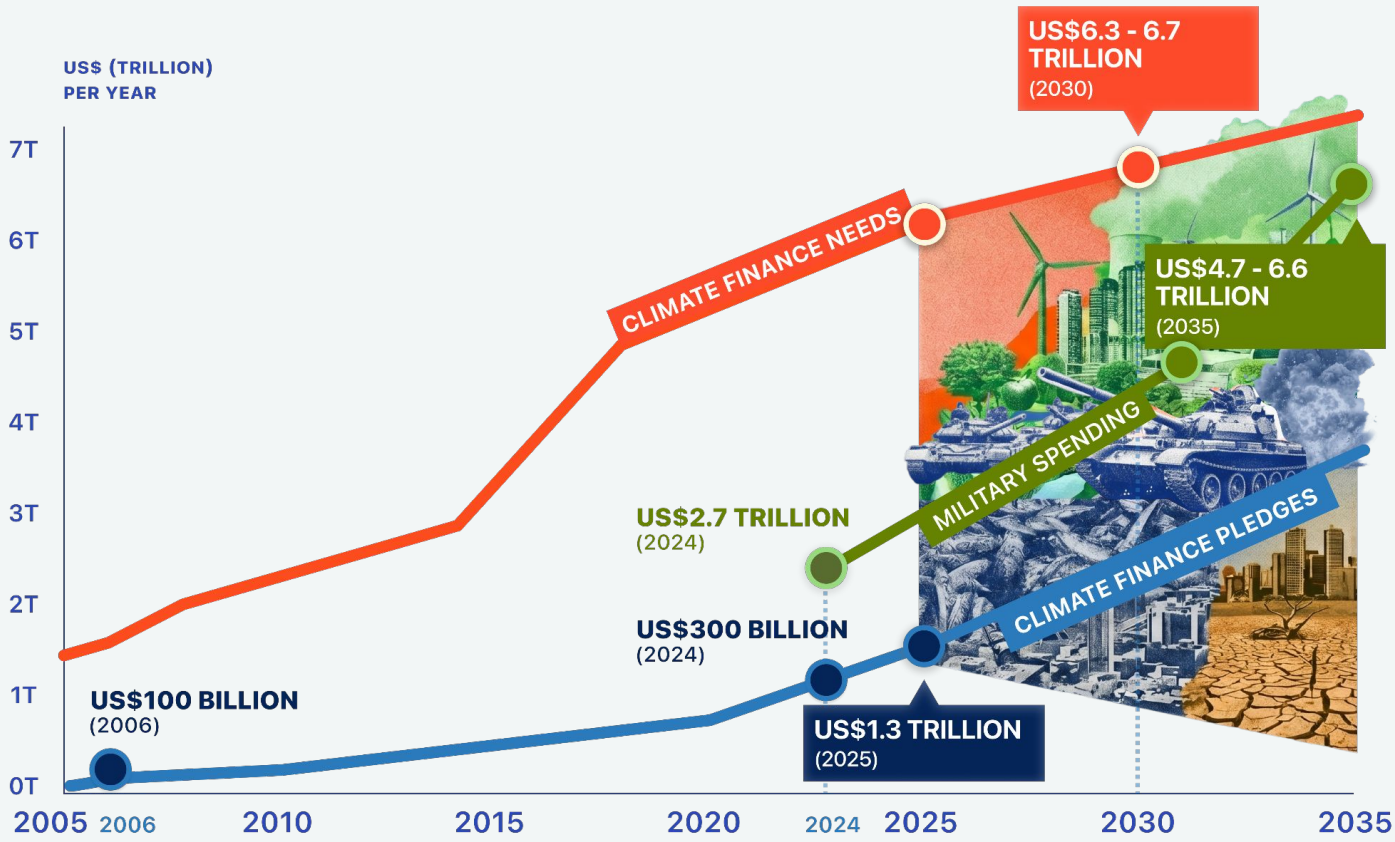
Other NGO constituencies under the UNFCCC, including the Women and Gender Constituency (WGC), have called on the Global North[39] to pay at least US$5 trillion per year to the Global South as annualised reparatory payments for its climate debt.[40] With respect to just transition financing, according to the Independent High Level Expert Group, by 2035, developing countries will need to scale just transition spending from about $US10 billion per year today to $US50 billion per year.[41]

37 Bhattacharya, A et al. (2024). Raising ambition and accelerating delivery of climate finance: Third report of the Independent High-Level Expert Group on Climate Finance.
38 Climate Action Network (CAN) submission on the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG). (2024).
39 Also referred to in this paper as 'developed' countries.
40 Feminists demand wealthy countries #PayUp their climate debt! Women and Gender Constituency. (2025, November 5).
41 Report On The Baku To Belem Roadmap To 1.3T. (2025).

I. THE FINANCING GAP

Currently available climate finance as a whole is woefully inadequate to address all aspects of the climate crisis. The US$100 billion per year of climate funds which the wealthy Global North nations pledged to the Global South since COP15 in 2009 have not been met.[42] The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) points to a nearly US$2 trillion annual shortfall in finance to meet the SDGs related to energy and climate needs.[43]

The UNFCCC continues to be unable to respond to the urgency. COP29 agreed to a new climate finance goal of at least US$300 billion annually by 2035,[44] while COP30 called on all countries to work toward scaling up climate financing to at least US$1.3 trillion to 'developing' countries, encompassing the US$300 billion as well as finance from all public and private sources.[45]



SOURCES FOR THE DATA REFERENCED IN THIS GRAPH CAN BE FOUND IN
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42 UNFCCC Standing Committee on Finance Second report on progress towards achieving the goal of mobilizing jointly USD 100 billion per year to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation Executive Summary. (2024). UNFCCC Standing Committee on Finance.
43 United Nations. (2025). The Security We Need Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future Report of the Secretary-General.
44 UNFCCC. (2024, November 24). COP29 UN Climate Conference Agrees to Triple Finance to Developing Countries, Protecting Lives and Livelihoods. United Nations Climate Change.
45 Report On The Baku To Belem Roadmap To 1.3T. (2025).

Currently, most resources are provided at market rates, with only about one percent delivered as grants,[46] further adding to already high debt levels (averaging around 30 percent of GDP across developing countries, and reaching roughly 44 percent in Latin America and 47 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa).[47] As argued by the Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative,[48] The "Baku to Belém Roadmap to 1.3T" places strong emphasis on 'developed' countries leveraging private finance, which in practice largely means debt-creating instruments and profit-driven investments. This approach leaves 'developing' countries shouldering increased debt and policy conditionalities, further limiting their ability to pursue their development priorities and transition plans.

Importantly, what this means is that the ***climate-debt trap has taken on a compounding new dimension.*** *Climate finance instruments themselves are now accelerating the very debt crisis they purport to address.[49] As loss and damage costs mount, driven by climate impacts that 'developing' countries did least to cause, debt-creating climate instruments pile additional financial obligations onto already strained public finances, making the achievement of the SDGs increasingly out of reach.[50]*

From a feminist perspective, it is important to note that these fiscal pressures do not fall evenly. As public budgets are squeezed, financing for gender equality, the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and social reproduction work overwhelmingly performed by women is routinely sacrificed first – pitted against other "social goods" in a competition for shrinking resources that feminist political economists have long identified as a structural feature of austerity.[51]

46 Presentation Slides: IRENA Webinar: Global Landscape of Energy Transition Finance. (2026, January 20). Irena.org.

47 World Economic Outlook Database. (2025). International Monetary Fund.

48 Rambarran, J., & Sawas, A. (2025). Debt Justice And Financing The Just Global Energy Transition: International Cooperation On The Climate-Debt Crisis And The Role Of A Treaty. Fossil Fuel Treaty.

49 Tan, C., Erdem G., & Yilmaz-Vastardis A., (2024). Financing Sustainable Just Energy Transitions: Challenges and Ways Forward.
See also: Climate loans are drowning the vulnerable: New index exposes a global debt trap. (2025, November 16). Young Power in Social Action (YPSA).

50 See for example: Tan, P. C., Yilmaz Vastardis, D. A., & Erdem Türkelli, D. G. (n.d.). Submission of Evidence to the House of Commons International Development Committee for the Inquiry into the UK's International Climate Finance. New Frontiers in International Development Finance (NeF DeF): Climate Finance for Equitable Transitions (CLiFT).

51 See for example: Mlinarević, G. et al. (2017). A Feminist Perspective On Post-Conflict Restructuring AND Recovery: The Case Of Bosnia. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

Trapped by existing debt burdens, many Global South countries are left with little choice but to pursue new fossil fuel extraction projects, either through resource-backed loans used to service existing obligations, or because the cost of renewable alternatives remains inaccessible. This entrapment carries its own long-term risks. The threat of stranded assets and exposure to Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) cases further constrain countries' policy space and ability to manage a just transition on their own terms.[52]

The result is an impossible position. Countries that may be willing to transition are structurally prevented from doing so, not for lack of political will, but because the international financial architecture gives them nowhere to turn.[53] *This is why the international community must move urgently beyond debt-creating instruments toward predictable, grant-based public climate finance that genuinely enables Global South countries in their transition efforts.*[54]

Just transition financing is especially scarce. A report by Action Aid finds that less than three percent of existing climate finance, channeled through UNFCCC-established mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Climate Investment Fund (CIF), have supported just transition approaches.[55] At the same time, of the little financing available for the global energy transition, 'developing' countries receive a small fraction of just three per cent (excluding China and G20 developing countries).[56] This means that going forward, the just energy transition at national, regional, and global levels will require immense volumes of predictable and public climate finance delivered through grants and highly concessional funding, in particular to climate-vulnerable Global South countries from countries in the Global North that got them into this situation in the first place.[57]

52 Woolfenden, T. (2023). The debt-fossil fuel trap: Why debt is a barrier to fossil fuel phase-out and what we can do about it. Debt Justice.
See also: Record number of corporate lawsuits target climate action in controversial tribunal. (2025). Bilaterals.org; ISDS Platform.

53 Zucker-Marques, M., Volz, U., & Gallagher , K. P. (2023). Debt Relief By Multilateral Lenders: Why, How and How Much? Boston University Global Development Policy Center, Centre for Sustainable Finance, SOAS, University of London; Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.In

54 Nasrallah, A.; Rodriguez, C.; Fouad, H.; Elhatimi, I.; Rambarran, J.; Mohan, P.; Kadirgamar, N. & Sawas, A. (2026) Spillover Effects: The Fossil Fuel–Debt Trap in the Global South. Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative; MENAFEM Movement for Economic, Development and Ecological Justice and Oil Change International.

55 Anderson, T., Castro, P., & Hertzler, D. (2025). Climate Finance For The Just Transition: How The Finance Flows: ActionAid's Third Annual How The Finance Flows Report. ActionAid USA.

56 Presentation Slides: IRENA Webinar: Global Landscape of Energy Transition Finance. (2026, January 20). Irena.org.

57 Rambarran, J., & Sawas, A. (2025). Debt Justice And Financing The Just Global Energy Transition: International Cooperation On The Climate-Debt Crisis And The Role Of A Treaty. Fossil Fuel Treaty.

Against this backdrop, two main challenges currently exist.

1. Firstly, financing for the just transition is **disproportionately insufficient**.

2. Secondly, the little financing that currently does exist is **predominantly debt-creating and profit-driven**.

Contrary to what Global North or 'developed' countries argue,[58] citing fiscal pressures and domestic economic crises, sources for public climate finance do exist. Notably, a rapidly increasing amount of Global North countries' as well as Russia, China and countries such as India and Saudi Arabia's public spending is allocated to military expenditure.[59]

58 Gabbatiss, J. (2024, November 4). COP29: What is the "new collective quantified goal" on climate finance? Carbon Brief.

59 The top five military spenders in 2024 were the US, China, Russia, Germany, India, and Saudi Arabia.

3. GLOBAL TRENDS IN MILITARY SPENDING OVER THE PAST DECADE

I. MAJOR TRENDS AND SPENDING PATTERNS BY REGION AND BUDGET CATEGORIES

In 2026, the current global context is marked by both record levels of armed conflict and displacement as well as significant and sustained increases in military spending across all regions. This spending is fueled by a range of geopolitical, regional, as well as domestic trends towards militarisation and securitisation in response to real or perceived security challenges. These include more spending on militaries, weapons modernisation, policing, border enforcement and new technologies and domains.

Since consistent comparative records began, global military spending has increased over time, with periods of sustained increases as well as reductions that have been influenced by geopolitical, domestic, and regional perceptions of peace and security threats. In 2024, world military spending increased for the tenth consecutive year and reached a record high, surpassing US$2.7 trillion.

Between 2015 and 2024, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), military spending rose by 37 percent and increased across all five regions.[62] In 2024, 100 countries increased their military spending. In addition to growing in real numbers, between 2022 and 2024, global military spending as a share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) also rose from 2.2 to 2.5 percent. The military's share of total government budgets also increased from 6.6 to 7.1 percent.[63] These increases since 2022 are a shift from a longer-standing trend wherein military spending as a percentage of GDP has declined over time in many contexts from Cold War levels.[64] According to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, nuclear weapons spending, which is in addition to other military spending costs, was more than US$100 billion in 2024, an increase of approximately 11 percent from the previous year.[65] The volume of major arms flows increased by 9.2 percent between 2016-2020 and 2021-2025.[66]

60 Craft, W., Witherspoon, A., & Gedeon, J. (2026, March 19). The war on Iran cost the US $12.7bn by day six. Here's how it's been spent – in charts. The Guardian; The Guardian.
61 Otu-Larbi, F., Bigger, P., & Neimark, B. (2026, March 21). Two weeks of war in Iran unleashed more carbon pollution than Iceland does in a year. Substack.com; Climate and Community Institute.
62 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. (2025). SIPRI Yearbook 2025: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security. Chapter 3: Military expenditure. SIPRI.
63 United Nations. (2025). The Security We Need Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future Report of the Secretary-General.
64 Military spending as a share of GDP. (2025). Our World in Data.
65 Snyder, S. (2024). Hidden Costs: Nuclear Weapons Spending in 2024. International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).
66 Global arms flows jump nearly 10 per cent as European demand soars. (2026, March 9). SIPRI.

Military spending is by no means equally distributed, or equally increasing, across the world. The world's largest military spender has long been the United States, with almost US$1 trillion in spending alone in 2024, comprising around 37 percent of the global total. US federal budget data show that for 2026, US$1.48 trillion has been allocated for the military – approximately 13 percent of the US federal budget for Fiscal Year 2026.[67] The top five military spenders in 2024 include UNSC permanent members China and Russia as well as Germany and India. Together they comprise around 60 percent of global military spending. As the UN Secretary-General (SG) notes, "the heavy concentration of global military spending reflects the unequal distribution of power among States", with the 10 largest spenders in 2024 including all five permanent members of the UNSC.[68]

There is also a remarkable alignment between military strength, geopolitical power, nuclear weapons and fossil fuel extraction and emissions. Nine states possess over 12,000 nuclear warheads as of 2025, with almost 90 percent of these possessed by the US and Russia.[69] As WILPF has pointed out in a report on the parallels and connections between the nuclear and fossil fuel industries, there is significant overlap between highly militarised global powers, including nuclear-armed states and the countries which bear the most responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions fueling the climate crisis.[70]

Not only is the United States the largest historical emitter of greenhouse gases in the world, but the US military is the largest single institutional GHG emitter in the world, having directly generated 636 million metric tons of CO_2 between 2010 and 2019.[71] This figure does not include indirect emissions from sources such as the military-industrial supply chain. If included, the figure would at least triple.[72] The Americas region has 40 percent of global military spending, followed by Europe (26 percent), Asia (23 percent), and the Middle East (nine percent). Notably, the Africa region has disproportionately low levels of spending, with less than two percent of global military spending in 2024 despite having around 20 percent of the world's population.[73]

67 Department of Defense (DOD). (2026). USASpending.gov.
68 United Nations. (2025). The Security We Need Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future Report of the Secretary-General.
69 ICAN. (2023). The World's Nuclear Weapons. International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).
70 Acheson, R., Geyer, K., Riccoboni, G., & Varella, L. (2024). "Petrobromance", Nuclear Priesthood, and Police Repression: Feminist Confrontations of Violent Industries, and Movements to Abolish Them. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.
71 Howarth, T. (2025, July 2). The US military's carbon footprint is mind-bogglingly big. Here's how they could cut it. BBC Science Focus Magazine.
72 Parkinson, S. (2025, September). Military spending rises and greenhouse gas emissions: what does the research say? Scientists for Global Responsibility.
and Climate Reparations for Military Emissions. (2025, November 5). Transform Defence for Sustainable Human Safety.
73 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. (2025). SIPRI Yearbook 2025: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security. Chapter 3: Military expenditure. SIPRI.

Broadly speaking, conflict-affected countries spend a higher proportion of their budgets on militaries and there is often higher spending in regions where there is a major armed conflict. However, this trend has not entirely borne out in all regions. For example, African spending has increased more slowly than other regions. This is despite many armed conflicts including a full-scale war in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic, as well as an increase in military coups and transitions in power – with eleven coups in nine African states since 2020.[74]

A wide range of expenditures constitute national military budgets and countries prioritise these expenditures differently. Personnel is the highest consistent budget item in most countries (constituting a majority of spending in many), where procurement expenditure varies.[75] The United States, for example, currently spends almost 40 percent of its military budget on operation and maintenance, with 22 percent for personnel, the second highest area of spending.[76] This reflects the large number of military installations that the US has around the world, including around 800 military bases.[77] But many countries are increasing their spending in areas such as modernisation – for example, of nuclear forces[78] and in areas such as artificial intelligence and surveillance.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) has a commonly agreed upon definition of military spending, but with recent commitments by NATO countries to increase military spending as high as 5 percent of GDP, many countries are also broadening their conceptions of military spending to include "defense-related" expenses such as infrastructure.[79] Transparency is a challenge among many large military spenders, particularly when considering ways in which state funding contributes to militarisation. For example, some research indicates that China's military budget may be higher than its official figures, as aspects such as research and development, equipment purchases, paramilitary forces, and pensions are not included.[80]

74 Ayele Dersso, S., & Shewadeg, B. (2025). Coup d'état continues to surge as the African Union and regional bodies inadvertently make coup-making profitable again – Amani Africa. Amaniafrica-Et.org.
75 United Nations. (2025). The Security We Need Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future Report of the Secretary-General.
76 Peterson Foundation. (2024, August 12). Budget Basics: National Defense. Peterson Foundation.
77 Kitchlew, I. (2022, March 10). Is super-polluting Pentagon's climate plan just "military-grade greenwash"? The Guardian.
78 Dumbacher, E. D., Horowitz, M. C., & Kahn, L. (2025, July 9). Will Trump's "Big Beautiful" Defense Spending Last? Cfr.org; Council on Foreign Relations.
79 North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (2025). Defence expenditures and NATO's 5% commitment. NATO.
80 Vallance, D. (2025, December 11). Solving the puzzle of China's defence spending. Lowyinstitute.org; Lowy Institute.

In 2024, some estimates indicate that the global cost of violence on the economy amounted to ***US$19.97 trillion.***[81] *In contrast, ending world hunger by 2030 is estimated to cost* ***only US$40 billion per year.***[82] *Even some estimates for the cost of ending extreme poverty, a momentous task, suggest this may require* ***just 0.3 percent*** *of world GDP, or around* ***US$318 billion per year.***[83]

But there are many other areas of spending which reflect militarised and securitised responses to perceived threats or security challenges which contribute to the overall costs of violence to society, communities, and the environment. For example, militarised police forces or border agencies are often not incorporated into figures on military spending, but reflect a securitised logic of how the state aims to respond to social issues and challenges, with social costs. The US as a whole (including states, cities, towns) spends more than US$118 billion USD annually on policing, with some cities spending between 30 and 60 percent of their annual budgets on police.[84]

Brown University's Costs of War project estimates that the Global War on Terror cost around US$8 trillion from the US federal budget, going beyond the Pentagon budget and encompassing the Department of Homeland Security, veterans' care and increases to bases, among others.[85] Since the late 1990s and particularly after 9/11, new challenges such as terrorism and migration have become front and center in state priorities and international cooperation priorities have aligned with that. The United Nations has dramatically expanded its work on counterterrorism, including through a dedicated UN office, a global counterterrorism strategy, and incorporation of counterterrorism into UNSC mandates.[86] This, in turn, has reinforced state capture and corruption, restricted civil society, undermined prevention and peacebuilding, advanced belligerence and closed space for transformation and conflict resolution.[87] Just in the past three years, as of 2026, counterterrorism has experienced a 700 percent increase in regular budget funding at the UN, with limited transparency.[88]

83 What Would It Cost to End Extreme Poverty? (2025). Berkeley.edu; Center for Effective Global Action.
84 Acheson, R., Geyer, K., Riccoboni, G., & Varella, L. (2024). "Petrobromance", Nuclear Priesthood, and Police Repression: Feminist Confrontations of Violent Industries, and Movements to Abolish Them. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, page 103.
85 U.S. Federal Budget. (2024, October 7). Costs of War | Brown University.
86 Saferworld & Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. (2021, September). The rise of counter-terrorism at the United Nations: Two decades later.
87 Saferworld & Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. (2021, September). The rise of counter-terrorism at the United Nations: Two decades later.
88 Homstad, K., & Donaldson, B. (2026, March 4). Where Do UN Counterterrorism Funds Go? It's Murky. - PassBlue. PassBlue.

Migration, another global phenomenon now frequently framed as a national security consideration, is also facing intense securitisation, with global spending on immigration enforcement at record levels.[89] Budget increases to immigration agencies in the United States have been steadily increasing since 2012,[90] with an exponential increase in 2025.[91] In Europe, the European Union (EU) border agency Frontex has also steadily received increased funding since 2015[92] and the EU's 2028-2034 proposed budget tripled funds for migration, border management, and internal security.[93] The US[94] and EU[95] also heavily fund border externalisation through immigration enforcement in other countries, including by supporting detention and surveillance, with adverse impacts on the human rights of people on the move. This is particularly relevant to climate and environmental movements as the climate crisis is expected to contribute to both internal and external migration, as people's lives, communities, and livelihoods are disrupted.

89 Akkerman, M. (2023, May 31). Global Spending on Immigration Enforcement Is Higher than Ever and Rising. Migrationpolicy.org.
90 Akkerman, M. (2023, May 31). Global Spending on Immigration Enforcement Is Higher than Ever and Rising. Migrationpolicy.org.
91 Altman, H., Broder, T., & D'Avanzo, B. (2025, July 8). The Anti-Immigrant Policies in Trump's Final "Big Beautiful Bill," Explained. NILC.
92 Akkerman, M. (2023, May 31). Global Spending on Immigration Enforcement Is Higher than Ever and Rising. Migrationpolicy.org.
93 EU 2028-2034 proposed budget triples funds for migration, border management and internal security. (2025, July 17). Migration and Home Affairs.
94 Human Rights First. (2025). Submission to the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants on externalization of migration governance.
95 Europe's outsourcing of border control increases risks to migrants. (2024). Doctors without Borders - USA.

II. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR THE RISE IN MILITARY SPENDING

As the UN Secretary General argued in his 2025 report on the impact of military spending on sustainable development,

> *"Recent geopolitical uncertainties have led many Governments to prioritise security through deterrence and military strength. In this environment, military expenditure is seen as a necessity to manage an increasingly unpredictable world.*[96]

However, the Secretary General warns,

> *"While rising military expenditure is not a new phenomenon, its recent intensification poses the risk of it becoming 'normalized' and regarded as inevitable.*

Globally governments cite many factors as justifications for increasing military spending, including perceived security considerations, the proliferation of conflicts across borders, regional tensions, and geopolitical uncertainty.[97] Specific factors have driven increases in military spending in recent years, some of which are explained in the section below. However, these increases cannot only be explained by singular events, but also by a logic that positions military buildup and a new arms race as the solution to the problems faced in our world today. From a feminist perspective, this reality also links closely with a global rise in right-wing, largely male-dominated leadership that is aiming to reverse hard-won gains on human rights and gender equality.[98]

This ideological underpinning behind skyrocketing militarisation is therefore important to unpack, particularly in a world marked by a growing climate crisis and multidimensional challenges to peace, human rights and sustainable development.

96 United Nations. (2025). The Security We Need Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future Report of the Secretary-General.
97 United Nations. (2025). The Security We Need Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future Report of the Secretary-General.
98 Tabbush, C. (2024, June 21). Understanding backlash against gender equality: Evidence, trends and policy responses (L. Turquet, Editor, & B. Howell, Research Assistant). UN Women.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and the subsequent response from NATO countries, has been one of the most significant factors driving the recent total increase in global military spending. Russia's military spending is now double its 2015 level, with a 38 percent increase between 2023 and 2024 alone.[99] These new commitments, paired with existing trends, led to the SG's warning of dramatically increased military spending by 2035.[100] This is despite the fact that global security continues to deteriorate overall.

Geopolitical tensions between major powers such as the United States, Russia and China also continue to drive increases in spending outside of specific armed conflicts, as well as informing the nature of such spending. For example, all three of these major military powers are rapidly aiming to modernise their militaries, including modernisation of nuclear arsenals, investing in artificial intelligence (AI) and influence operations (such as disinformation campaigns) and domains such as cyber and outer space.[101] Upgrading nuclear arsenals risks increasing nuclear threats, weakening the nonproliferation regime and pressuring other states to seek nuclear weapons.[102]

With the expiry of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) treaty in 2026, the final arms control agreement between the US and Russia, arms control is at its weakest in decades, putting the world in a new arms race.[103] These increasing tensions have been enabled through the dismantling of multilateralism and the inaction of the UNSC, particularly in the wake of the crises in Ukraine and Gaza.

Broadly, technological advancement is also leading some countries to believe they should increase military spending. For example, military AI procurement is on the rise globally,[104] risking negative social impacts and grave environmental consequences due to the energy and water requirements of AI technologies.[105]

Lack of regulation of AI on the global and national levels has left it to individual private companies to determine guardrails on military uses, despite the enormous risks these technologies pose to world peace and to people's lives.[106]

99 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. (2025). SIPRI Yearbook 2025: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security. Chapter 3: Military expenditure. SIPRI.
100 United Nations. (2025). The Security We Need Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future Report of the Secretary-General.
101 Darjan Vujica, opinion contributor. (2026, January 30). China, Russia and Iran are investing billions to influence the US midterms. The Hill.
102 Petrovics, A. (2026, January 15). Prospects and Problems for Reinvigorating Superpower Nuclear Cooperation. Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft.
103 Johnston, D. (2026, February 13). Running to Stand Still: Russian Nuclear Modernization after New START. War on the Rocks.
104 Artificial Intelligence in Military Market Size, Share, and Industry Analysis 2026-2034 (2025). Fortune Business Insights.
105 UNEP. (2024, September 21). AI Has an Environmental problem. Here's What the World Can Do about that. UNEP.
106 Vallance, C. (2026, March 3). US-Israel war with Iran: OpenAI changes deal with US after backlash. BBC.

Additionally, local considerations and dynamics also fuel militarisation, both reflecting regional realities as well as the global trend towards securitisation.

In Latin America, for example, there are no major inter-state armed conflicts, but there are high levels of violence in some countries where state militarisation and policing intersect with organised crime, armed groups, and other forms of insecurity, including in Indigenous territories, rural areas, and peripheries of urban areas.[107]

This violence, perpetrated by state forces as well as non-state actors such as paramilitaries and criminal networks, have significant impacts on women and girls, as well as women human rights defenders and environmental defenders – and is also linked with broader militarisation, extractivism and border externalisation.

107 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2025 Women's Major Group Position Paper. (2025).

4. IMPACTS OF MILITARY SPENDING

I. MILITARY SPENDING VS. HUMAN SECURITY: A CRISIS OF PRIORITIES

Assessing the impact of military spending, particularly in contrast to climate finance and other social benefits, requires examining different areas of tradeoffs. Research on the cost of violence indicates that there are a variety of ways in which violence impacts people and societies. These include direct consequences to both survivors and perpetrators, longer-term costs such as impacts to the perception of safety in society and the multiplier effect of not diverting investments towards wellbeing.[108] Many of these arguments also hold true at the societal level for military spending. In a direct sense, military spending diverts resources away from other areas that are vital for achieving the SDGs and for advancing peace. However, armed conflicts – which are fueled by military spending as well as other economies of war – also contribute to humanitarian crises, displacement, poverty and hunger while destroying social and physical infrastructure. Further, the actual cost of armed conflicts and military spending is often underestimated, with related expenses hidden below other budget lines.[109]

Such political choices have long-term consequences for economies and governance. As the UN Secretary General stated in his recent report,

> *"Reorienting economies towards the military changes the long-term outlook for public finance; affects long-term social investment in health and education, including as demographics change; and locks countries into military-centred policies, sometimes for decades.*[110]

Economists have warned that rising military spending is likely to be funded by countries taking on debt, which is alarming given existing high indebtedness levels.[111] Shifts towards militarism also foster networks of influence dedicated to sustaining such levels of military expenditure, frequently termed the military-industrial complex.

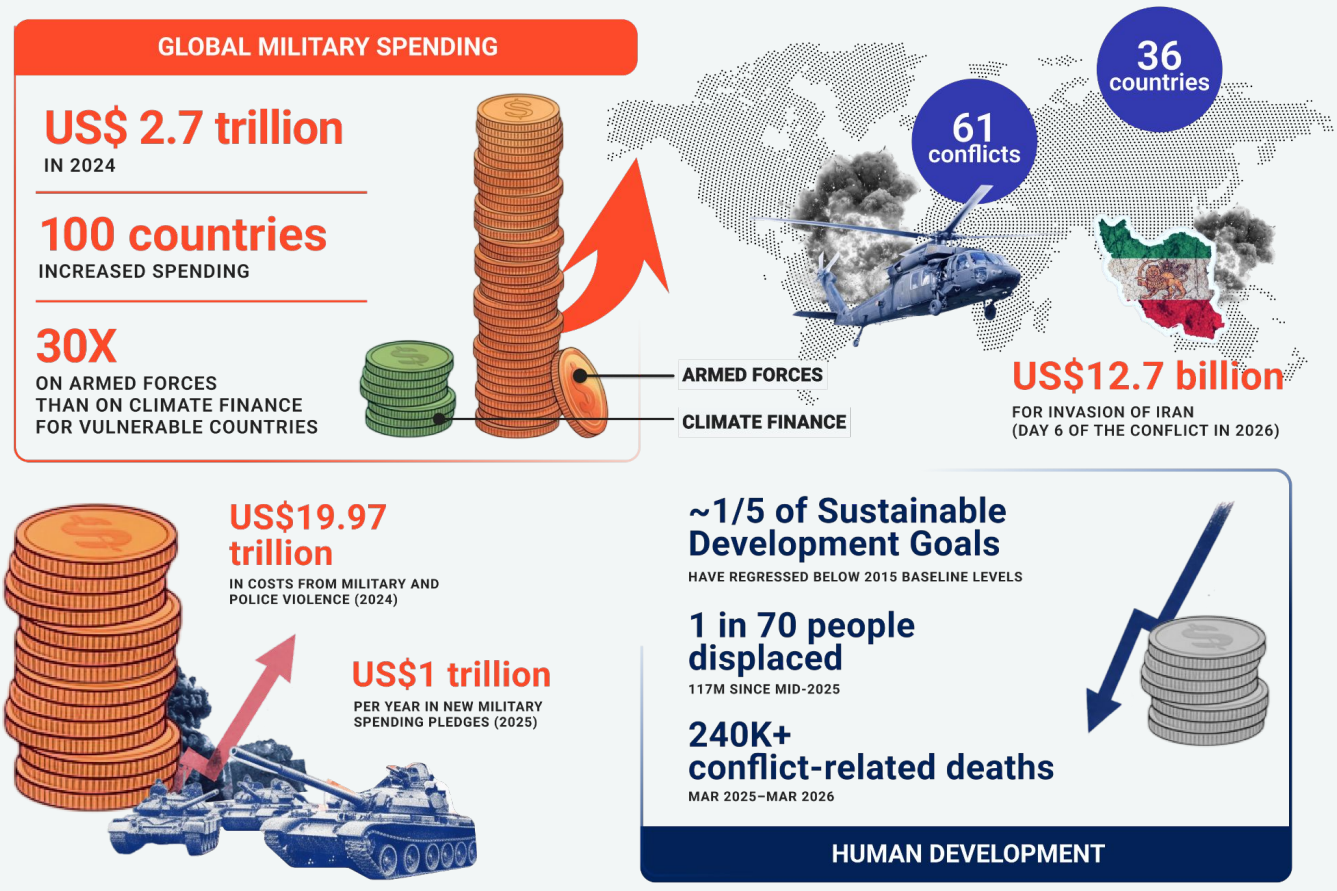
Some have argued that Big Tech companies are part of a new Digital-Military-Industrial Complex, reflecting a deep collaboration between technology companies and the state for the purposes of counterterrorism, logistics, surveillance and warfighting.[112]

108 The Economic Impact of Violence in 2025. (2025, August 28). Vision of Humanity.
109 Global defence spending continues to grow amid geopolitical uncertainty. (2026). IISS.
110 WILPF International. (2025, September 22). Military Spending, the Sustainable Development Goals, and Financing for Peace - WILPF. WILPF.
111 Letzing, J., & World Economic Forum. (2025, May 29). Global military spending surge likely to drive more public debt. World Economic Forum.
112 Coveri, A., Cozza, C., & Guarascio, D. (2025). Big Tech and the US Digital-Military-Industrial Complex. Intereconomics, 2025(2), 81–87.

Military-related procurement contracts with private companies in the United States increased thirteenfold between 2008 and 2024 and the real numbers are likely an underestimate because of the secretive nature of these contracts and initiatives.[113] Fossil fuels have been the lifeblood of modern militaries.[114] Therefore military spending can lock in national economic dependence on fossil fuels, limiting the likelihood that this trajectory will be changed in future years.[115] In this sense, military spending reorients budgets and priorities in the long term in ways that are harmful for people and the planet.

Most of the SDGs, which include ending poverty, zero hunger and health and wellbeing for all, are off track and nearly one-fifth have actually regressed below 2015 baseline levels.[116] The gap needed to finance them is approximately US$4 trillion, half of which is for energy and climate financing. This is only 1 percent of global wealth.[117] Within this, specific development priorities are achievable for a fraction of the cost of current military expenditure, with long term positive impacts on society.

MILITARY SPENDING VS. HUMAN NEED: WHO PAYS THE PRICE?



SOURCES FOR THE DATA REFERENCED IN THIS GRAPH CAN BE FOUND IN
THE DOUBLE DIVIDEND: HOW REDUCING MILITARY SPENDING CAN FINANCE A JUST TRANSITION

113 Coveri, A., Cozza, C., & Guarascio, D. (2025). Big Tech and the US Digital-Military-Industrial Complex. Intereconomics, 2025(2), 81–87.
114 Crawford, N. C. (2022). The Pentagon, Climate Change, and War. In The MIT Press eBooks. The MIT Press.
115 How increasing global military expenditure threatens SDG 13 on Climate action - CEOBS. (2025, May 29). The Conflict and Environment Observatory (CEOBS).
116 United Nations. (2025). The Security We Need Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future Report of the Secretary-General.
117 SDG Finance. (2021). UNDP.

II. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Military spending locks in carbon

Military expenditure does not only take resources away from climate finance – it directly exacerbates the climate crisis. It has been shown that an increase in military expenditure positively correlates with fossil fuel use and military-related emissions.[122] Fossil fuels have powered as well as shaped modern military force for over a century as militaries are particularly dependent on fossil fuels as an energy source. In 2019, Scientists for Global Responsibility and Conflict and Environment Observatory conservatively estimated that military activity contributes to at least 5.5 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.[123] Within five years, from 2019–2024, the combined military expenditure of NATO correlated with emissions similar to the territorial emissions of Bahrain.[124] In 2025, Tipping Point North South estimated that

> *"the top 20 military spenders alone are responsible for at least 10 billion metric tonnes of CO2 equivalent of military-related emissions during the first quarter of the 21st century,*[125]

which is the equivalent of roughly one quarter of global annual emissions, or approximately two years of US emissions.[126] This estimate does not include the substantial conflict-related emissions.

According to a recent literature review by Dr Stuart Parkinson, a pioneering researcher on military emissions, and Executive Director of Scientists for Global Responsibility, a rise in military expenditure can mean an increase in emissions in various categories – from military fuel or electricity consumption, supply-chains within the arms industry, production of raw materials and components for use in military goods and services or aircraft use.[127]

122 Dr Ho-Chih Lin , Wendela de Vries, Nick Buxton, Mark Akkerman, & Deborah Burton. (2023, October 17). Climate crossfire: How NATO's 2% military spending targets contribute to climate breakdown. Transform Defence for Sustainable Human Safety; Transnational Institute, Stop Wapenhandel, Tipping Point North South, Centre Delàs, IPPNW Germany.

123 Parkinson, S., & Cottrell, L. (2022b). Estimating the Military's Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Scientists for Global Responsibility and Conflict and Environment Observatory.

124 Parkinson, S. (2025). Military spending rises and greenhouse gas emissions: What does the research say? Scientists for Global Responsibility.

125 Lin, D. H.-C., & Burton, D. (2025, November 5). Climate Reparations for Military Emissions. Transform Defence for Sustainable Human Safety; Tipping Point North South.

126 How much carbon dioxide does the United States and the World emit each year from energy sources? (2022). Www.usgs.gov.

127 Parkinson, S. (2025). Military spending rises and greenhouse gas emissions: What does the research say? Scientists for Global Responsibility.

Military aircraft and fighter jets in particular consume excessive amounts of fossil fuels.

For example, just one military jet, the B-52 Stratocruiser, consumes about as much fuel in an hour as the average car driver uses in seven years.[128] This reflects the ways in which individual-level and consumer/level approaches to address the climate crisis also fail to meet the mark. Although individuals can and should play our part in leading more sustainable and less ecologically harmful lifestyles, these approaches are insufficient when we look at this larger context of structural harm.

If global military spending continues to increase as projected, emissions and fossil fuel use are set to rise even further. According to a 2025 publication by Scientists for Global Responsibility, a standardised spending rise of US$100 billion will lead to an increase in the military carbon footprint of approximately 32 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent with uncertainty in that figure being high due to lack of transparency in emissions along the military supply chain.[129]

As well, in 2025, NATO committed its member states to spend five percent of their GDP on the military. As a briefing by Tipping Point North South, Transnational Institute and Stop Wapenhandel finds, meeting this goal would double military spending to a total of US$19 trillion between 2025 and 2030, and would lead to an additional 840 million tonnes of emissions.[130]

The current procurement push for fossil-fuel intensive equipment, such as fighter jets that will be used for decades to come, means that militaries will be locked into fossil-fuel dependence far into the future. Militaries cannot "green" their way out of fossil-fuel dependence because there is no realistic alternative carbon-free energy source to wholesale replacing fossil fuels consumption in major military equipment. Current gas-guzzling weapon systems, such as F-35s, are expected to be in service well beyond 2050. However, even if investments into "green" technologies are taken into account, military expenditure increases would still lead to an increase in military emissions.[131]

It is important to note that cited data on militaries' emissions are only estimates. States are currently not obliged to report on their militaries' emissions in their national reporting to the UNFCCC. While some may choose to publish their military emissions independently, this is far from the full picture.[132]

128 Steichen, L., & Koshgarian, L. (2020). No Warming, No War: How Militarism Fuels the Climate Crisis — and Vice Versa. JSTOR; National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies.
129 Parkinson, S. (2025). Military spending rises and greenhouse gas emissions: What does the research say? Scientists for Global Responsibility.
130 Climate Collateral (2025 update): Why the military's impact on climate change can no longer be ignored. (2025, November 13). Transform Defence for Sustainable Human Safety; Transnational Institute, Stop Wapenhandel and Tipping Point North South/Transform Defence Project.
131 Noor, D. (2024, July 9). Nato's 2023 military spending produced about 233m metric tonnes of CO2 – report.
132 Parkinson, Dr. S. (2025). Military greenhouse gas emissions reporting: How reliable is it? Scientists for Global Responsibility.

Emissions and ecological destruction during active conflict

The above data on emissions relates to military activity in "peace" time only. Active conflict contributes to additional and significant emissions as well as ecological destruction more broadly. The use of missiles and bombs and the resulting destruction of infrastructure and entire ecosystems, including carbon sinks such as forests and the inevitable and subsequent reconstruction of the infrastructure and built environment, all combine to create immense amounts of emissions. In contexts of invasions and wars, military objectives override any environmental concerns or climate-related obligations. International law is only slowly catching up to the need to recognise the climate and wider environmental effects of armed conflicts.[133]

The US war on Iran illustrates this starkly. Within just 14 days, 5 million tonnes of CO2 were released, comparable to Iceland's entire 2024 annual emissions,[134] while costing the US a staggering $18 billion by day 18.[135] With the war ongoing at the time of writing, researchers Fred Otu-Larbi, Patrick Bigger and Benjamin Neimark warn that as it drags on, the carbon costs of this war will exponentially increase.[136]

Replenishing depleted weapons stockpiles, damage to oil infrastructure causing uncontrolled burning and the potential arrival of more countries' military forces in the region all point to a significant and rising emissions toll.[137] Reflecting on this, researcher Patrick Bigger of the Climate and Community Institute shared in a Guardian article:**"Every missile strike is another downpayment on a hotter, more unstable planet, and none of it makes anyone safer."**[138]

Beyond emissions, US-Israeli strikes hitting oil refineries, military bases, and nuclear facilities have grave environmental consequences. The cumulative effect of these attacks have created poisonous harms with long-term consequences for the whole region.[139]

With respect to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a recent study estimates that four years of war has led to an additional 311 million tonnes of CO2 emissions, comparable to the annual emissions of France.[140]

133 Neimark, B., & Mackintosh, K. (2025). How wars ravage the environment – and what international law is doing about it. TheConversation.com; The Conversation.
134 Otu-Larbi, F., Bigger, P., & Neimark, B. (2026, March 21). Two weeks of war in Iran unleashed more carbon pollution than Iceland does in a year. Substack.com; Climate and Community Institute.
135 Craft, W., Witherspoon, A., & Gedeon, J. (2026, March 19). The war on Iran cost the US $12.7bn by day six. Here's how it's been spent – in charts. The Guardian; The Guardian.
136 Otu-Larbi, F., Bigger, P., & Neimark, B. (2026, March 21). Two weeks of war in Iran unleashed more carbon pollution than Iceland does in a year. Substack.com; Climate and Community Institute.
137 Craft, W., Witherspoon, A., & Gedeon, J. (2026, March 19). The war on Iran cost the US $12.7bn by day six. Here's how it's been spent – in charts. The Guardian; The Guardian.
138 Gayle, D. (2026, March 21). US and Israel's war on Iran is a disaster for the environment, analysis shows. The Guardian.
139 Three days of Operation Epic Fury: rapid overview of environmental harm in Iran and the region - CEOBS. (2026, March 3). CEOBS.
See also: Gayle, D. (2026a, March 20). From black rain to marine pollution, the war in Iran is an environmental disaster. The Guardian.
140 de Klerk, L., Shlapak, M., Zibtsev, S., Myroniuk, V., Soshenskyi, O., Vasylyshyn, R., Krakovska, S., Kryshtop, L., & Bun, R. (2026). Climate Damage Caused By Russia's War In Ukraine. Initiative on GHG Accounting of War.

The study finds that 37 percent of additional emissions can be attributed to warfighting activities, while 23 percent is attributable to reconstruction efforts. The report notes that "Armed forces still rely heavily on fossil fuels to power tanks, armoured vehicles, and the expanding logistical networks supporting military operations. Fossil fuel consumption, for example by tanks and fighter jets, account for 90 percent of all warfare emissions. The remaining 10 percent stems primarily from ammunition production and the replacement of destroyed military hardware."[141]

Similarly, materials like concrete and steel, both carbon-intensive, are expected to account for over 80 percent of future emissions from rebuilding efforts.

In the Middle East, research published by Neimark et al.,[142] suggests that the carbon footprint of the first 15 months of Israel's genocide in Gaza is greater than the annual emissions of 36 individual countries. The same study estimated that both emissions arising from the war and projected reconstruction will produce over 32.2 million tonnes of CO_2, which would be greater than the carbon emissions of over 100 individual countries.

WARS AND MILITARY ACTIVITY: THE HIDDEN CLIMATE TOLL

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THE DOUBLE DIVIDEND: HOW REDUCING MILITARY SPENDING CAN FINANCE A JUST TRANSITION

141 de Klerk, L., Shlapak, M., Zibtsev, S., Myroniuk, V., Soshenskyi, O., Vasylyshyn, R., Krakovska, S., Kryshtop, L., & Bun, R. (2026). Climate Damage Caused By Russia's War In Ukraine. Initiative on GHG Accounting of War.

142 Neimark, B., Otu-Larbi, F., Larbi, R., Bigger, P., Cottrell, L., Lennard de Klerk, & Mykola Shlapak. (2025). War on the Climate: A Multitemporal Study of Greenhouse Gas Emissions of the Israel-Gaza Conflict. SSRN.

Military expenditure supercharging "false solutions"

Looking ahead, states and the military-industrial complex may lean on "false" solutions in response to a worsening climate crisis. 'False' solutions include carbon capture and storage (CCS),[143] nature-based solutions including offsets, carbon markets,[144] geoengineering, as well as the concept of "net zero".[145]

As Andreas Malm and Wim Carton assert in their new book The Long Heat: "If there is one theme that runs unbrokenly through the history of weather control over the past two centuries, it is that of military power".[146] While geoengineering is not a form of weather control but a climate modification technology, they deploy shared techniques such as cloud seeding while stratospheric aerosol injection echoes the logic of weather modification. In light of this, experts warn that geoengineering technologies risk becoming entangled with military interests in several ways.[147]

As researchers seek to develop a dangerous technology, they have turned to arms companies such as Airbus, Boeing, and Lockheed Martin. Operationalised geoengineering programmes would require contracts with these exact defence and aerospace firms, thereby funneling large amounts of public money to major arms companies, further supercharging these companies' already excess profits.[148]

In October 2025, Israeli company Stardust raised US$60 million in venture capital to develop commercial-scale solar geoengineering technologies for sale to governments and militaries.[149] Since its founding in 2023, its major investors have included a multinational Israeli-American-Canadian firm specialising in "security, intelligence, and technology," with contracts spanning the Israeli Ministry of Defense, the CIA, FBI, Mossad and MI5.[150]

143 CCS has been found to not be carbon neutral and gives the fossil fuel industry a license to continue burning fossil fuels. See for example: Drugmand, D., & Muffett , C. (n.d.). Confronting the Myth of Carbon-Free Fossil Fuels: Why Carbon Capture Is Not a Climate Solution. Center for International Environmental Law.

144 With respect to carbon markets, analysis of 25 years of evidence points to a total failure in reducing emissions. See: Romm, J., Lezak, S., & Amna Alshamsi. (2025). Are Carbon Offsets Fixable? Annual Review of Environment and Resources, 50(1), 649–680.

145 Acheson, R., Geyer, K., Riccoboni, G., & Varella, L. (2024). "Petrobromance", Nuclear Priesthood, and Police Repression: Feminist Confrontations of Violent Industries, and Movements to Abolish Them. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

146 Malm, A., & Carton, W. (2025). The Long Heat. Verso Books. Chapter 18: Empire of the Stratosphere, Section Climate power grows out of the barrel of the gun (and vice versa) pg 1195 of 1990.

147 Sovacool, B. K., Baum, C., & Low, S. (2023). The next climate war? Statecraft, security, and weaponization in the geopolitics of a low-carbon future. Energy Strategy Reviews, 45, 101031.

148 Lin, Dr. H.-C., & Burton, D. (2024). Excess Profits Tax On The Arms Industry to fund international climate finance. Tipping Point North South.

149 Hiar, C., & Mathiesen, K. (2025, October 31). Global cooling startup raises $60M to test sun-reflecting technology. Politico.

150 Ribeiro, S. (2025, December 17). Solar Geoengineering for War and Profit - Geoengineering Monitor. Geoengineering Monitor.

According to the Geoengineering Monitor, Stardust also actively promotes its connections to the Israeli military and has flagged the possibility of future acquisition by the US government.[151] CEO Yanai Yedvab has described the fundraising as "a major vote of confidence" in the company's strategy of landing government contracts to deploy its technology at global scale.[152] Stardust has not yet disclosed where it plans to conduct its "outdoor contained experiments" but the Israeli military has a long history of testing new weapons technologies on Palestinians.[153] This prospect illustrates a broader risk. Governments will direct public resources toward highly speculative and dangerous technologies that compound social and environmental injustices, while deepening ties to the military-industrial complex and diverting funds away from genuine climate solutions.

Beyond solar geoengineering, researchers have also raised concerns about the military's ties to carbon removal technologies. One expert argued that any intervention at this scale inevitably draws in the military-industrial complex – not necessarily by design, but simply because large engineering programmes of this kind have always generated spillover benefits for weapons and war research and infrastructure.[154] NATO's Defense Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) for example invests in start ups developing dual-use technologies, including energy resilience. Selected start-ups include Hydrogen Refinery which is working on "carbon negative e-fuels and e-fertilisers from waste."[155]

151 Ribeiro, S. (2025, December 17). Solar Geoengineering for War and Profit - Geoengineering Monitor. Geoengineering Monitor.

152 Hiar, C., & Mathiesen, K. (2025, October 31). Global cooling startup raises $60M to test sun-reflecting technology. Politico.

153 Geoengineering Press Release: Palestinian Institute for Climate Strategy launches investigation into US-Israeli startup following concerns over potential violation of de facto geoengineering moratorium. (2025). Palclimateinstitute.org; The Palestinian Institute for Climate Strategy.
See also: Dowling, P. (2023, November 17). Dirty secret of Israel's weapons exports: They're tested on Palestinians. Al Jazeera.

154 Sovacool, B. K., Baum, C., & Low, S. (2023). The next climate war? Statecraft, security, and weaponization in the geopolitics of a low-carbon future. Energy Strategy Reviews, 45, 101031.

155 See: Hydrogen Refinery H2R - Home.

Through public subsidies, procurement contracts and favourable regulatory frameworks, states in Europe and North America have channelled billions of dollars into these technologies while slashing funding for just transitions in the Global South. The US Inflation Reduction Act for instance offered huge tax relief incentives for CCS for high-emitting companies.[156] The IRA followed a 2021 infrastructure law which had already included "$100 million for the Department of Energy to design pipelines to transport compressed CO2 emissions to underground storage sites, $2.1 billion in loans and grants for the private sector to build the pipelines and $3.5 billion to construct four "hub" facilities to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere," as noted by a Time article, which also pointed out that these investments will mean the sequestration of "less than 0.1% of the CO2 the U.S. emits each year".[157]

The European Union's Net Zero Industry Act,[158] adopted in 2024, similarly fast-tracks permits for carbon capture infrastructure, locking in fossil fuel dependency under the guise of climate action. As one of its recent iterations, the EU's Industrial Carbon Management Strategy (ICMS) seeks to increase carbon capture targets to 450Mt by 2050 which is set to cost European taxpayers a staggering €16 billion. The total cost of Europe's planned CCS projects are estimated at €520 billion, of which as much as €140 billion will be required from taxpayers.[160] These false solutions, actively enabled by Global North governments, entrench extractive corporate profiteering, while the ever worsening impacts of the climate crisis are socialised globally.

156 CATF | Carbon Capture and the Inflation Reduction Act. (n.d.).
157 de la Garza, A. (2022). The Inflation Reduction Act is a Carbon Capture Bonanza. Time.
158 European Commission. (2024). The Net-Zero Industry Act. Single-Market-Economy.ec.europa.eu.
159 Balanyá, B. (2024). Carbon capture doesn't work — yet the EU is going for it . Corporateeurope.org; Corporate Europe Observatory.
160 Balanyá, B. (2024). Carbon capture doesn't work — yet the EU is going for it . Corporateeurope.org; Corporate Europe Observatory.

Finally, it would be remiss not to mention nuclear energy in the context of taxpayers' investments into misguided "climate solutions".

Nuclear energy is often presented as a low-carbon alternative to fossil fuels, yet a transition to nuclear energy has been shown to prolong the fossil fuel industry for decades.[161] Nuclear energy is not carbon neutral, is prone to accidents at nuclear reactor sites and carries other ecological and social risks throughout the entire nuclear supply chain.[162] Despite these concerns, the US Energy Department has invested billions in recent months to expand the country's nuclear energy infrastructure,[163] while China's nuclear power construction investment reached a record high of 146.9 billion yuan ($20.16 billion in 2024.[164] In a significant policy shift, the World Bank ended its longstanding exclusion of nuclear power from its financing in June 2025[165] and the Asian Development Bank similarly removed its exclusion in November 2025.[166]

While investments into nuclear energy are not formally categorised as "military" expenditure – nuclear energy remains closely linked to militarism and nuclear weapons proliferation.[167] Nuclear infrastructure shares technologies with military nuclear programmes, including uranium mining, enrichment and plutonium reprocessing. Expanding nuclear power therefore risks strengthening systems associated with nuclear weapons development while diverting attention and investment away from renewable energy solutions that can be deployed more rapidly and safely. It does not address the structural drivers of fossil fuel dependence, and introduces additional environmental and security risks.

161 Acheson, R., Geyer, K., Riccoboni, G., & Varella, L. (2024). "Petrobromance", Nuclear Priesthood, and Police Repression: Feminist Confrontations of Violent Industries, and Movements to Abolish Them. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.
162 M.V. Ramana. (2024). Nuclear is Not the Solution. Verso Books.
163 Fact Sheet: The Energy Department Is Delivering On Accelerating The Deployment Of Nuclear Power. (2026, January 19). Energy.gov; US Department of Energy.
164 China can build over 40 nuclear units at once, report says. (2025, April 28). Qazinform.com; Kazinform International News Agency.
165 World Bank ends ban on funding nuclear energy. (2025). World Nuclear News.
166 Xinhua. (2025). ADB opens door to nuclear power support under new energy policy. China Daily.
167 M.V. Ramana. (2026, February 24). The Innate and Inseparable Ties Between Nuclear Weapons and Energy. CounterPunch.org; CounterPunch.

The climate crisis as a "threat multiplier"

Instead of recognising that fossil-fuel powered military activity and conflict play a key role in exacerbating the climate crisis, governments and militaries position the military-industrial complex as the solution to a crisis they have significantly contributed to.[168] This narrative serves to justify further military spending increases.

For example, Global North-based militaries and military alliances have described the conflict-potential of the fossil-fuelled climate crisis as a "threat multiplier". This framework looks at direct threats to national security–such as military operations–as well as indirect "threats" of conflict and violence or mass migration, that are exacerbated by the climate crisis.[169]

Militaries have also been increasing their involvement in activities relating to humanitarian and natural disaster relief. For example, the US military has a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief program, aiming to show a "softer side" to the military's presence abroad.[170] Countries including Australia, Canada, India, Japan, and South Africa have also responded to disasters within their own regions by deploying military personnel.[171] Increasingly, researchers are tracking the ways in which militaries have expanded their footprint to respond to hurricanes, floods, wildfires, heatwaves, and other climate-related issues.[172] Military alliances such as NATO are also involved in environmental and climate-security topics, with NATO having adopted a Climate Change and Security Action Plan in 2021.[173] This changing landscape for emergency assistance over time has elevated the role of the military in society in legitimising its involvement in non-military activities and, as a consequence, legitimising further increases in military expenditures.

168 Buxton, N. (2021). A primer on climate security The dangers of militarising the climate crisis transnationalinstitute ideas into movement. Transnational Institute.

169 Acheson, R., Geyer, K., Riccoboni, G., & Varella, L. (2024). "Petrobromance", Nuclear Priesthood, and Police Repression: Feminist Confrontations of Violent Industries, and Movements to Abolish Them. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

170 The U.S. Military's Role In Disaster Relief. (n.d.). Vehicles for Veterans.
See also: Wiharta, S., Randall, T., Ahmad, H., Haine, J.-Y., & Löfgren, J. (2008). The Effectiveness of Foreign Military Assets in Natural Disaster Response. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

171 Wiharta, S., Randall, T., Ahmad, H., Haine, J.-Y., & Löfgren, J. (2008). The Effectiveness of Foreign Military Assets in Natural Disaster Response. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

172 Cusick, D. (2023). New Tool Tracks Military Deployments to Climate Disasters. Scientific American.

173 NATO. (2022, July 26). Environment, climate change and security. NATO.

Military expenditure risks hijacking transition minerals[174]

Military demand is actively competing with and in many cases overriding, the resource needs of a genuine just transition.[175] In 2024, the UK government announced the financing for “critical” mineral importers.[176] However, Global Justice Now found in its analysis that over half of the minerals designated by the UK government as “critical” play “no major role” in the green transition but are in high demand by the military-industrial complex.[177] Similarly, NATO's list of 12 "defence-critical" raw materials[178] has nothing to do with the renewable energy transition. The current US administration, openly denying the climate crisis, has also intensified its efforts to secure minerals for its “military preparedness,” including through an Executive Order which announced urgent measures to secure US access to minerals.[179]

This dynamic should not come as a surprise. Historically, military priorities have always shaped which resources are deemed "critical" and how they are extracted, from coal powering Napoleonic naval fleets to oil driving the First World War and uranium fueling Cold War nuclear arsenals.[180] Today's “critical” minerals rush repeats this pattern. Military priorities and related military expenditure are driving the minerals agenda, shaping extraction priorities, supply chain investment and geopolitical competition, often at severe human and ecological cost to frontline and Global South communities.[181]

Skyrocketing military expenditure, combined with the military-industrial complex’ priorisation and extraction of minerals are therefore key obstacles to climate justice and a just transition agenda that meaningfully benefits frontline communities.

174 This section is based on a draft briefing paper written by Deborah Burton and Karen Hallows.
175 Aniket Narawad. (2025). How defence is reshaping the critical minerals supply chain. Sustainableviews.com.
176 Courea, E. (2024, October 24). State-backed loans to go to firms importing critical minerals into UK. The Guardian.
177 Rickard, C., & Bannister, L. (2025). Material realities: Who needs “critical minerals” and at whose expense? Global Justice Now.
178 NATO releases list of 12 defence-critical raw materials. (2025). North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).
179 The White House. (2025, January 21). Declaring a National Energy Emergency. The White House.
180 Johnstone, P., & Marín, A. (2025). Military drivers of critical minerals extraction: impacts on development and sustainability. Institute of Development Studies.
181 Rainsford, C. (2025). Critical minerals: Once mined for renewables, now for war. Global Witness.

III. MISTRUST, HEIGHTENED TENSION, COMPETITION

Militarisation, namely, the process of increased influence and entrenchment of militaries into social, economic and political relations, is underpinned by a logic of militarism.[182]

Militarism is rooted in ideas such as hierarchy, obedience and the use of force[183] which legitimise violence through the belief that countries should maintain strong militaries and even pursue aggression to advance particular interests. In a world with profound inequalities within and between nations, patriarchy, colonial legacies and intersecting forms of structural injustice, militarism bolsters the existing social order to the detriment of those who are subjugated by it and struggle at its margins. On a normative level, higher rates of military spending – and diversion of resources away from social wellbeing – also legitimise the idea that violence is an appropriate and justified way to resolve disputes.

Today's level of militarisation is particularly dangerous, as it exists in a climate where the infrastructure for multilateralism, arms control and global cooperation is simultaneously being weakened and technology is advancing at rapid speed without necessary guardrails. Arms control agreements that were instituted towards the end of the Cold War have collapsed, contributing to a new global arms race.[184] Disarmament treaties are also being abandoned by states, as exemplified by recent withdrawals of some states from the Mine Ban Treaty[185] and the Convention on Cluster Munitions.[186] The world is also more unpredictable and insecure. Armed conflicts are becoming more protracted and fewer conflicts are being brought to an end through inclusive, comprehensive peace agreements that have the backing of the UN and global community. The UN's role in mediation has declined in contrast to third-party mediation[187] with a particular crisis of legitimacy for the UNSC that has failed to subvert new levels of geopolitical deadlock.

183 UN Women. (2022). THE IMPACT OF MILITARIZATION ON GENDER INEQUALITY.
184 Lindstaedt, N. (2025, May 29). Global Military Spending Surges As Arms Control Mechanisms Collapse. Forbes.
185 Five European States Withdraw from Mine Ban Treaty. (2025, July). Human Rights Watch.
186 ICRC Warns of Civilian Harm as Cluster Munitions Ban is Eroded. (2025, March 5). International Committee of the Red Cross.
187 Benomar, J. (2023, August 30). What Happened to the UN's Mediation Abilities? - PassBlue. PassBlue.

The UN Secretary General has warned that rising military spending is emblematic of the way that disputes and conflicts are managed, reshaping the international security landscape. This results in weakened architecture for prevention, erosion of trust and cooperative security and drifting away from multilateralism, which in turn contributes to heightened insecurity and more difficulty implementing positive commitments, such as on climate action.[188] Rising military spending is therefore both a consequence and a driver of a weakened UN and multilateral system, whereby states no longer possess the same trust in collective security architecture and instead view it as logical to turn inwards towards a narrow form of defense.[189]

Although there is a debate about the exact relationship between military spending, likelihood of armed conflict and intensity of violence, research indicates that higher military spending does have adverse impacts on peace.[190]

Firstly, when one country increases their military spending, neighboring countries in particular often increase spending due to the perceived impact on their strategic stability.[191] This is true even outside of formal military alliances with spending commitments, such as NATO.[192] Historically, including notably before World War I and World War II, rising military spending has been correlated with arms races, which have in turn led to armed conflicts breaking out.[193]

Those who talk exclusively about weakened multilateralism miss the fact that cooperation is still happening and even intensifying in some areas, such as counterterrorism, surveillance, and border externalisation. It is, however, in areas that advance militarism over climate justice and peace.

188 United Nations. (2025). The Security We Need Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future Report of the Secretary-General.
189 Cusimano, S. (2025, September 23). Does Growing Military Spending Spell the United Nations' Decline — Or Make It More Relevant than Ever? Centre for International Governance Innovation.
190 Mitchell D, Pickering J (2017). Arms Buildups and the Use of Military Force. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics.
191 Moon, A-Young. (2021). 1 Things We Should Consider about Global Military Spending for educators dedicated to peace. PEACEMOMO and International Peace Bureau.
192 North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (2025). Defence expenditures and NATO's 5% commitment. Site Name Seo.
193 Mitchell D, Pickering J (2017). Arms Buildups and the Use of Military Force. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics.
194 The Economic Impact of Violence in 2025. (2025, August 28). Vision of Humanity.

Some analysis has also indicated that new technologies are upending the traditional logic of deterrence, as their rapid evolution makes it harder to estimate another country's true military capabilities.[195] Even if spending does not necessarily lead directly to a new war breaking out, research indicates that there is a correlation between higher military spending and the overall cost of war, such as more casualties in armed conflicts, with only modest gains in so-called deterrence.[196] This also has implications within countries. There is some evidence to indicate that leaders sometimes turn to internal or external aggression as a way to consolidate their power including during periods of weakened legitimacy.[197]

These risks have led feminist peace activists Ray Acheson and Madeleine Rees to argue that:

> *"Military spending—not its volume or level, but rather the absolute nature of it, the roots of it and the consequences it has had for ordering our societies and international relations—has thus far condemned us to live within systems of violence and exploitation.*[198]

Securitisation has become the norm for tackling more crises and issues, including the climate emergency or migration flows.[199] Although governments use language of security and protection to justify their spending on militaries, civilians continue to pay the price for war and violence.[200] Prioritising military spending therefore does not tackle underlying structural drivers of violence, conflict and instability, but rather exacerbates them by raising the stakes, weakening other responses to conflict and violence and making war and harm more likely.

195 How increasing global military expenditure threatens SDG 13 on Climate action - CEOBS. (2025, May 29). The Conflict and Environment Observatory (CEOBS).
196 Efraim Benmelech, & Monteiro, J. (2025). Military Spending and War. National Bureau of Economic Research, WORKING PAPER 34123.
197 Preparing for the Wrong War? The need to broaden the focus beyond defence spending towards a comprehensive approach to peace and security. (2025, November 4). Global Policy Journal.
198 Acheson, R., & Rees, M. (2020). "A feminist approach for addressing excessive military spending" in UNODA Occasional Papers Rethinking Unconstrained Military Spending.
199 Calvo Rufanges, J. (2021, May). No business without enemies: War and the arms trade. TNI Longreads; Transnational Institute.
200 Reaching Critical Will. (n.d.). Critical issues: Military Spending. Www.reachingcriticalwill.org.

5. THE CASE FOR REDIRECTING MILITARY EXPENDITURE TO THE GLOBAL JUST TRANSITION

I. DECADES OF CONSENSUS: THE UN'S CASE AGAINST EXCESSIVE MILITARY EXPENDITURE

From the founding of the UN, the reduction of military expenditure has been a core goal of the multilateral system. Article 26 of the UN Charter tasks the UN Security Council with creating a plan to regulate armaments, with the express aim of promoting international peace and security "with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources."[201]

Over the past 80 years, multiple UN instruments have documented the ways in which militarism – and its manifestation in military spending – adversely impacts human rights, the environment, women's rights, and development.[202]

The connection between military spending reductions and development was first made explicitly in the mid-1960s, when Global South countries rallied around the demand that resources released through disarmament should be directed toward UN development objectives. In 1965, the General Assembly adopted a resolution encouraging governments to study the economic and social aspects of disarmament.[203]

Between 1970 and 1988, the UN produced detailed analysis on the economic and social consequences of the arms race and rising military expenditure. A 1971 expert report[204] unanimously concluded that a substantial reduction in global military expenditures should be brought about as soon as possible and that halting the arms race would increase the possibility of providing additional aid to developing countries. The report laid the groundwork for the UN's argument that resources freed from military spending could help close the development gap between rich and poor nations.

201 United Nations. (1945). United Nations Charter.
202 For a comprehensive historical overview of the United Nations' efforts to reduce military spending, see Spies, M. (2019). United Nations Efforts to Reduce Military Expenditures. United Nations.
203 UN General Assembly Resolution: Conversion to peaceful needs of the resources released by disarmament. (1965). United Nations.
204 United Nations. (1971). Economic and social consequences of the armaments race and its extremely harmful effects on world peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General.

In 1976, virtually all countries of the world met to discuss disarmament and adopted a declaration regarding military spending as a "colossal waste", diverting scarce resources urgently needed in developing countries, observing that

> *"the hundreds of billions of dollars spent annually on the manufacture or improvement of weapons are in sombre and dramatic contrast to the want and poverty in which two-thirds of the world's population live.*[205]

Other **landmark UN documents** referencing the vast detrimental impacts of military spending include the 1982 UN study on the relationship between disarmament and development,[206] the 1992 Rio Declaration,[207] Agenda 21[208] and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action amongst others.

More **recent disarmament instruments** also speak to military expenditure. The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT),[210] with 118 states parties and 53 signatory states, as the first legally binding international instrument to regulate conventional weapons transfers, incorporates the language of Article 26 of the UN Charter.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW),[211] with currently 74 states parties and 95 signatories, underlines in its preamble the waste of economic and human resources for nuclear weapons production and modernisation.

UN human rights mechanisms also have reinforced the need for military expenditure re-allocation. In 2014, the Independent Expert on Democratic and Equitable International Order urged states to cut military spending to invest in education, healthcare and for research into sustainable sources of energy and for the promotion of sustainable development.[212] In 2016, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on the situation of human rights in North Korea, expressing concern over government policies that prioritise military spending at the expense of citizens' access to food.[213] The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights drew a pointed connection between arms transfers and resource diversion, noting that weapons procurement can come with an "opportunity cost" in social sectors, such as health and education.[214]

205 United Nations. (1976). Declaration on Disarmament Tenth Special Session of the UN General Assembly.
206 United Nations (1982). The relationship between disarmament and development. UN Group of Governmental Experts on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development.
207 United Nations. (1992). Rio Declaration on Environment and Development 1992.
208 United Nations (1992). Agenda 21.
209 United Nations (1995). Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.
211 United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.
212 On Global Day, UN expert urges less military spending, more investment in development. (2014, April 14). UN News.
213 United Nations. (2016, April 8). Situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea :: resolution /: adopted by the Human Rights Council on 23 March 2016. United Nations Digital Library System; UN.
214 A/HRC/44/29: The impact of arms transfers on human rights: 2020 report. (2020). OHCHR.

In line with past SGs, current UN Secretary General António Guterres has repeatedly called for the reduction and reallocation of military expenditure towards climate justice, the Sustainable Development Goals and social and economic development. Key documents include his 2018 Agenda for Disarmament: Securing our Common Future,[215] his annual reports on Women, Peace, and Security;[216] the 2023 New Agenda for Peace[217] and the landmark 2025 report The Security We Need: Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future[218] produced in follow-up to the Pact for the Future.[219]

In terms of climate instruments, Article 2.1(c) of the Paris Agreement obliges states to "mak[e] finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate resilient development." This involves both increasing and better climate-aligning all financial flows. This should be done through regulatory frameworks and policy measures, and actively divesting and shifting away from financial activities exacerbating the climate crisis, including those with continued high or increased emissions and those perpetuating fossil fuel use. As WILPF has proposed elsewhere, it can therefore be argued that increased military spending undermines the mandate of Article 2.1(c) and should be progressively reduced.[220]

Military spending has also been introduced as an alternative source of funding in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group III in its contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report (March 2023), where it explored a reallocation as "(…) moderate reductions in military spending (which may involve conflict resolution and cross-country agreements on arms limitations) could free up considerable resources for the SDG agenda, both in the countries reducing spending and in the form of ODA." [221]

The breadth and consistency of UN engagement on military spending is striking. The multilateral system has repeatedly and unambiguously identified military expenditure as a diversion of resources urgently needed elsewhere. As the climate crisis demands urgent reorientation of global finance, the established UN foundation provides a strong argumentative basis to reduce and redirect military expenditure toward climate finance, as both legally grounded and morally necessary.

215 United Nations (2018). Agenda for Disarmament.
216 See for example: United Nations Security Council (2021). Women and Peace and Security. Report of the Secretary-General.
217 United Nations (2023). Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda For Peace.
218 United Nations. (2025). The Security We Need Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future Report of the Secretary-General.
219 United Nations. (2025). The Security We Need Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future Report of the Secretary-General.
220 Benzing, M., & Geyer, K. (2024). Towards Climate Justice: Redistributing Military Spending to Climate Finance Linking Militarism and Climate Finance. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.
221 Lecocq, F., H. Winkler, J.P. Daka, S. Fu, J.S. Gerber, S. Kartha, V. Krey, H. Lofgren, T. Masui, R. Mathur, J. Portugal-Pereira, B. K. Sovacool, M. V. Vilariño, N. (2022). Mitigation and development pathways in the near- to mid-term. In IPCC, 2022: Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

II. A GROWING CIVIL SOCIETY AND CLIMATE JUSTICE MOVEMENT

There is a rapidly growing movement of civil society organisations, activists, researchers, think tanks, and Nobel Peace Laureates calling for the reduction and reallocation of military spending to climate finance. Across movements, there is increasing recognition that militarism and by extension, military expenditure, is a key obstacle to climate justice.

WILPF has been a pioneer in this space. Its long-standing "You Get What You Pay For" campaign, launched in 2006, has consistently highlighted the funding gaps for social and ecological needs against the backdrop of expanding military budgets.

As early as 2008, WILPF published a statement connecting military spending to the climate crisis, calling on **"governments to allocate their military expenditures... towards addressing a real security threat such as catastrophic climate change,"** and warning:

> *"We must have a paradigm shift in resource allocation. We can meet this challenge, but only if we are prepared to face the fact that bombs, guns, cluster bombs and landmines will not deter or remove the threat of a tsunami, a hurricane, a flood, a virus, or a water shortage.*[222]

In 2025, WILPF re-launched its campaign "Move the Money: Stop Funding War, Start Building Peace," including the demand to redirect funds from military spending to ecological regeneration.[223]

The Global Campaign on Military Spending (GCOMS) launched in 2011 by the International Peace Bureau, including the annual Global Days of Action on Military Spending (GDAMS), has been the longest-running annual campaign to tackle excessive military spending.[224] Since 2023, it has increasingly foregrounded the climate crisis, exposing the opportunity cost of military budgets and the links between militarisation and environmental destruction under the banner *"War Costs Us the Earth."* Its 2026 campaign has been endorsed by over 200 organisations ranging from trade unions to the education sector and climate justice organisations.

222 WILPF Statement to the Conference on Disarmament on International Women's Day 2008. (2008). Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.
223 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Move the Money: Stop Funding War– Start Funding Peace.
224 Global Campaign on Military Spending. About Us.

UNFCCC-recognised civil society constituencies have followed suit in making the connections between military spending reductions and climate justice.The Women and Gender Constituency (WGC), representing hundreds of feminist organisations across the globe, in its submission on the Baku to Belem roadmap for instance, proposes to mobilise climate finance through redirecting military expenditures.[225] Climate Action Network (CAN), the world's largest climate network made up of more than 1,900 civil society organisations, also has included the disruption of militarism in its five-year strategy (2025–2030) as a strategic aim.[226]

In its COP28 policy document, CAN notes,

> *"We ask leaders to reduce and re-allocate military spending to reduce emissions and to provide adequate, scaled-up finance as this is a critical enabler of ambitious climate action."* [227]

In a submission on a new climate finance goal in 2024, CAN suggests taxing companies in high-emitting sectors including the military industry and to redirect excess profits to climate finance.[228]

Building on this, CAN's press release after the conclusion of the 2025 Bonn Climate Change Conference notes that

> *"Even as NATO leaders just 200km away pledged more than US$1 trillion a year in additional military spending, rich polluting countries showed up at the climate talks pleading poverty. The silence on war, genocide, and rising global inequality was deafening.*[229]

The significance of CAN increasingly centring on this issue should not be underestimated. In recent years, its 'escalation' tactic – mobilising across constituencies – has helped deliver landmark outcomes: the establishment of a Loss and Damage Fund at COP27, the recognition of the need to phase out fossil fuels at COP28, and the establishment of a Just Transition Work Programme at COP30.

225 Submission by the Women and Gender Constituency (WGC) on the "Baku to Bélem Roadmap to 1.3T" General overarching comments. (2025). Women and Gender Constituency (WGC).
226 CAN 5-YEAR STRATEGY. (2025). Climate Action Network (CAN).
227 COP28: TOWARDS SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION FOR A JUST AND EQUITABLE FUTURE ANNUAL POLICY DOCUMENT. (2023). Climate Action Network (CAN).
228 Climate Action Network (CAN) submission on the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG). (2024). Climate Action Network (CAN).
229 Taaffe, D. (2025, June 26). Breakthrough for Justice at Bonn climate talks amid a system in crisis - Climate Action Network. Climate Action Network.

Beyond official UNFCCC constituencies, the Environment, Climate, Conflict, and Peace (ECCP) Community of Practice,[230] a collective of more than 1,300 individuals around the world working for more than 400 organisations and institutions, included demands for military reallocation in previous COP policy asks.[231] The Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative has also called out the discrepancy between global military spending and available climate finance, such as in its COP29 briefing[232] and elaborates, together with its partner organisation WILPF, on these intersections in the policy brief 'Stop Fossil Fuels from Fuelling Conflict'.[233] Other key organisations that have led to consolidate military reallocation demands at the multilateral level include the Quakers United Nations Office,[8] the Conflict and Environment Observatory (CEOBS), Tipping Point North South,[234] the Transnational Institute, Peace Boat, the Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, and WILPF, as well as many Global South Climate Justice activists such as Mitzi Jonelle Tan, Ayshka Najib, Lia Mai Torres and many others.

Beyond multilateral spaces, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Israel's genocide in Gaza, and other recent geopolitical developments have brought the connections between militarism and the climate crisis into sharper focus amongst peace and climate organisations, academics and the broader public. These themes have gained further traction through the Global Week of Action for Peace and Climate Justice, which in 2025 mobilised movements across the world under the banner 'Divest from war – invest in the just transition.[9]

Yet despite decades of evidence, advocacy, and growing cross-movement consensus, military budgets have continued their relentless upward trajectory.

This is a stark reminder that the problem is not a lack of alternatives, but a lack of political will to listen to those proposing them.

Decision-makers continue to prop up the military-industrial complex and geopolitical elites whose interests are bound up in the very structures driving both militarism and the climate crisis, while systematically marginalising the feminist, Indigenous and Global South perspectives that have long offered more just and sustainable visions of security. **If we are serious about a world that is peaceful, equitable and ecologically viable, we must be equally serious about who gets to shape that world. This means challenging existing institutions and frames of thought as insufficient and unrepresentative, exposing the profits and power that lie behind establishment thinking and building new forums and movements in which those most affected by war and the climate crisis are recognised as the credible experts they already are.**

230 ECCP Community of Practice.
231 Peace@COP Policy Asks. (2023). ECCP Community of Practice.
232 COP29 Pay up to power forward: finance the transition away from oil, gas and coal. (2024). Fossil Fuel Treaty.
233 Geyer, K. (2024). STOP FOSSIL FUELS FROM FUELLING CONFLICT: Why the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty is an essential climate tool for peace. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative.
234 See for example: TPNS Participation at COP29. (2024, December 4). Transform Defence for Sustainable Human Safety.

III. AN INCREASING NUMBER OF GOVERNMENTS SPEAKING OUT

A growing number of governments have used the world's largest climate talks (COP) to call out the stark discrepancy between increased military spending and the chronic underfunding of climate action. Against the backdrop of escalating wars and genocide, there too is a growing awareness of the intersection of climate injustice and military spending amongst world leaders.

At COP28, Brazilian President Lula stated, "It is unacceptable that the promise of US$100 billion a year made by the 'developed' countries will not come to fruition while, in 2021 alone, military spending reached US$2.2 trillion."[235]

At COP29, Nepal called for "the vast resources spent on arms [to] be redirected to adaptation and mitigation efforts."[236] At the same COP, Mexico proposed dedicating "1 percent of military spending to a reforestation programme that would restore 15 million hectares,"[237] while Panama observed, "Global military spending stands at about US$2.5 trillion yearly. US$2.5 trillion to kill each other is not too much, but 1 trillion to save lives is unreasonable."[238] As well, in the lead up to COP29, during a Press Conference at the UN General Assembly, the Chair of the Alliance of Small State Islands (AOSIS) Fatumanava III Dr. Paolelei Luteru observed,

> *"It is also incredibly disheartening to hear of leaders from developed countries now changing their tune and amending their climate finance commitments to climate 'ambitions'...It is a very bitter pill to swallow when we see bigger countries somehow conjuring endless streams of money to finance military conflicts with no end in sight. Last year, 2023, saw the world military expenditure increase for the ninth consecutive year, reaching a total of $2,443 billion. Funds for military conflicts and aggressions? Available at the ready. Yet funds to save lives and livelihoods from the climate crisis are continuously delayed. I do not need to remind you of the long overdue delivery of the $100 billion goal – and how grossly inadequate it has proven to be.*[239]

235 WILPF International. (2024, November 18). 10 Things You Should Know About Militarism and Climate Finance. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

236 Statement by Right Honourable Mr. Ramchandra Paudel, President, and the Leader of Nepali Delegation at the CoP29 World Leaders Climate Action Summit (Baku, 12 November 2024). (2024).

237 At COP29, Mexico reiterates President Sheinbaum's proposal to allocate 1% of military spending to reforestation. (2024). Gob.mx; Gobierno de Mexico.

238 Rich countries slammed at Cop29 for spending more on wars and weapons than preventing climate change. (2024). Morning Star.

239 AOSIS Sept 23rd Press Conference – NCQG – Alliance of Small Island States. (2024, September 23). Aosis.org. as seen in
ROBBING PETER TO PAY PAUL: THE SDGs vs RISING MILITARY EXPENDITURES. Addressing The Significant And Negative Impacts Of Rising Global Military Expenditure On The Sustainable Development Goals (n.d.). AFRICED, Global Justice Now, Health Poverty Action, Resilient40, The Palestinian Institute for Climate Strategy, Tipping Point North South.

III. AN INCREASING NUMBER OF GOVERNMENTS SPEAKING OUT

During June 2024 talks on the NCQG in Bonn, Saudi Arabia, on behalf of the Arab Group, proposed a five percent sales tax on developed countries' arms companies as a potential source of climate finance.[240]

At COP30, President Lula again condemned massive global military spending as a misallocation of resources. He said "If the men who wage war were at COP30, it would be much cheaper to spend US$1.3 trillion a year to end the climate problem than US$2.7 trillion to wage war as they did last year."[241]

Colombia's President Gustavo Petro challenged NATO members' commitment to allocate five percent of GDP to weapons, arguing that "Russia is not the enemy; the climate crisis is the enemy."[242]

Latvia's President Edgars Rinkēvičs also highlighted that Russia's invasion of Ukraine "limits climate investment as resources are redirected to defence spending."[243]

Beyond COP, states have made connections in other multilateral spaces, including the UN General Assembly First Committee for Disarmament and International Security. Liechtenstein for example observed in its statement in 2023, "Military spending comes at a high opportunity cost, for example for the mitigation of climate change – the most existential threat to human security."[244]

240 Kinney, E. (2024, November 11). What to expect on militarism, conflict and climate at COP29. Conflict and Environment Observatory.
241 Gamba, L. (2025, November 11). Brazil's president urges world leaders to "defeat" climate crisis deniers at opening of COP30. AA.
242 Petro dice a Europa que el enemigo es la crisis climática y no Rusia. (2025, November 6). EuroEFE.
243 Statement by the President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs at the 30th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties. (2025). Mfa.gov.lv; Permanent Mission of the Republic of Latvia to the United Nations.
244 GENERAL DEBATE ON ALL DISARMAMENT AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AGENDA ITEMS STATEMENT BY MS. MYRIAM OEHRI, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE. (2023). Permanent Mission of the Principality of Liechtenstein to the United Nations New York.

6. RE-ALLOCATING MILITARY SPENDING: WIN-WIN FOR THE GLOBAL JUST TRANSITION

I. FOUNDATIONAL WORK FOR REALLOCATION MECHANISMS: A PRECEDENT EXISTS

Historical and contemporary UN and civil society-proposed frameworks offer concrete models for how military spending could be redirected toward financing a just transition.

In 1973, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution recommending a ten per cent reduction in the military budgets of the permanent members of the Security Council during the next financial year, with ten per cent of those savings allocated to 'developing' nations.[245] The resolution established a Special Committee on the distribution of the funds released. The mandate of the Special Committee was to distribute funds on an equitable basis, bearing in mind the urgent needs and requirements of recipient countries. While adopted by a vast majority, China, the United Kingdom, France and the US abstained and declined to participate.

The Special Committee never met formally and the initiative did not come to fruition. Nevertheless, this historical precedent remains significant. It demonstrates that a strong political will has long existed among the vast majority of UN member states, who – despite holding the majority vote – were ultimately constrained by the refusal of a small minority of heavily militarised states to participate.

245 United Nations (1973). UN General Assembly Resolution: Reduction of the military budgets of the States permanent members of the Security Council by 10 percent and utilization of part of the funds thus saved to provide assistance to developing countries

More recently, **three quantitative frameworks** can serve as inspiration going forward:

The Peace Dividend Campaign

launched in 2020 by over 50 Nobel Prize Laureates, proposes a two percent annual reduction in military spending in all countries.[246] Applied over five years starting in 2025, this would liberate an estimated US$1.3 trillion, which could be redirected to a global fund to tackle the climate crisis and other challenges such as pandemics.

The Five Percent Proposal

advocates for annual absolute cuts of five percent in military spending over ten years, with savings redirected to human and planetary needs and a 5 percent threshold formula that is universal and equitable in order to rein back spending thereafter.[247] Applied to the top 20 military spenders, this would equate to a cumulative 40 percent reduction in annual military expenditure – and, by extension, potentially an up to 40 percent reduction in military carbon emissions.

The 10% for All campaign[248]

launched in 2025 and initiated by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, proposes a coordinated and global 10 percent reduction in military expenditure. This would free up 271 billion USD annually. The campaign advocates for "a strategic approach building on regional and multilateral treaties" including regional cooperative agreements and bilateral treaties between neighbouring countries. It proposes to invest half of the military spendings saved into local social priorities, and half into global social priorities, including climate justice.

246 Sabbagh, D. (2021, December 14). "Colossal waste": Nobel laureates call for 2% cut to military spending worldwide. The Guardian.
247 The Five Percent Campaign. (n.d.). Tipping Point North South.
248 10% for All: A global campaign to cut military spending, reframe security, and invest in humanity,

II. A GLOBAL JUST TRANSITION FUND – A UNIFYING MECHANISM FOR PEACE AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

As the above section has demonstrated, calls to reduce military expenditure and reallocate it towards social and economic development – including climate justice – are not new, isolated, or radical. They are rooted in the founding principles of the United Nations, further refined and amplified by a growing civil society and climate justice movement, and increasingly echoed by governments across the world stage. What has been missing is a concrete, unifying mechanism that brings all three pillars together – one that cannot be obstructed by a small number of heavily militarised states, but instead harnesses the political will of those countries that are serious about addressing the climate crisis and building a peaceful world for all.

As feminist peace activists Ray Acheson and Madeleine Rees of WILPF have argued in their feminist critique of military spending:

> *"For true alternative perspectives to be treated as relevant, credible and expert, we need diverse participation, spaces and relationships to build new narratives and options. That means creating new forums – local and transnational – with diverse leadership and participation, in which people from non-normative or non-dominant perspectives and experiences can discuss issues, build discourse and create solutions.*

Acheson and Rees continue to assert:

“

We need to work with others whose beliefs are outside of the dominant, mainstream narrative of militarized security, and generate a new sense of what is normative and credible. We also need to challenge existing institutions and frames of thought as insufficient, unrepresentative and illegitimate, and to point out the interests – such as profits and power – that lie behind establishment thinking and structures.[249]

This is where the Fossil Fuel Treaty comes in. The global movement advocating for a Fossil Fuel Treaty is strikingly diverse and intersectional, centering the perspectives and demands of those most marginalised and most affected – from Indigenous peoples to Small Island States – voices that rarely receive the platform they deserve. It brings together communities impacted by militarised extractivism and countries bearing the gravest consequences of a crisis they did little to cause.

The proposed Fossil Fuel Treaty would provide an international mechanism to fairly manage the global phase out of fossil fuels, enabling a just rapid transition for all states and communities. Negotiated by ambitious states, it will focus on stopping the expansion of fossil fuel extraction and winding down existing production to safe levels - starting with the most responsible and least dependent countries first. It would ensure every country in the world is able to tap into the abundant renewable energy that exists and make the shift to communities and economies free of fossil fuels by having wealthy, fossil fuel extractors commit to making the transition in their own countries and pay for their fair share of the problem by delivering financing and technical support to countries least responsible for climate change. It would build new forms of co-operation, trust and solidarity between nations committed to addressing one of the biggest crises of our times. It will show that a fairer, more just world is possible – not just in terms of energy, climate and environment, but also economically, politically and socially.

249 Acheson, R., & Rees, M. (2020). “A feminist approach for addressing excessive military spending” in UNODA Occasional Papers Rethinking Unconstrained Military Spending.

A Fossil Fuel Treaty will be a complement to the Paris Agreement which focuses on emissions in terms of 'demand'. By explicitly focusing on the supply-side of fossil fuels and promoting international co-operation in active support of a global just transition away from oil, gas and coal, the Fossil Fuel Treaty addresses the risks of unintentional harms including baked in emissions and stranded assets.

Other international mechanisms that have managed threats of nuclear weapons and landmines have shown that a treaty does not need to be universal to be effective. A grouping of 'champion' countries, including those most vulnerable to climate change, non-producers and small and mid-level producers as well as those countries championing peace and disarmament, can drive significant change. This can also result in new international legal standards and norms that flow through to the finance sector, subnational governments and ultimately domestic policy actions.

The movement for a Fossil Fuel Treaty is at a critical crossroads. 18 nations have already joined this initiative and are participating in discussions on possible mechanisms and provisions that could be included in the negotiation of a Fossil Fuel Treaty to complement the Paris Agreement. As a result of persistent movement building by the Treaty Initiative and its vast network for various years, Colombia and the Netherlands announced their co-hosting of the historic First International Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels (Santa Marta Conference) in Santa Marta, Colombia.[250]

While the conference goes beyond the elaboration of a Fossil Fuel Treaty, it will be discussed as one of the possible pathways for transitioning to sustainable, diversified, and accessible energy.[251]

The Fossil Fuel Treaty proposal is structured around **three core pillars**:

An end to the expansion of fossil fuel production

An equitable phase out of existing production in line with 1.5C

A global just transition

250 First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels. (2026). Colombia and The Netherlands.
251 The First Conference on the Transition Away from Fossil Fuels. (2026). Fossil Fuel Treaty.

As part of the third pillar, an essential benchmark for the Treaty's success is its ability to catalyse the necessary financing.[252] Similarly, Colombia as one of the co-host of the Santa Marta Conference, notes in one of its conference background papers:

> *"Given that scaling the transition requires a steep change in annual investment (...), the discussion must confront how to expand fiscal space, lower the cost of capital and align international finance with the macroeconomic realities of indebted economies.*

There are a number of mechanisms and provisions that could be included in a Fossil Fuel Treaty to enable the financing of the Global Just Transition away from fossil fuels. Firstly, it could establish a Global Just Transition Fund, financed by a combination of levies (e.g. on fossil fuel production via an extraction or export levy, a royalty charge, or a windfall profit charge) and direct member state contributions from public finance (including from corporate taxation). One source of public finance could be an agreed percentage of member states' annual military expenditure.

Access to the fund could be conditional on Treaty ratification which would include a commitment to end new expansion as well as plans for specific activities or projects that would enable the phase down and out. The fund would provide finance for these activities, ultimately being directed to making the phase-out fiscally feasible for fossil fuel dependent states, ensuring clean alternatives are affordable and scalable and protecting workers and other marginalised groups. A Fossil Fuel Treaty could establish the fund and provide the umbrella framework under which it operates.

Built on three pillars – a UN mandate, a growing civil society movement and a critical mass of committed countries – a reallocation mechanism within the Fossil Fuel Treaty could redirect public finance from military spending toward climate action, delivering a genuine win for both climate and peace.

252 Sawas, A., Byrnes, R. and Partridge, M. (2024). If it's not global, it's not just: How a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty can accelerate finance for a global just transition. The Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative.

III. SEISMIC POTENTIAL FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

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Even if the world otherwise converges on pathways consistent with the Paris Agreement on climate change, a substantial rise in military spending could render climate goals unattainable.[253]

UN SECRETARY-GENERAL, THE SECURITY WE NEED: REBALANCING MILITARY SPENDING FOR A SUSTAINABLE AND PEACEFUL FUTURE

The Secretary General's warning is unambiguous – we cannot spend our way to militarised security and a liveable planet at the same time. Research shows that reductions in military spending can cause emissions to fall faster than they rose.[254] This is a rare and precious dynamic in the race against climate breakdown. The positive ripple effects compound. Less military activity means less demand for the fossil fuels that power it resulting in cleaner air, water, soil and biodiversity.

The geopolitical logic for the reallocation of military expenditure is equally compelling.

An estimated 25–50 percent of all interstate wars since 1973 have been linked to oil.[255]

Reducing dependence on fossil fuels cuts emissions as well as resource motive for conflict itself, breaking a cycle of extraction, militarisation and ecological destruction that has defined the past half-century.[256] Fewer oil-motivated wars means fewer invasions, less devastation as well as less of the catastrophic and largely uncounted carbon toll of armed conflict.

253 United Nations. (2025). The Security We Need Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future Report of the Secretary-General.

254 Parkinson, S. (2025). Military spending rises and greenhouse gas emissions: What does the research say? Scientists for Global Responsibility.

255 Colgan, J. D. (2013). Fueling the Fire: Pathways from Oil to War. International Security, 38(2), 147–180.

256 For a comprehensive overview of the links between war and fossil fuels, see: Geyer, K. (2024). STOP FOSSIL FUELS FROM FUELLING CONFLICT: Why the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty is an essential climate tool for peace. Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom and Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative.

Finally, climate finance, including financing for a just transition, will only work when it flows reliably. War disrupts everything from supply chains and political commitments to institutional trust.

The 2026 US war on Iran is a case in point. Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 percent of global oil supply passes, has severely disrupted global supply chains, with far-reaching global knock on effects. Described as the largest supply chain disruption in the history of the global oil market,[257] supply disruptions pose a real risk to the renewable energy transition, as inflation, higher interest rates and higher borrowing costs de-incentivise investments into renewable energy.[258]

This dynamic was part of the reason why the last energy crisis following Russia's invasion of Ukraine did not lead to a surge in renewable capacity.[259] In contrast, history shows that mutual reductions in military spending tend to open space for diplomacy, multilateral cooperation and the kind of stable geopolitical environment in which climate finance commitments can actually be met and scaled.

Peace is therefore a fundamental prerequisite for climate action, and the Fossil Fuel Treaty offers a framework to pursue both simultaneously.

257 Strait of Hormuz: Factsheet. (2026). IEA.

258 In the US for example, in October 2023, Ørsted ceased development of the Ocean Wind 1 and 2 projects, with its 'CEO Americas' citing that "macroeconomic factors have changed dramatically over a short period of time, with high inflation, rising interest rates, and supply chain bottlenecks impacting our long-term capital investments." See: Ørsted Ceases Development of Ocean Wind 1 and Ocean Wind 2 and Takes Final Investment Decision on Revolution Wind. (2023, October 31). Us.orsted.com; Orsted.

259 For example, Kenya's state-owned utility had to delay payments in 2023 because it struggled to source US dollars and euros, while the cost of capital for clean power projects remained high due to currency volatility and high debt levels, with the Kenyan shilling depreciating 28% against the US dollar between 2018 and 2024. Sterile, A., & Gordon, E. (2025, February 6). How a high cost of capital is holding back energy development in Kenya and Senegal – Analysis - IEA. IEA.

IV. COOPERATION TOWARDS A PEACEFUL TOMORROW

A **just transition** provides a powerful and unique opportunity to **build momentum for climate and for peace**. Although states will always seek to work together to address common challenges, who defines which challenges are important and therefore merit the financial, human and political prioritisation? In recent history, there have been distinctions between eras in terms of how world leaders have **collectively defined security**, **allocated resources towards these priorities** and **cooperated with one another**.

Between 1960 and 1980, world military spending nearly doubled to US$500 billion. However, the final years of the Cold War and the subsequent decade brought a period of sustained reduction in military spending, which was matched by reduced procurement, lower numbers of armed forces personnel and reduced employment in the arms industry.[260] Notably – and not coincidentally –
this period also saw advancements on arms control, disarmament and other areas of international cooperation. At a time of global instability, arguing that cutting military spending can strengthen international peace and human security might seem paradoxical. Yet this is precisely what history suggests. When Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev dramatically scaled back military expenditure in the final years of the Cold War, the United States followed suit.[261]

As a result, between 1986 and 1995 alone,[262] the Montreal Protocol (1987) was adopted, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was created (1988), the United States and Soviet Union co-sponsored a political resolution on strengthening the UN's role in peace and security (1989), peacekeeping missions expanded, the UN Secretary General proposed An Agenda for Peace (1992), the Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro (1992)[263] and the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing (1995), resulting in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.[264]
In 2000, the UN adopted eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with targets relating to poverty, hunger, disease, and inequality.[265] Globalisation also brought expanded trade and investment, particularly with the creation of the World Trade Organization in 1995,[266] as well as migration and cultural exchange.

260 United Nations. (2025). The Security We Need Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future Report of the Secretary-General.
261 Health Poverty Action, Resilient40, AFRICED, Global Justice Now, The Palestinian Institute for Climate Strategy, & Tipping Point North South. (n.d.). Robbing Peter to Pay Paul: The SDGs vs Rising Military Expenditures. Retrieved March 27, 2026.
262 Research Guides: 80 Multilateral Agreements that Shaped our World: the United Nations at 80: 1986-1995. (2016).
263 United Nations. (1992). United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3-14 June 1992. United Nations.
264 United Nations. (n.d.). Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995. www.un.org.
265 United Nations. (2015). United Nations Millennium Development Goals. United Nations.
266 World Trade Organization. (2025). WTO | the History of Multilateral Trading System. Wto.org.

Although these developments were not universally lauded by progressive movements, who resisted and critiqued the adverse consequences of globalised neoliberal capitalism, this era does reflect the ways in which reduced conflict, militarism and competition between major powers resulted in heightened international cooperation on a range of issues. In contrast, trends over the past two and a half decades have indicated that states can indeed find ways to cooperate, but their priorities have been more focused on counterterrorism, militarism and migration control rather than fulfilling their obligations on the environment and development.

Heavily militarised countries will not set the rules or limitations on military spending. The rules and limitations will have to come from elsewhere.

“

Just as it was non-nuclear-armed states that negotiated the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons against the rancour and pressure of the nuclear-armed States; just as it was women suffragists – not male political leaders – who won women’s right to vote; just as it was abolitionists – not slave owners – who outlawed the most horrific practice in human history, it is not the military powers that will end militarism or constrain military spending. It will have to be others who believe in the rule of law, international cooperation and integration, human security and environmental sustainability who push for and create alternatives through developing new norms, laws, agreements and commitments.

ACHESON AND REES

States may still ask, why not both? Can we not fund peace, climate finance and human rights, and also "keep ourselves safe"? As this paper has demonstrated, although some may believe such a balance to be theoretically possible, current trends make it less and less realistic. The ever-creeping military and security budgets – which create more harm to people and planet – and inadequate financing for climate justice and sustainable development demonstrate that no state has figured out a "balance" that can take the planet back from the brink of destruction. It therefore remains for states to make the courageous decision to chart a new path, and reorient economies towards peace, care and wellbeing.

"Ultimately, the Governments that produce and sell weapons and wage wars of domination and occupation will need to be brought on board, but the leadership for an alternative future will not come from them without a fundamental reorientation towards concepts and understandings of security within those countries. They will have no alternative than to change when it becomes clear that the status quo is no longer tenable, when the tides have turned against their weapons and warfare, when other Governments have forged ahead with new plans, and when their own citizens demand redistribution of resources away from weaponized security to security based on human rights, justice and environmental sustainability."[267]

RAY ACHESON AND MADELEINE REES, WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE AND FREEDOM

267 Acheson, R., & Rees, M. (2020). "A feminist approach for addressing excessive military spending" in UNODA Occasional Papers Rethinking Unconstrained Military Spending.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

I. PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS

International Actions

1. Join the growing bloc of countries seeking to negotiate a Fossil Fuel Treaty that would help manage a global transition away from fossil fuels that is fast, funded and fair.

2. Advocate for a Fossil Fuel Treaty in international peace and security fora, including introducing relevant thematic discussions, text and proposals in fora such as the UN General Assembly's First Committee on International Peace and Security and the UN Security Council, where opportunities exist.

3. Build the group of peace champion first mover countries by engaging countries known to champion global peace and encouraging them to join and grow the bloc of countries supporting a Fossil Fuel Treaty.

4. Convene and dialogue by organising and/or attending conferences and bilateral meetings with like-minded country champions for global peace on the Fossil Fuel Treaty to build awareness of risks associated with both runaway military spending and a failure to secure a managed global phase out through a treaty.

5. Bring the message of military spending reallocation to wider multilateral processes by using the platforms of wider UN and multilateral processes such as UNGA, UNFCCC, UNCBD, UNEA, the Climate Security Mechanism; human rights mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review; and the forthcoming Santa Marta Conference to include consideration of a Global Just Transition Fund within the Fossil Fuel Treaty, and call for the start of negotiations of the Treaty in these processes.

6. Advance Regional Approaches by ensuring greater visibility within regional dialogues and platforms of the grave impacts of military spending on peace and climate. Build deeper understanding of the avenues to finance a global just transition, including through the reallocation of military expenditure and opportunities to build regional cooperation towards a just transition that diversifies economies and builds peace.

Recommendations for The First Conference to Transition Away From Fossil Fuels:
Create a Working Group to investigate routes by which nations can agree on the universal, equitable redirection of military spending to support a Global Just Transition Fund.

National Actions

1. **Centre those most affected in deliberations related to Just Transition and a Fossil Fuel Treaty which must include:**

   a. Those facing the frontline impacts of the climate crisis;

   b. Those facing the impacts of land and environmental displacement and degradation related to fossil fuels and critical mineral extraction - especially Indigenous Peoples, minoritised communities and women and girls;

   c. Fossil fuel and critical mineral extraction workers and local communities and individuals affected by conflict and insecurity; and

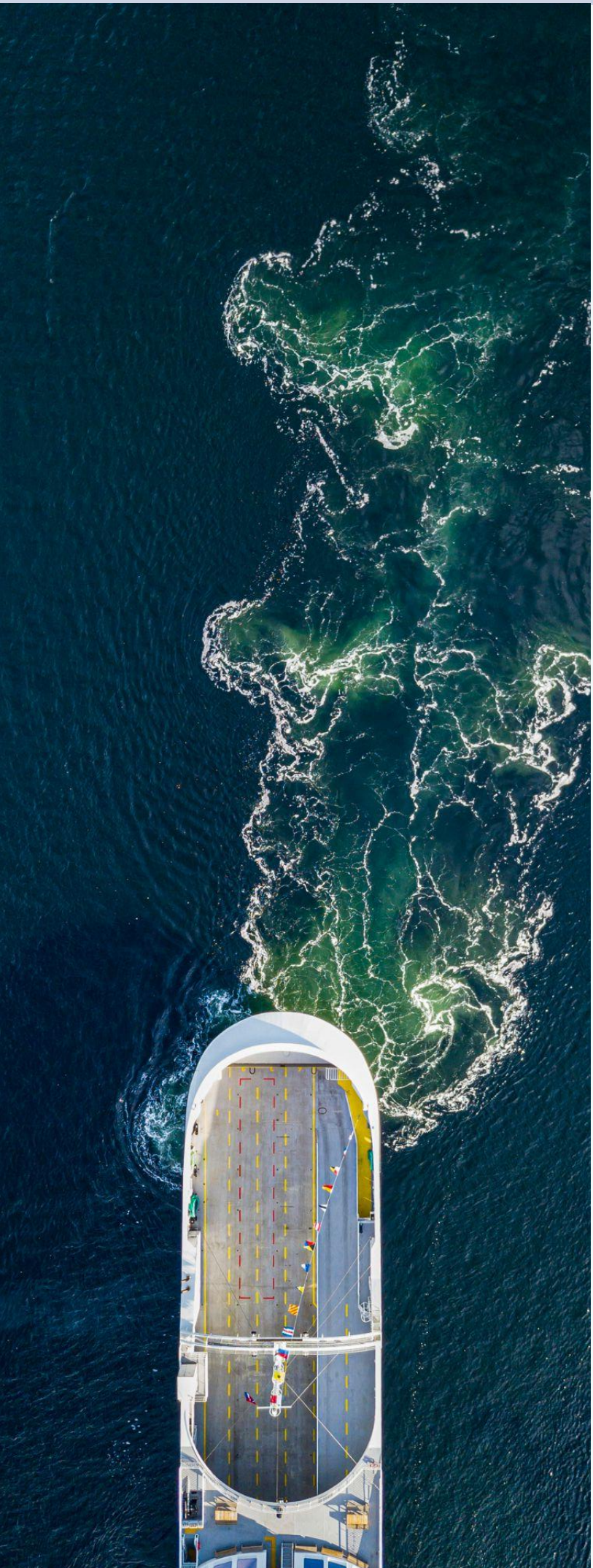
   d. Women and girls, Indigenous Peoples, people with disabilities, minoritised communities and LGBTQI+ people whose perspectives on the inclusive design of the Just Transition are key, as outlined in the decision text on the Just Transition Work Programme at the UNFCCC and the Bélem Action Mechanism for a Just Transition (BAM) under the UNFCCC.

2. **Commit to transparency on fossil fuel financing and military expenditure to build trust and advance collaboration**

   Governments should establish a binding transparency commitment ensuring that citizens, communities, and civil society organisations have the right to access clear, timely and comprehensive information on how public funds are being allocated including:

   a. **Fossil fuel financing,** production, import and/or export.

   b. **Military expenditure** including full budget breakdowns and procurement decisions, amongst others. This can include a renewed commitment to submit comprehensive information to the UN Report on Military Expenditures as well as making this information easily available at national level.



3. Mobilise public finance for the just transition

a. Phasing out existing financial support for the fossil fuel sector, especially subsidies and redirecting those to just transition activities such as developing renewable energy and transport sectors and training and re-skilling young people and fossil fuel workers for a resilient diversified economy.

b. All countries to commit to a reduction in military expenditure by an agreed percentage such as ten percent per fiscal year.

c. Global North countries' launching of a public commitment to reduce military spending and reallocate a percentage of their annual military expenditure to finance the GJT, including a possible Global Just Transition Fund under the Fossil Fuel Treaty.

II. PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Study and research

- ➔ Where military spending goes in your own country, and at what opportunity costs, including climate justice.
- ➔ Develop accessible public-facing content making the military spending vs. climate finance trade-off tangible and relevant for your specific context.

Build

- ➔ Coalitions across peace and climate justice movements that are intersectional, international, intergenerational, and transnational and actively amplify and centre Global South demands on the climate-militarism nexus.
- ➔ Alliances with Global South countries disproportionately affected by the climate crisis and military expenditure and conflict.

Campaign

- ➔ **For** the reduction and re-allocation of military expenditure to climate justice, and in particular the just transition, including within relevant UNFCCC constituencies and other coalitions and movements.
- ➔ **Against** the national and local level securitisation and involvement of armed actors in climate and environmental disasters and natural disaster relief and advocate for civilian, community-grounded responses instead.
- ➔ **Against** the narrative that military spending equals safety and security.
- ➔ **For** international solidarity and centre the experiences, priorities and demands of those directly impacted by the climate crisis and wars and conflict.
- ➔ **For** cooperation, disarmament, and trust-building to prevent war, militarisation, and conflict, including over critical minerals required for the renewable energy transition.

Join and Endorse

- ➔ WILPF's Move the Money campaign
- ➔ 10% for All campaign
- ➔ Global Days of Action on Military Spending
- ➔ The Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative