The Metaphysics of Nonexistence: Militarism, Carbon Pollution, and Ecological Tipping Points in the Anthropocene

CLIMATE BREAKDOWN Reports
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RIGHT ACTION IN THE FACE OF RUNAWAY CLIMATE CHANGE?

The root of Climate Change isn't carbon;

It's the destructive nature of thought itself.

I wrongly divide myself from the world;

Everything other I either ignore or fear,

or seek to control or destroy.

The Geometry of Life is not two guns pointed

at each other; it's a circle.

We're all Brothers & Sisters, you & I,

the Rock, the River, the Tree, the Sky.

Our war against Nature, against ourselves, only ends

with a revolution of thought and consciousness.

The Metabolic Core of Domination: The Global Military Carbon Footprint

The global military-industrial complex represents one of the most significant and least scrutinized drivers of climate breakdown. Military operations, the manufacturing of weaponry, and the maintenance of global supply chains for the defense sector are inherently fossil-fuel-intensive activities that prioritize kinetic readiness over ecological stability. Estimates suggest that the military sector, including the industries that produce equipment and ammunition, is responsible for approximately 5.5% of total global greenhouse gas emissions. This figure exceeds the total annual emissions of major industrialized nations like Japan and is double the emissions of the entire worldwide civil aviation sector.

Despite this immense footprint, military emissions remain a significant blind spot in international climate policy. Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), reporting military emissions is not mandatory, and the data provided by nations is often patchy, inconsistent, or not clearly disaggregated from civilian sources. This lack of transparency allows the most carbon-intensive institutional actors to operate outside the regulatory frameworks designed to mitigate climate change, essentially exempting the "guns" from the rules governing the "circle."

The United States Department of Defense: An Institutional Carbon Giant

The United States Department of Defense (DOD) is the world's largest institutional user of petroleum and, correspondingly, the single largest institutional producer of greenhouse gases in the world. The scale of DOD energy consumption is such that it consistently accounts for between 77 and 80 percent of all US government energy use. From Fiscal Year 1975 to FY2018, the total greenhouse gas emissions from the DOD exceeded 3,685 million metric tons of CO2 equivalent.

US Department of Defense Emission Metrics	Data Point
Total Emissions (FY1975–FY2018)	3,685+ Million Metric Tons CO2e
Post-9/11 War Emissions (2001–2018)	1,267 Million Metric Tons CO2e
Overseas Contingency Operations (War Zones)	440+ Million Metric Tons CO2e
FY2018 Annual Emissions	56 Million Metric Tons CO2e
Share of Federal Energy Consumption	77% – 80%

The carbon intensity of the US military is deeply intertwined with its mission to protect access to global oil resources, creating a self-perpetuating feedback loop. A significant portion of US military fuel use is dedicated to maintaining a presence in oil-rich regions like the Persian Gulf, effectively using petroleum to secure the flow of petroleum. This "oil-security nexus" illustrates the "two guns" metaphysics in practice: a system where energy is consumed at massive scales to ensure the continued availability of the very energy that drives global conflict and ecological

collapse.

The emissions from the post-9/11 wars alone highlight the environmental toll of active conflict. From 2001 through 2018, war-related operations in major zones like Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Syria generated over 440 million metric tons of CO_2e. When expanded to include all DOD operations during this period, the total reaches 1,267 million metric tons. For perspective, in 2017, the Pentagon's total emissions were greater than those of industrialized countries such as Sweden, Denmark, and Portugal, and exceeded the total emissions from the entire US iron and steel industry.

China and the Expanding Global Arms Race

The "two guns" logic is increasingly manifesting as a renewed global arms race, with China emerging as the world's second-largest military spender. In 2024, global military expenditure reached a record $2.7 trillion, a 9.4% increase from the previous year—the steepest year-on-year rise since the end of the Cold War. The United States and China together account for nearly half of this global total.

China's military expenditure in 2024 was an estimated $314 billion, continuing a trend of consecutive annual increases. The carbon implications of this expansion are difficult to track because China, as a Non-Annex I country, has no formal obligation to report military emissions to the UNFCCC. While China's overall national CO_2 emissions have begun to plateau or fall due to massive investments in solar and wind power, the rapid growth of its chemical industry and metal production sectors—driven in part by military manufacturing—continues to exert upward pressure on its carbon footprint.

The combined military emissions of NATO members, China, and Russia reached an estimated 551 million metric tons of CO_2e in 2024. This volume of pollution is equivalent to the annual emissions produced by 300 million passenger cars. As these nations commit to even higher levels of spending—with NATO recently discussing a target of 5% of GDP—the projected emissions are expected to rise significantly, with an estimated additional 840 million tonnes of emissions generated between 2025 and 2030.

The Internal Mechanics of Conflict: ICE and the Carbon Footprint of Exclusion

The metaphysics of conflict does not stop at national borders; it manifests domestically through the securitization of migration and the expansion of the enforcement apparatus. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operates a "deportation and detention machine" that is both inhumane and environmentally destructive. The carbon footprint of these operations is a direct consequence of a policy that prioritizes the "guns" of enforcement over the "circle" of human and ecological solidarity.

The Atmospheric Cost of "ICE Air"

ICE Air Operations functions as a de facto airline that transports detainees between detention centers and carries out international deportations. Unlike commercial airlines, ICE Air frequently

operates flights that are only partially full, representing an extraordinary waste of fossil fuel energy.

ICE Air Operational Statistics	Estimated Impact
Annual Flight Missions	2,000+
Estimated Annual CO2 Emissions	57,000 – 80,000 Metric Tons
Operational Contract Value	$650 Million – $850 Million
Major Operational Hubs	San Antonio, Miami, Mesa, Alexandria

While the emissions from ICE Air are smaller than those of the DOD, they contribute to a broader pattern of "environmentally destructive" operations overseen by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). DHS is one of the few federal agencies beyond the DOD that performs significant "non-standard operations" that contribute to the national carbon footprint. The pursuit of exclusion at the border mirrors the global conflict metaphysics, diverting resources and carbon capacity toward the enforcement of separation rather than the mitigation of the climate drivers that fuel migration in the first place.

The Opportunity Cost of War: Germany’s "Zeitenwende" and the Green Transition

The fiscal choices made by modern states reveal a profound prioritization of the "two guns" over the "energy independence revolution." Germany’s 2022 *Zeitenwende*—a major shift in security policy—serves as a critical case study in the opportunity costs of militarism. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Germany established a €100 billion special fund for military modernization.

Arms Procurement vs. Climate Neutrality

This €100 billion investment in the *Bundeswehr* is focused on closing gaps in conventional military capabilities, such as the procurement of F-35 fighter jets and heavy transport helicopters. This allocation of capital competes directly with the resources needed to reach Germany's target of climate neutrality by 2045. While the government has also proposed a €500 billion infrastructure and climate fund, the military spending is structured through constitutional amendments that allow it to bypass traditional debt limits, essentially granting it "theoretically unlimited" fiscal priority over green investment.

German Fiscal Comparison (2025-2029)	Allocation Amount
Bundeswehr Special Fund (Military)	€100 Billion
Annual Climate & Transformation Fund (CTF)	~€10 Billion
Annual Defense Budget (Projected 2029)	€152 Billion
Renewable Energy Savings (EU 2021-2023)	€100 Billion

The financial resources diverted to the military could otherwise accelerate the deployment of "freedom energies"—renewable power sources that provide genuine energy independence and security. Analysis indicates that between 2021 and 2023, the deployment of wind and solar

capacity in the EU already saved consumers approximately €100 billion by displacing expensive fossil fuels. If the €100 billion currently earmarked for arms were redirected toward renewable infrastructure, the resulting reduction in fossil fuel dependence would do more to enhance long-term regional security than the acquisition of hardware that remains tethered to high-carbon supply chains.

The Employment Efficiency Gap

The economic argument that military spending stimulates growth and job creation is consistently debunked by comparative analysis of sector-specific employment rates. Military spending is one of the least efficient ways to create jobs, largely because it is capital-intensive rather than labor-intensive.

Investment Sector	Jobs per $1 Million Invested
Education	13
Healthcare	9
Clean Energy	7 – 8
Infrastructure	7 – 8
Military	5

By prioritizing the military-industrial complex, governments like those of the US and Germany are accepting a lower "human return" on investment. For every million dollars shifted from the military to education or clean energy, society gains nearly double the employment opportunities and moves closer to a regenerative "circle" economy.

Ecological Tipping Points: The Unraveling of the Pacific Northwest

The "physics of the gun" and the resulting carbon pollution are driving localized ecological collapses in the Pacific Northwest (PNW) and the Intermountain West. These tipping points represent the material failure of the "circle" when confronted by the thermal and chemical stress of the dominant culture’s metaphysics.

The Acidification of the Salish Sea

Ocean acidification, often called the "evil twin" of climate change, is progressing in the Pacific Northwest at a rate that exceeds global averages. As the ocean absorbs atmospheric CO2, it undergoes a chemical transformation:

This increase in hydrogen ions (H^+) lowers the pH and reduces the availability of carbonate ions, which are essential for calcifying organisms to build shells and skeletons. The Salish Sea is particularly vulnerable due to its geography and the seasonal upwelling of naturally acidic deep waters that carry the carbon "signature" of fossil fuel emissions from decades ago.

Ocean Acidification Indicators (PNW)	Findings
Post-Industrial Acidity Increase	30% – 50% faster than models
Projected 2100 Acidity	150% higher than pre-industrial
Shellfish Industry Economic Value	$452 Million (at risk)
Critical Biological Threshold	pH of 7.5 – 7.8 (Extinction Event levels)

Since the early 2000s, oyster hatcheries in the PNW have experienced mass mortalities of larvae, which are unable to form their initial shells in corrosive waters. The impact extends to the Dungeness crab, a cornerstone of the regional economy and ecosystem, whose sensory systems are blunted by increased acidity, reducing their ability to hunt and navigate. This is the "circle" unravelling; as the foundations of the marine food web dissolve, the entire biological heritage of the coast is impoverished.

The Aridification of the Intermountain West

In the Intermountain West, the traditional concept of "drought" as a temporary weather anomaly has been superseded by "aridification"—a permanent shift to a drier state driven by rising temperatures. This process is characterized by an increase in "evaporative demand," or the "thirst of the atmosphere". Even in years with normal precipitation, extreme heat can dry out soils and reduce runoff, creating a "vicious cycle" where dry ground heats up faster, fueling further drought.

Research in Colorado indicates that the eastern part of the state is drying faster than the Western Slope, with soil moisture depletion signals detectable as early as 1970. This aridification is straining the Colorado River Basin, which provides water to 40 million people and is currently experiencing its driest conditions in at least 1,200 years. The "two guns" paradigm responds to this scarcity through competition and legal conflict over water rights, whereas the "circle" paradigm would require a fundamental restructuring of land use and consumption to match the region's new hydrologic reality.

The Fall of the Sentinel: The Whitebark Pine

The whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) is a keystone and foundation species of the high-elevation West. These trees, which can live for over 1,000 years, stabilize subalpine soils and regulate the timing of snowmelt. However, as of 2016, an estimated 51% of all standing whitebark pines are dead. The species was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 2022 due to the synergistic effects of white pine blister rust (an invasive fungus), mountain pine beetle outbreaks, altered fire regimes, and climate change.

The decline of the whitebark pine illustrates a critical metaphysical tipping point: the breakdown of mutualism. The tree depends almost entirely on the Clark’s nutcracker for seed dispersal. When whitebark populations fall below a certain density, the nutcracker stops caching seeds and instead becomes a seed predator, consuming the remaining resource to survive. This creates a feedback loop where the tree can no longer naturally regenerate.

Whitebark Pine Restoration Costs	Estimated Unit Cost
"Plus Tree" (Resistant) Identification	$700 per tree
Resistance Screening (Seedlings)	$1,200 per family
Operational Seedling Production	$2.09 per plug
Direct Planting (Excluding Seedling)	$150 – $500 per acre
5-Year National Park Restoration Goal	$44 Million (IRA funded)

The cost of saving this keystone species is strikingly low when compared to military assets. The entire five-year federal investment in whitebark pine restoration—$44 million—is roughly half the cost of a single F-35A fighter jet (~$80 million) and a fraction of the $2.1 trillion estimated lifecycle cost of the F-35 program. This disparity reveals the profound misalignment of our current "security" priorities. We are willing to spend trillions to defend a political order through force, yet we hesitate to spend millions to defend the biological foundations that make life possible.

The Metaphysics of Choice: Nonviolence or Nonexistence

The "two guns" metaphysics has led humanity to a precipice. The resources consumed by the military-industrial complex—both in terms of financial capital and carbon budget—are being stolen from the future of the "circle". Dr. King’s philosophy of nonviolence was not merely a tactic for social change but a "way of life for courageous people" that recognizes the "Beloved Community" as the ultimate goal of human existence.

The Beloved Community and the Ethics of Interconnection

In the "Beloved Community," international disputes are resolved through peaceful conflict resolution and reconciliation rather than military power. This perspective is echoed in Indigenous worldviews that emphasize "relationality"—the understanding that the entire cosmos is a web of intimate knowing relationships where everything is related. In this metaphysics, we are not competitors in a zero-sum struggle for dominance, but "Brothers and Sisters in the family of life." The shift from the "two guns" to the "circle" requires a fundamental re-evaluation of what constitutes security. Genuine security is found in energy independence through renewables ("freedom energies"), in the restoration of keystone species like the whitebark pine, and in the mitigation of the chemical shifts in our oceans. It is found in the "relentless pursuit of truthful ends through moral means".

Strategic Rebalancing for a Regenerative Future

The evidence suggests that the current path of increasing military expenditure and uncounted carbon pollution will lead to the "nightmare scenarios" predicted by both military planners and climate scientists. A mere 5% reallocation of the $2.7 trillion global military budget would provide $135 billion—more than enough to meet global climate finance targets and fund the monumental green transition required to stabilize the planet's life-support systems.

To choose the "circle" is to acknowledge that the universe is "on the side of justice" and that life is a cooperative participation. The alternative—the continued pursuit of the "two guns" paradigm—is a commitment to a physics of collapse. As we stand amidst the aridification of our lands and the souring of our seas, the choice remains as it was in Dr. King's time: nonviolence or nonexistence. The defense of the "circle" is the only war worth winning, and it is a war that can only be won through the weapons of love, cooperation, and a deep commitment to the family of all life.

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