



Emissions Footprint

by KATHLEEN OLDS & JULIA-SIMONE RUTGERS /// EAC Volunteers

The relationship between greenhouse gas emissions and the American military has become an increasingly urgent topic among environmentalists and governments alike.

It started with a loophole in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol—a loophole hard-fought by the American negotiating team at UN climate talks. In an effort to keep the military as free from restriction as possible, US delegates successfully argued to exempt certain military activities, namely overseas operations and fuel, from rules about emission reduction.

As a result, Kyoto signatory nations were not required to report back to the UN on military emissions from international air and sea transport, or multilateral operations in other countries. While the US never signed the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, these exemptions became the norm for military emissions-reporting for several years. The latest UN climate document—the 2015 Paris Agreement—makes no reference to military emissions reporting; the word “military” doesn’t appear once in the document.

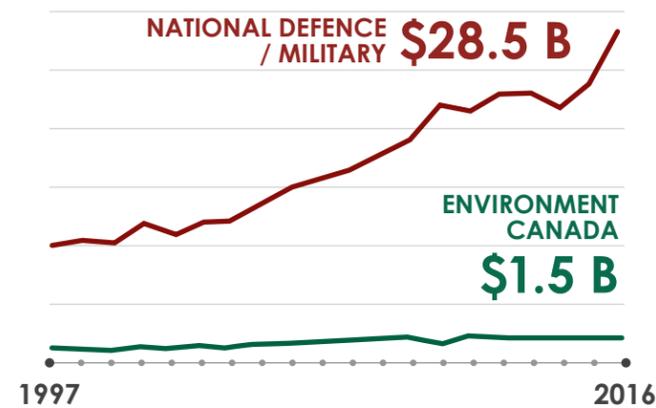
Within reported emissions, the US Department of Defence (DOD) is the largest single institutional emitter of greenhouse gases, while Canadian National Defense emits more greenhouse gas than any other national department by a factor of five. And yet, it is still difficult to know the scope of military carbon emissions.

In recent years, this careful omission of key operations and fuels from reporting has become a focal point for environmental activists. As Oil Change International director Stephen Kretzmann told the Guardian in 2015, “the atmosphere certainly counts the carbon from the military, therefore we must as well.”

In 2010, the DOD recognized climate change as a factor that magnifies security threats: “climate change will contribute to food and water scarcity, will increase the spread of disease, and may spur or exacerbate mass migration,” writes the DOD in its 2010 Quadrennial Report. They’re not alone; according to the American Security Project 70 per cent of nations worldwide, including Canada, recognized climate change as a threat to national security as of 2018.

Military development is therefore known to exacerbate the security threats they ostensibly aim to minimize—a vicious cycle fueled by fossil fuels.

Government of Canada, Funding



Source: Public Accounts of Canada

There are two potential strategies for breaking this cycle. The first, the greening of defense, is being explored by the Canadian Government. The Defence Energy and Environment Strategy, published in 2017, outlines the Department of National Defense (DND) sustainability plan. In it, they pledged \$225 million to infrastructure projects that will aim to reduce emissions 40 per cent from 2005 levels by 2020.

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At the moment, much of the DND’s reported emissions come from petroleum, jet fuel, and gasoline, whose emissions per kilojoule are difficult to decrease using alternative energy sources. In addition, their emissions targets are limited to buildings and commercial vehicle fleets—all military equipment and overseas operations are exempt.

It’s impossible to say what percentage of the Canadian military’s total emissions are counted among these domestic buildings and commercial fleets, yet this is the only sector that has any target or accountability for its emissions. Within this sector, however, the DND is pursuing clean energy, waste reduction, and reduced environmental footprint.

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Government of Canada, Federal Greenhouse Gas Emissions

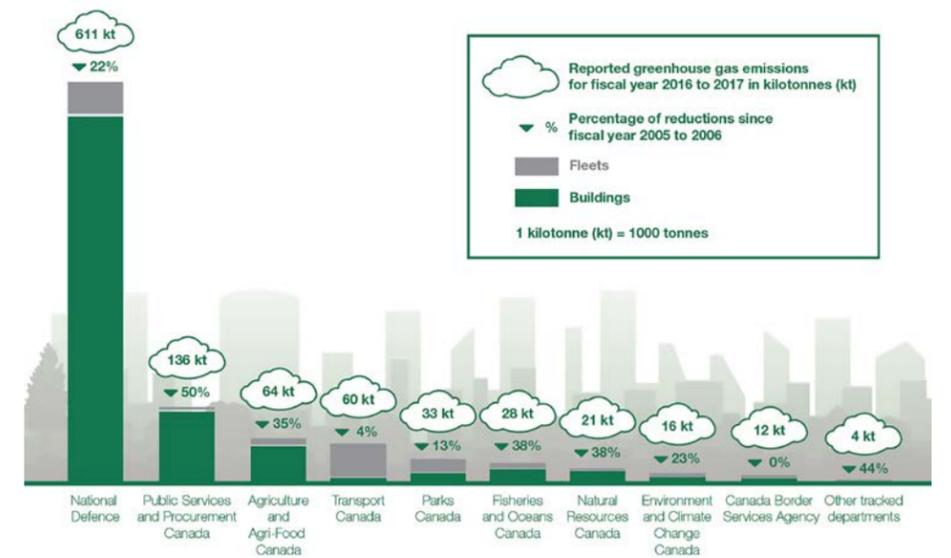


Chart: Tamara Lorincz

The second strategy is more radical—the dismantling or curtailing of the military itself. The carbon emissions from each dollar spent on defense has historically exceeded that of any other sector. Barring an unforeseen technological development, this proposition will continue to hold for domestic reported emissions. Although overseas emissions are unknown, it is reasonable to suppose that these too mostly come from jet fuel, petroleum, and gasoline and are therefore difficult to mitigate.

Grassroots movements and academics are becoming increasingly vocal about the interrelation of the military and greenhouse gas emissions. “No decarbonization without demilitarization” has become a global rallying cry. Many activists, it is important to note, explicitly recognize that the military conflicts with environmentalism on more than simply greenhouse gas emissions—some believe that the principles and ethical assumptions under which the military operates undercut both the ends and the means of sustainability.

Others also argue that the budget percentages taken up by the military undermine governmental commitments to climate action. Canada’s defense spending is projected to reach \$32 billion by 2026, while the budget for environment and climate has flatlined around the \$1 billion mark since 1997. A 2008 report from Oil Change International found that US spending on the Iraq war could have covered the global investments in renewable energy that would be sufficient to halt global warming trends by 2030.

Tamara Lorincz, a PhD candidate at the Balsillie School of International Affairs is one of Canada’s foremost experts on the link between the military and greenhouse gas emissions. She is adamant that this is a fundamental issue for environmentalists, but one that is often avoided: “Not one environmental organization and no member of Parliament takes on the military,” she says. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and UN’s Deep Decarbonization Pathways Project also seem hesitant to tackle the issue and exclude carbon emissions for the military in all their reports.

TAKE ACTION

Talk to your MP and MLA to speak out about military expansion projects in your area. Advocate for accurate military reporting for overseas operations.

The lack of information, as well as the apparent lack of drive from prominent political figures can impede action on decreasing defense emissions. Lorincz, however, is hopeful that change can happen and can be catalyzed by individuals.

Lorincz recommends calling your MP as well as your local environmental group to organize against the buying of new fighter jets, an estimated \$40 billion which will, she predicts, purchase F-35s for the Air Force. Lorincz suggests a more specific call to action in our province, “Nova Scotians specifically have a responsibility to prevent the building of new warships in the Irving shipyard,” a \$26 billion deal that is Canada’s largest ever defense procurement contract.

The lesson she draws from her work is that “Peace has got to be fundamental to the environmental movement. If it is not, we will not succeed.”

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