

# AN “INCONVENIENT TRUTH” THAT AL GORE MISSED

By Michael Eisenscher

In a recent interview with *The Real News*, actor and activist [John Cusack](#) made a simple but profoundly important point: “[Y]ou can't separate climate justice and militarism”, he said, “... because the drones are going to follow the fresh water, and the soldiers are going to protect the oil, and then if things go on as they are, game over for the planet.”

There is ‘an inconvenient truth’ that didn't make it into the [2006 documentary](#) by that name featuring Al Gore. It is something rarely mentioned by most environmental and social justice activists and their organizations. Most labor leaders who seek a just transition to a sustainable energy system that does not make workers with fossil fuel-dependent jobs bare the social cost also remain silent.

The truth is that preventing climate change from inflicting cataclysmic damage to our ecosystem and threatening much of life on earth and civilization as we know it cannot be accomplished unless we also demilitarize our foreign policy, end interventionist wars and break the grip that both Big Carbon and the military-industrial complex have on our federal budget, foreign policy, economy and government.

## Peace is a climate goal because it is a climate necessity

War is an [environmental nightmare](#) that pollutes and contaminates every place it is fought, while contributing substantially to the carbon load of the planet. The US military is the single [largest consumer of fossil fuels](#) on the planet and its single largest greenhouse gas polluter. War and climate change-caused disasters are the principal drivers of global migration and the refugee crisis.

The physical, social and financial impacts of war are felt for generations. War, preparation for war and its aftermath drain resources from investment in renewable energy. It limits our ability to protect our most vulnerable frontline communities and mitigate the worst effects of climate change. Military spending consumes funds needed to meet other critical economic and social needs – healthcare, education, infrastructure, energy efficiency and more. The costs of war continue long after the fighting ends in the ongoing care required by veterans, the social costs of addiction, depression and other manifestations of PTSD, and interest paid to service the debt that accrues when wars are fought on the government's credit card.

Our military's primary function is to defend whatever the president as commander-in-chief determines is in America's ‘national security’ or ‘vital US interests’. George Bush sent tens of thousands of troops to invade Iraq in 2003 without provocation and in contravention of international law, in the name of ‘national security’. But in reality, the concepts of ‘national security’ and ‘vital interests’ are more often than not euphemisms for protecting and defending corporate and investor interests, preeminent among which are the interests of fossil fuel energy conglomerates and the military-industrial complex – or more simply to make the world safe for the exploitation of and trade in fossil fuel and other natural resources while boosting profits of military contractors. To do that it has to assert military superiority and global hegemony to discourage, and discourage or defeat, any competitor or adversary, whether real, potential, contrived or imagined. The US military serves as global enforcer for fossil fuel interests. It's collaborator in that effort is the military-industrial complex, which maintains a codependent and inextricably interwoven relationship with Big Carbon. Neither can survive without the other.

The US military has been continuously at war for more than 17 years at a cost of over [five trillion dollars](#), and has been engaged in some form of armed conflict or military intervention on average [every six months](#) since World War II. Its global reach is provided by more than [1.3 million men and women under arms](#) stationed on [800 foreign bases](#) in 80 nations, reinforced by 20 aircraft carriers; 66 submarines; 329 other naval craft; 3,700 fighter jets, bombers and attack aircraft; 44,700 tanks and armored fighting vehicles; [6,550 nuclear warheads](#), and 800 inter-continental ballistic missiles – a military might unmatched by any other country in the world. The US has deployed [Special Forces to 150 countries](#) – more than three-quarters of all the nations in the world\* – in service to what the [AFL-CIO General Executive Council](#) in 2011 aptly described as a “militarized foreign policy.” The US fits the classic definition of a ‘[garrison state](#)’.

In order to fulfill this role, the US military and military contractors consume nearly [two-thirds of the entire US discretionary budget](#), costing taxpayers \$1.25 trillion a year when the Pentagon base budget, war spending, nuclear arms, veterans benefits and future care, interest paid on funds borrowed to finance past wars, and other national security-related expenses of government are added up. The US military budget is greater than the [next seven nations combined](#) – roughly double what China, Russia, Iran and North Korea together spend – far more than is required to defend our country's borders and its people.

As we abandon fossil fuels, a just transition to a sustainable energy society requires that we defend immigrant families, protect and meet the needs of frontline communities, assure the welfare of displaced workers in both fossil fuel-dependent and military-industrial jobs, and support military personnel impacted by an end to our aggressive foreign policy.

Just as fossil fuel and military-industrial interests are interwoven and interdependent, so too are environmental, social justice and labor causes. The labor, environmental justice and peace movements must abandon issue and organizational silos to begin operating as a single multi-faceted progressive movement that understands their interdependence and consciously develops collaboration, mutual support and solidarity between them. What compels these different strands of progressive struggle to weave a new progressive tapestry is recognition that *none of these movements can achieve their objectives without achieving the objectives of the others*. We will not be able to successfully decarbonize our economy if we do not also demilitarize US foreign policy.

[Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) understood this when he declared one year prior to his death: “We as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. . . . When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered.” His admonition has been echoed more recently by the [Poor People’s Campaign](#).

### We need a new definition of national security

*We need a new definition of national security based on what the American people, not multinational corporations and the investor class need to be secure* – not based on the size of our military, the number of our foreign military bases, the power of our weapons or the advanced state of our military technology but on the strength of our shared values and the needs and aspirations of the American people. Real national security should protect our people, not the profits of multinational corporations.

- Real national security exists when people have jobs with incomes sufficient to provide a decent standard of living, affordable housing and healthcare, education without a lifetime of student debt, and safe, affordable child and elder care.
- Real national security provides efficient affordable mass transit, modern safe public infrastructure, a proper social safety net, sustainable carbon-free energy, protection of our environment, and wholesome food.
- Real national security can only be achieved if all countries dramatically reduce their consumption of fossil fuels, lower the threat posed by runaway global warming, and eliminate all nuclear weapons.
- Real national security requires our country operate in the world as a member of a global community of nations so as to earn respect rather than to instill fear.
- Real national security requires respect for international law, human rights, the rights of refugees, the Bill of Rights of the US Constitution, and work to end xenophobia, nativism, racism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia.
- Real national security can be achieved only if the conditions of poverty, unemployment, alienation and despair which provide the fertile field in which terrorism grows are alleviated throughout the world – when the fate of the least of us is tied to the fate of the rest of us as members of a single global human community.

That is why we must rise together for climate, jobs, justice *and peace*.

~1359 words ~

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\* “‘We’re Profiteers’ - How Military Contractors Reap Billions from U.S. Military Bases Overseas” by David Vine, Monthly Review, July 1, 2014, <http://monthlyreview.org/2014/07/01/were-profiteers/>

“Special Operations Forces Continue to Expand Across the World—Without Congressional Oversight” by Nick Turse, The Nation, <https://www.thenation.com/article/special-operations-forces-continue-expand-across-world-without-congressional-oversight/>

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“The US has 1.3 million troops stationed around the world — here are the major hotspots” by Daniel Brown and Skye Gould, Business Insider, Aug. 31, 2017, <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-military-deployments-may-2017-5>

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