



FEMINIST INTERVENTIONS:

Resisting the Militarization of the Climate Crisis

A Focus on the US and EU



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Acknowledgements

AUTHOR

Daniela Philipson García is a PhD feminist researcher in Politics and International Relations at Monash University. Her research focuses on the effects of militarization on gender-based violence and the environment.

EDITORS

Mara Dolan and Alexandria Gordon (WEDO), and Sheena Anderson and Michelle Benzing (CFFP)

The [Women's Environment and Development Organization \(WEDO\)](#) is a global women's advocacy organization for a just world that promotes & protects human rights, gender equality and the integrity of the environment.

The [Center for Feminist Foreign Policy \(CFFP\)](#) is a research, advocacy, and consulting organization dedicated to promoting Feminist Foreign Policy across the globe.

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Executive Summary

The climate crisis is increasingly being framed as a “security challenge” by the United States (U.S.) and European Union (EU). According to this narrative, the climate crisis requires militarized and securitized solutions, coupled with often hostile and discriminatory migration policies. These approaches not only fail to address the root causes of the climate crisis, but also intensify the driving factors of the climate crisis – capitalism, extractivism, and imperialism. Militarization increases greenhouse gas emissions and destroys the environment. Likewise, military spending diverts resources away from climate action and obstructs transparency and accountability. Lastly, militarization perpetuates colonization and heightens risks for environmental defenders.

Feminist analyses challenge militarization and securitization narratives of the climate crisis and call for responses rooted in global cooperation, compassion, care, and justice. Feminist security scholars argue that security is gendered and show that militarization threatens lives and livelihoods, disproportionately affecting marginalized populations. Intersectional feminists also underscore that climate justice is not possible without first achieving racial justice and gender justice. This brief posits that gender-responsive policies and feminist intersectional analyses are indispensable to addressing the climate crisis. Furthermore, feminist foreign policy frameworks of analysis, unlike militarization and securitization, must address the root causes of the climate crisis.

The aim of this brief is to challenge the securitization and the militarization of the climate crisis in the U.S. and EU, underscoring the climate crisis as a human rights and feminist issue. It explores feminist perspectives and situates the militarization of the climate crisis within a growing body of feminist foreign policy frameworks of analysis. In addition to conducting desk research, the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) and the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP) conducted 10 interviews with feminist, anti-militarist, and environmental experts from the U.S., Germany, Zimbabwe, Colombia, Mariana Islands, the Philippines, Mexico, and Yemen. Their experiences and work informed the arguments and takeaways for U.S. and EU policymakers presented below.

Key Takeaways¹

- 1** Divest from militarized and securitized responses to the climate crisis.
- 2** Follow the lessons and leadership of those at the forefront of the climate crisis.
- 3** Adopt a feminist foreign policy framework and gender-responsive policies to the climate crisis.
- 4** Leverage and replicate existing mechanisms that move away from normative frameworks of militarization and securitization.

¹ Takeaways are outlined in detail on page 16 of this brief.

Introduction

What is the militarization of the climate crisis?

A wealthy country that uses force to put the interests of its privileged elites first, while ignoring those who are most vulnerable, will exacerbate the climate crisis. As a global emergency that transcends borders, the climate crisis cannot be contained by weapons, violence, or force. The climate crisis requires responses rooted in global cooperation, compassion, care, and justice.

Increasingly, affluent governments, such as the United States (U.S.) and most European Union (EU) governments, are framing the climate crisis as a security challenge that requires surveillance, weapons, and militarized solutions to mitigate potential threats, such as scarcity of natural resources, climate-induced migration, and heightened conflict. In a 2021 report, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) stated that “unpredictable extreme weather conditions caused by climate change are exacerbating existing risks and creating new security challenges for U.S. interests” (DOD, 2021). In the EU’s 2016 Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, the climate crisis was described as a factor endangering the EU’s people and territory, as well as a “threat multiplier that catalyzes water and food scarcity, pandemics, and displacement” (EU, 2016). In response to these narratives, feminist civil society asks: ***whose security are we really talking about?***

These approaches, which seek to securitize and militarize the climate crisis, are a cause of great concern. Not only do they deepen injustices, but they also view those who are most affected by the climate crisis as a “threat,” othering them and promoting an “us versus them” narrative (Transnational Institute, 2021a). Militaries also contribute to the climate crisis and environmental destruction as some of the largest consumers of fossil fuels and emitters of greenhouse gas emissions (WILPF, 2021). According to Scientists for Global Responsibility and the Conflict and Environment Observatory (2022), the total global military carbon footprint is approximately 5.5% of global emissions. **If the world’s militaries’ greenhouse gas emissions were bundled together to represent those of a single country, they would have the fourth largest national carbon footprint in the world.**

The U.S. military alone creates more greenhouse gas emissions than Sweden or Portugal. If it were a country, the U.S. military would be the world’s 55th largest contributor to global warming (Reuters, 2019). The production, testing, selling, and buying of weapons, including both small arms and nuclear weapons, also have huge repercussions for the environment, creating toxic waste that poisons biodiversity, soil, groundwater, and air (WILPF, 2021).

A Note on Securitization and Militarization

For the purpose of this brief, “securitization” and “militarization” are defined as follows.

SECURITIZATION:

Security refers to collateral, such as property, for financial transactions. Thus, securitization refers to reducing risks of harm or danger in a specific context. Because securitization is often linked to the repression of others (e.g. the expropriation of Indigenous land) to guarantee financial benefits, it is rife with structured inequalities across race, gender, class, etc. In other words, some people or groups are the beneficiaries of securitization while others are targeted by it (Ahuja 2021).

MILITARIZATION:

“Militarization is a step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military or comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas” (Enloe, 2000). According to the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, “the effects of militarisation can be seen in the increase of security and defense budgets that allocate disproportionate funds to the military and other militarized security actors. The effects of militarisation include the dissemination of militaristic language, values, and symbols, which are internalized and normalized by societies and causally linked to destructive gender stereotypes. Militarization promotes gendered hierarchies and the primacy of the nation manipulating the image of the ‘Other’ to construct an ‘enemy’ worth.” (CFFP, 2021)

Some interviewees discuss the connection between securitization and militarization:

“Violence fuels violence. I do not differentiate between militarization and securitization because they are intimately connected. In Mexico, where public security is militarized, violence is ubiquitous, we are always in mourning.”

—NÁME VILLA DEL ÁNGEL

The implications of securitizing and militarizing the climate crisis become particularly pernicious when they translate into government spending. The richest countries spend up to 30 times more on their militaries than on climate finance (Transnational Institute, 2022). A study from the National Priorities Project (2022) found that, in 2018 in the U.S., the average taxpayer paid \$3,400 in military and nuclear weapon spending compared to \$123 in disaster relief and only \$8 in renewable energy and energy efficiency. Spending on securitizing borders has also increased significantly. Between 2013 and 2018, border spending by the seven biggest greenhouse gas emitters rose by 29% (Transnational Institute, 2021b). In the U.S., spending on border and immigration enforcement tripled between 2003 and 2021 (ibid.). In Europe, the budget for the EU border agency, Frontex, increased by 2,763% between 2006 and 2021 (ibid.).

Methodology

The aim of this report is to challenge the securitization and the militarization of the climate crisis, underscoring the climate crisis as a human rights and feminist issue, exploring feminist interventions and perspectives, and situating the militarization of climate within feminist foreign policy frameworks of analysis. Furthermore, it provides feminist analyses and alternatives that attend to the root causes of the climate crisis, as well as a series of key takeaways for U.S. and EU policymakers and movement allies on how to work towards the advancement of climate justice and feminist peace via frameworks for human rights and feminist foreign policy.

For this brief, the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) and the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP) conducted 10 interviews with feminist, anti-militarist, and environmental experts from the U.S., Germany, Zimbabwe, Colombia, Mariana Islands (Guam), the Philippines, Mexico, and Yemen. Their experiences and work informed the arguments presented here, as well as the report’s key takeaways. The interviews are quoted throughout the report. In addition to the interviews, WEDO & CFFP conducted an in-depth literature review and desk research.

Why did WEDO and CFFP write this report?

WEDO and CFFP are two leading organizations at the intersection of global climate, environment, feminist foreign policy, advocacy, and research. As part of their missions, WEDO and CFFP believe it is critical to raise awareness of the dangers of responding to a crisis driven by extractivism and racial and gender injustice with militarized means. To explicitly challenge securitization and militarization narratives, WEDO and CFFP aim to share the experiences of feminist and civil society leaders challenging and naming these issues in their lives and work. Furthermore, WEDO and CFFP believe it is particularly important to hone in on the perspectives and recommendations of those from the Global South who are at the front lines of the climate crisis. While WEDO and CFFP recognize that the climate crisis, and resulting securitization and militarization policies, are global issues, this brief specifically addresses the U.S. and EU countries as major emitters of greenhouse gas emissions and contributors to the arms trade and military crises.

Why is this a feminist issue?

'Security' is gendered

Feminists have a long tradition of challenging securitization and militaristic responses, and advocating for alternative solutions to building peace and justice (Enloe, 2000; Tickner, 2018; True, 2022). Feminist security and postcolonialist scholars also challenge traditional definitions of security and peace, pointing at the different threats faced by women and marginalized groups relative to more privileged groups in the so-called Global North (Sajed, 2022; True, 2020). Beyond defining security simply as the absence of war and conflict, feminist scholarship defines security as “peace that includes social justice,” as well as economic security and environmental security (Tickner, 2018). This definition further underscores the notion that women and marginalized groups experience security, peace, and conflict differently.

For example, Moñeka De Oro, an environmental activist and expert from the Mariana Islands (Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands), said in an interview that security for her means having access to clean water and land that has not been contaminated by the U.S. military base near her home. “What does genuine security mean? For us, it really means access to clean water and having land that’s not contaminated by toxins from the military. Juxtapose that with militarization, which involves weapons and men in battle rattle gear. This kind of security brings a false illusion of security to serve and benefit very few people and people who are hungry for power.”

Michelle Benzing, an environmental queer activist and member of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) German section, said that “the issue with the climate crisis securitization narrative is that the security being addressed is that of the nation-state. State security does not center the perspectives of humans and the people who are most vulnerable to the climate crisis. It instead centers the perspective of so-called Global North countries, particularly that of the U.S. and EU.”

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MOÑEKA DE ORO

Militarizing the climate crisis threatens lives and livelihoods

When it comes to environmental security, everyone's security is threatened in the long run, yet it is women and marginalized groups who suffer the most in the here and now (Tickner, 2018). For example, traditional gender roles often put women and non-binary people at increased risk during extreme weather events. The climate crisis is also associated with increased risk and prevalence of gender-based violence (Duncanson et. al., 2022). Likewise, when faced with militarization, climate-related threats against women and non-binary people are compounded. Militarization causes women and non-binary people to experience higher thresholds of physical insecurity, and the incidence of gender-based violence tends to increase (Tickner, 2018).

In an interview with Edwick Madzimore, President of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in Zimbabwe, she spoke about how water scarcity in her country has made it more challenging for women to go about their everyday lives. "The water crisis has made it harder for women because the few water sources that they were relying on have now dried up." She explained that women are the ones responsible for household duties that require retrieving and using water.

In Yemen, women face similar challenges, according to Dr. Nadia Al-Sakkaf. Dr. Al-Sakkaf is the former Chief Editor of the Yemen Times and was the first female Minister of Information in Yemen. She told WEDO and CFFP during an interview that "women, in particular, are severely affected by water scarcity in countries like Yemen because they are the ones responsible for fetching water and doing the housework. They are also the ones most prone to being attacked when traveling longer distances." As a result, gender-responsive policies that include access to water and sanitation for menstrual hygiene, breastfeeding, and giving birth are indispensable.

Similarly, Natalia Daza, a researcher and environmental feminist activist from Colombia, explained that the feminization of poverty, the term used to point out that most of the world's poor are women, causes women to rely more on natural resources. Daza said, "we have to talk about how women are affected differently by the climate crisis because they are usually more in contact with natural resources due to the feminization of poverty, food insecurity, etc." Indeed, a study by Duncanson et. al. (2022) states that women in some societies are responsible for growing and gathering food, cooking, and care, all of which require water. Requiring women to travel longer distances to find water can, thus, lead to conflict within communities and households, as well as gender-based violence.

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NATALIA DAZA

De Oro, from the Mariana Islands, also highlighted that it is critical to make the links between gender inequality and the climate crisis because “women and girls bear a disproportionate amount of the impact of the climate crisis, and will be suffering at much higher rates than men. Similarly, non-binary folks will continue to be repressed with current climate laws and frameworks.” De Oro further explained that militarization of the climate crisis disproportionately puts women at risk. Living on a highly militarized island where the U.S. military has a strong presence, De Oro shared that with militarization comes an increase in the demand for sex work, “with militarization, there’s always going to be an increase in sex work and harm against women. There’s a lot of concern over that.” Mitzi Jonelle Tan, a youth and climate justice activist with Youth Advocates for Climate Action Philippines (YACAP), also shared how militarization in her country has led to an increase in gender-based violence. She remembered Jennifer Laude, a transgender woman who was killed by a U.S. Marine, Corporal Joseph Scott Pemberton. Pemberton was found guilty and later exonerated for his crime (Redfern, 2020).

No climate justice without gender justice

The experiences and perspectives of these experts and activists demonstrate how climate justice and social justice, especially gender justice and racial justice, are intrinsically related. Moreover, they make it very clear that securitization and militarization will not help achieve either of those goals – gender justice or climate justice. On the contrary, securitization and militarization compound injustices and intensify inequalities.

Benzing, from Germany, reaffirmed and expanded this idea. Benzing said “you cannot have climate justice without queer justice, Indigenous justice, gender justice, and racial justice. If we don’t see the overlapping systems of oppression through the exploitation of certain people and resources, we won’t be able to solve the climate crisis.” Daza, in Colombia, shared similar thoughts while challenging the militarization of the climate crisis. “If you understand inequality as the problem driving the climate crisis, you address inequality first instead of just saying ‘we need a solution, let’s just send the military in. What could go wrong?’”

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These perspectives are consistent with the struggles led by women’s movements, which insist that real security, including environmental security, cannot be achieved without first securing women’s equal rights (Tickner, 2018).

How do the securitization and militarization of the climate crisis drive injustice?

Militarization does not address the root causes of the climate crisis, it worsens them

Feminist scholars argue that the climate crisis is rooted in the political and economic systems that drive inequalities and exclusions that contribute to war (Duncanson et. al., 2022). The climate crisis is not a security challenge that can be solved with more security and military force because these approaches are unable to address the crisis's root causes—extractivism, capitalism, and imperialism. Instead, feminists underscore that the climate crisis requires alternative solutions that rethink and restructure the political and economic ties between humans and the earth (Cohn and Duncanson, 2022). To make the connections between militarization and extractivism, Náme Villa del Ángel, a non-binary anti-military and environmental activist from Mexico, mentioned that militarization and securitization have been radicalized due to neoliberalism. They said, “to continue extracting resources in an economic environment marked by scarcity and diminished productivity, violence is necessary and more acute. Militarization and securitization are thus radicalized to continue business as usual.”

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The experts interviewed also repeatedly pointed out that securitizing and militarizing the climate crisis not only fails to address the root causes of the climate crisis but also diverts resources and attention away from the factors driving the climate crisis, such as extractivism and other systems of oppression. Tan, from the Philippines, said that “militarizing the climate crisis distracts from the fact that the main reason for the climate crisis is the proliferation of fossil fuels. If the U.S. and the EU want to address the climate crisis, the answer is not to enhance militarization. The answer is to stop fossil fuel production, stop emissions, and pay reparations so we can adapt and deal with our loss and damage.” Lorah Steichen, a researcher and activist based at the Centre for Climate Justice at the University of British Columbia, underscored how a militarized response to the climate crisis helps legitimize U.S. militarism while making the climate crisis worse. “The legitimization of U.S. militarism causes more violence, more harm, more instability around the globe while it continues to contribute to climate change and environmental degradation.”

The harmful nature of militarized narratives

Militarized narratives of the climate crisis are harmful and false because they frame security in terms of the priorities and interests of wealthy governments, such as the U.S. and EU governments. Implicit in this narrative is the centering of the world from the perspective of U.S. and European elites, locating climate threats as coming from so-called Global South nations (Cohn and Duncanson, 2022). As a result of these narratives, climate refugees, most of whom come from the so-called Global South, are portrayed as a threat to national security. This framing is rooted in white supremacy and colonialism. First, countries in the so-called Global North are historically responsible for the warming of the planet and thus the climate crisis. Second, people in the so-called Global South and other disadvantaged communities will face the most severe consequences of the climate crisis. Further, excluding the so-called Global South and treating climate refugees as a threat ignores the United States and European countries' responsibility for the climate crisis and displaces the blame on those who are most vulnerable and at risk (Cohn and Duncanson, 2022; Transnational Institute, 2021a).

Miriam Mona Mukalazi, a member of the board of trustees at the international organization Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF), mentioned during her interview that “when it comes to military interventions, you always have this narrative of us versus them, creating a framing in which you’re always othering certain groups. Military strategies are based on othering. There can only be winners or losers, there cannot be collaborative solutions. That is so far away from feminist approaches and solidarity.” Ramon Mejia, a U.S. Marine veteran and anti-militarism organizer from the U.S., shared similar views. “Militarization makes a villain out of the people being impacted the most by climate change, yet have contributed to it the least. As long as government officials continue to view the world through a martial lens, one of scarcity and security, they’ll fail to address the root causes causing people to migrate in the first place.”

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MIRIAM MONA MUKALAZI

Benzing also underscored the injustices of framing people migrating as the problem. She said, “We need to dismantle the securitization/militarization narrative that frames people who are coming from countries most affected by the climate crisis as the problem. They are not the problem. We need policies that look at the responsibility of so-called Global North countries, like Germany, and their contributions to the climate crisis.” Finally, Steichen added that “these climate security narratives often end up characterizing people that are most impacted by climate change, and the other interrelated crises that coincide with the climate crisis, as security threats themselves. So it compounds the injustices for the most impacted people.”

Militarization increases greenhouse gas emissions and destroys the environment

Militaries are among the largest contributors to the climate crisis. They are highly dependent on fossil fuels and produce large amounts of greenhouse gas emissions. Scientists for Global Responsibility and the Conflict and Environment Observatory (2022) estimate that the U.S. military's annual carbon footprint equals 205 million tons of CO₂ and that France's military's annual carbon footprint equals approximately 8 million tons of CO₂ (Transnational Institute, 2022). According to Neta Crawford, an International Relations professor at Oxford University, 40% of the U.S. military emissions between 2001 and 2018 (approximately 1,270 billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions) were caused by the "war on terror" and U.S. military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq (ibid.). Aviation, which represents 3.5% of climate warming (Lee and Forster 2021), is another example of the military's mass contribution to the climate crisis. In 2021, global military aircraft more than doubled civilian fleets (Conflict and Environment Observatory 2021). Moreover, military bases also occupy and significantly pollute land and natural resources, bearing severe negative impacts on the communities nearby.

In their book, "Banning the Bomb, Smashing the Patriarchy," Ray Acheson (2021) finds that "nuclear testing is a history of racism and colonialism," hinting at the link between climate injustice and nuclear policy. Nuclear-armed countries typically test nuclear weapons on colonized territories or Indigenous lands. The U.S. alone has conducted more than 1,000 nuclear tests, most of which have taken place in the traditional land-use area of the West Shoshone (Acheson 2021). Similarly, France conducted 210 nuclear tests in Algeria and French Polynesia until 1996 (ibid.). Women's health studies have shown that in the aftermath of nuclear violence, women are more prone to high rates of stillbirths, miscarriages, congenital birth defects, and reproductive issues (ibid.).

The destruction and deterioration of the environment by the military is an everyday reality in the Mariana Islands. During her interview, De Oro shared how the construction of a new firing range for U.S. marines in the Mariana Islands led to the destruction of a limestone forest in her native land. "The military is currently building a firing range complex to accommodate the marines that are coming from Okinawa. They had to tear down 900 football fields [in size] of a pristine, ancestral limestone forest. They had to kill biodiversity, destroy cultural sites, and dig up ancestral burial sites to make way for the firing range. To make matters worse, it sits on top of the main water source for the entire island."² Mejia, a U.S. Marine veteran and anti-militarism organizer, shared how he witnessed soldiers pollute. "When I was in Iraq, I conducted supply convoys. When equipment was damaged or destroyed, we were supposed to transport it back to Kuwait to get properly disposed of. A lot of us didn't like the drive, so troops would instead just bury the equipment in the desert. All this toxic waste left to decay and contaminate the environment. The military is a very wasteful and destructive institution."

2 To find out more about the construction of the firing range for U.S. marines in the Mariana Islands and the destruction of the limestone forest, please see this article: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/17/in-guam-even-the-dead-are-dying-the-us-military-is-building-on-the-graves-of-our-ancestors>

Due to increased pressure, “greening the military” has been proposed as a solution to reduce militaries’ emissions. Some measures proposed include making military bases and equipment more resilient to extreme weather events “to train, fight, and win in an increasingly complex environment” (DOD, 2021), as well as using electric vehicles and solar-powered backpacks and blankets (Powers and Wu, 2021). However, it is important to note that these are false and unreliable solutions. A report from the Conflict and Environment Observatory (2023) found that “greening the military” in the EU consists of sporadic and unsustainable measures. More importantly, these measures are superficial, band-aid solutions that do not address the root causes of the climate crisis.

“They had to kill biodiversity, destroy cultural sites, and dig up ancestral burial sites to make way for the firing range. To make matters worse, it sits on top of the main water source for the entire island.”

MOÑEKA DE ORO

Military spending diverts resources away from the climate crisis and lacks accountability

Spending in the military also represents a significant opportunity cost. A Transnational Institute Report (2022), argues that “every dollar spent on the military not only increases greenhouse gas emissions but also diverts financial resources, skills and attention away from tackling one of the greatest existential threats humanity has ever experienced.” The seven top historical emitters are also among the top 10 global military spenders. By far, the largest emitter with the largest military budget is the U.S., followed by China, Russia, the UK, France, Japan, and Germany (ibid.). From 2013 to 2021, the richest countries in the world³ spent USD 16.8 trillion on military spending and only USD 243.9 billion on climate finance. In other words, during that period, these countries only spent the equivalent of 14% of their military spending on climate finance (ibid.).

Steichen explained that, in the U.S., “there is a huge discrepancy between the ease with which the state mobilizes resources for war and militarism compared to urgent human and environmental needs like international climate finance.” Wealthy countries are also responsible for the export of arms and weapons to countries that are disproportionately vulnerable to the climate crisis, diverting significant resources away from addressing the climate crisis and exacerbating conflicts (Transnational Institute 2022).

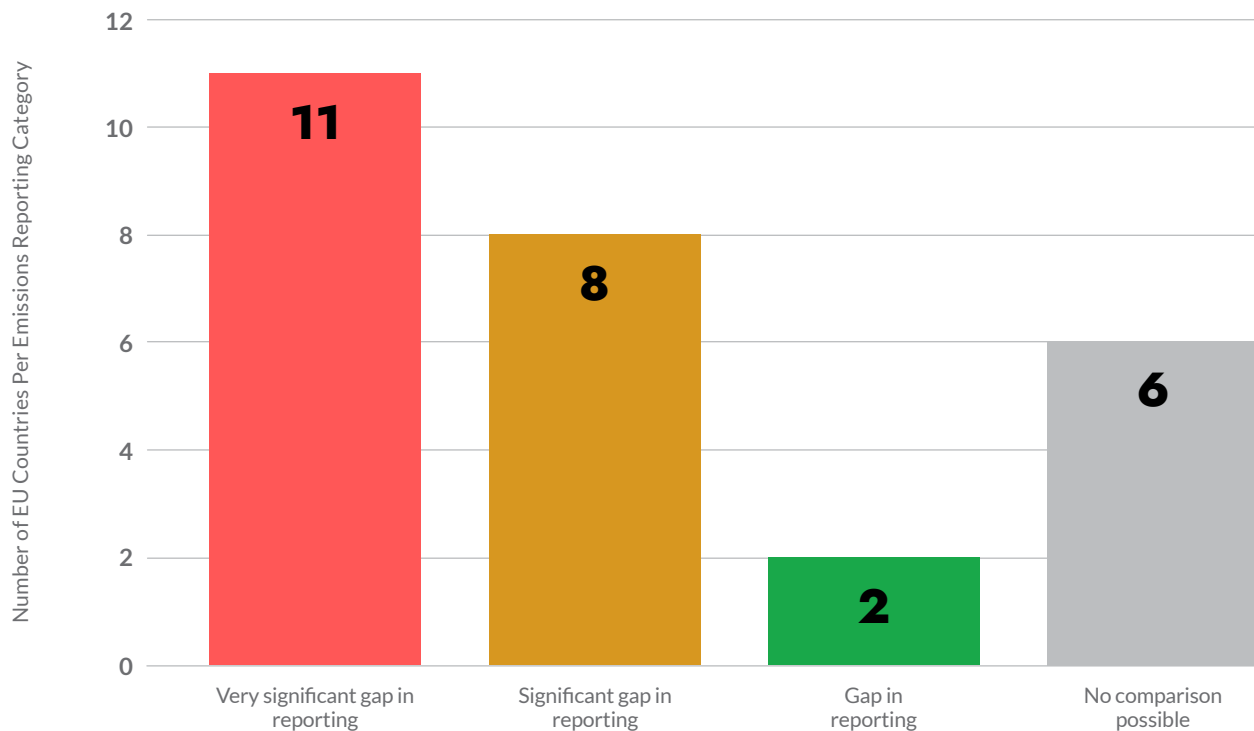
³ These countries are specifically referred to as Annex II countries according to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). They are considered to be developed countries. In total, there are 23 Annex II countries plus the European Union: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America ([UNFCCC](#)).

Despite bloated military budgets and militaries' massive detrimental climate effects, countries are not required to report their militaries' greenhouse gas emissions. In 1997, the Pentagon successfully lobbied to exclude reporting military emissions from the Kyoto Protocol. The 2015 Paris Agreement states that countries may report military emissions, albeit only voluntarily (ibid.). As a result, most militaries across the world are not accountable for any of their greenhouse gas emissions. According to the Military Emissions Gap dataset, the U.S. has a very significant gap in reporting military emissions. Out of the 27 countries that comprise the EU, 11 have a very significant gap in reporting military emissions, while eight have a significant gap, two have a gap in reporting, and six have no data available to conduct a comparison. To see a breakdown of these countries, please refer to the Annex.

“There is a huge discrepancy between the ease with which the state mobilizes resources for war and militarism compared to urgent human and environmental needs like international climate finance.”

LORAH STEICHEN

Military Emissions Reporting in the European Union



Source: The Military Emissions Gap Dataset

During their interview, Náme shared their frustration after attending the 27th Conference of the Parties in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. “At COP, everyone is constantly talking about transparency and accountability. Why then aren’t militaries held up to the same standards?” Whenever militaries provide some transparency into their greenhouse gas emission, they tend to share data on the amount of energy used at military bases and the fuel used to operate military equipment (CEOBS, 2021). However, these estimates do not include the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from military equipment procurement and other supply chains, which account for the majority of military emissions (ibid.). Hence, the few existing data provide conservative estimates of militaries’ greenhouse gas emissions, undercounting militaries’ effect on the climate crisis.

“At COP, everyone is constantly talking about transparency and accountability. Why then aren’t militaries held up to the same standards?”

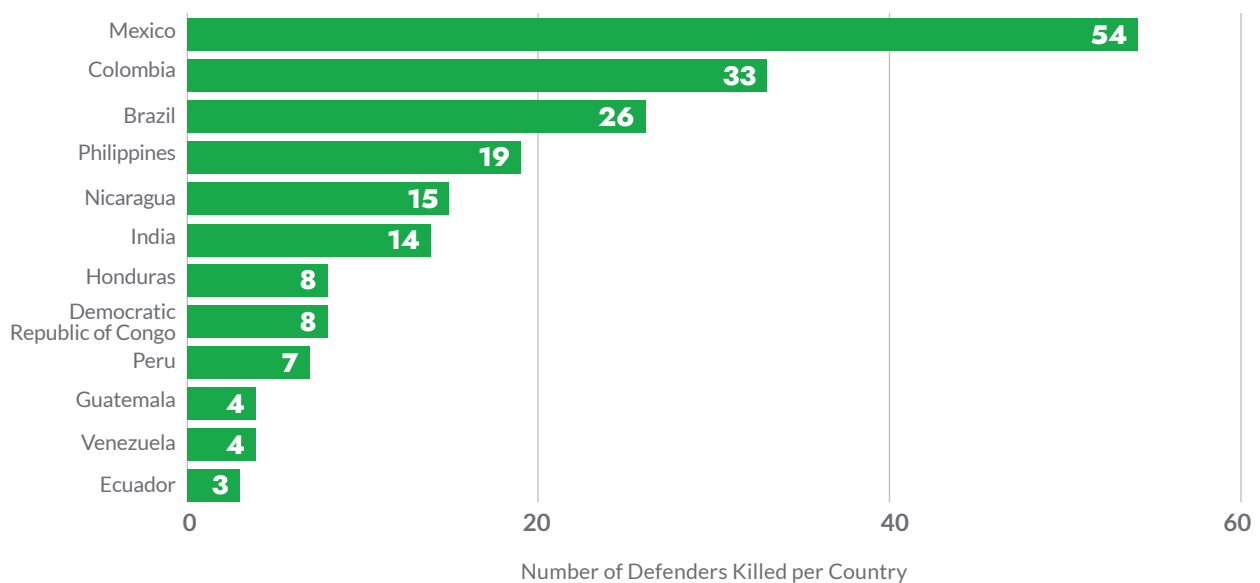
NÁME VILLA DEL ÁNGEL

Militarization and securitization heighten risks for environmental defenders and undermine democracy

Environmental defenders, most of whom are women, non-binary, and people from the so-called Global South, are at the forefront of the climate crisis. Moreover, they are the ones upholding democracy and holding the line against authoritarian governments (Freedom House, 2022). For this brief, WEDO and CFFP interviewed activists in some of the deadliest countries for environmental defenders, including Mexico, Colombia, and the Philippines. According to Global Witness (2022), out of 200 documented killings of environmental defenders worldwide in 2021, 54 were in Mexico, 33 in Colombia, and 19 in the Philippines. Other countries with high levels of violence against environmental defenders, include India, Brazil, and Nicaragua.

Land and Environmental Defenders Killed in 2021

Source: Global Witness



Environmental defenders are mostly threatened by governments, extractive industries, and criminal organizations who are seeking to exploit land and natural resources for profit. Securitized approaches to the climate crisis, which are encouraged by the U.S. and some European countries to protect their private investments abroad, also tend to criminalize environmental defenders to stop them from defending the environment. Environmental defenders use the most fundamental tools of democracy to advance their goals, such as community organizing, local protests, and meetings with local authorities, to stand up for their land and rights and continue the global struggle against the climate crisis (Global Witness, 2022). Thus, the securitization of the climate crisis and the persecution and killing of environmental defenders represent worrisome trends of democratic backsliding across the globe.

Tan, from the Philippines, told WEDO and CFFP that she decided to become a full-time environmental activist when she learned about the dangers associated with defending the environment. “The Philippines is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for environmental protectors and activists. That realization opened my eyes to what was happening. That’s when I decided to become an activist. That was in 2017 when I was a student.” Tan went on to explain the dangers of protesting in a highly militarized country, like the Philippines. “In 2016, due to droughts, farmers protested against the government, asking for rice to plant. They were met with militarization and gunned down. The climate crisis impacts people’s ability to protest to demand their rights. The Philippines’ government frames it as conflict and meets them with force.”

Tan added that the Philippines’ military is obstructing the struggle against the climate crisis because they specifically target women and young people who speak out. “The military targets human rights organizations, congressmen, and especially congresswomen, saying they are terrorists and communists because they are fighting for climate justice and land justice. There is a lot of propaganda. The result is young people who are scared of becoming activists. It is an active barrier in our organizing as climate activists.” Lastly, Tan noted that the military in the Philippines is funded and trained by the U.S.. “The U.S. trains our military. Our equipment comes from the U.S.. The U.S. influences our military policies. We have U.S. bases here. The U.S. military can come whenever they want.”⁴

In Mexico, the dangers and threats faced by environmental defenders are similar to those in the Philippines. Of the 54 environmental defenders killed in Mexico in 2021, almost half of them were Indigenous. This is because Indigenous territories are more vulnerable to being appropriated by national and foreign companies seeking to build large-scale extractivist projects (ibid.). Náme told WEDO and CFFP that they constantly fear for their lives and that many of their peers and colleagues have received death threats. Náme also noted that the regions most affected by the state-cartel violence nexus in Mexico are those rich in natural resources. “It is not a coincidence that the territories with a high presence of drug cartels, police, and military, are the same ones with a high presence of extractivist industries. There is a strong relationship

⁴ To find out more about the U.S. military’s expanded access in the Philippines, please see this article: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/2/philippines-set-to-allow-wider-us-access-to-military-bases>

between pillage and militarization.” Moreover, Náme explained that U.S. businesses have invested large amounts of money in Mexico’s energy sector and have pushed the Mexican government to use military force to protect their interests. “The energy reform benefited foreign investors, not Mexican people. The U.S. has also promoted the militarization of Mexican borders to curb migration into the U.S..”

Despite these challenges, Náme celebrated the passage of the Escazú Agreement in 2021. The Escazú Agreement is the first regional environmental and human rights treaty in Latin America and the Caribbean. Specifically, it guarantees the rights to environmental information and participation in environmental decisions. It also requires states to prevent and investigate attacks against environmental defenders (ibid.). Náme added that Escazú should be a blueprint for the rest of the world.

“It is not a coincidence that the territories with a high presence of drug cartels, police, and military, are the same ones with a high presence of extractivist industries. There is a strong relationship between pillage and militarization.”

NÁME VILLA DEL ÁNGEL

Militarization and securitization of the climate crisis perpetuate colonization

Many of the experts interviewed for this brief repeatedly stated that the militarization and securitization of the climate crisis reproduce colonial practices and power asymmetries. Madzimure, from Zimbabwe, specifically used the term “climate colonization.” Madzimure said, “we must stop imperialism in climate issues. We can call it climate colonization. Until we name those dynamics, we cannot achieve climate justice.” Moreover, De Oro said that “colonization needs to be called out more as the cause of the climate crisis. The Western value system emphasizes resources and profit accumulation but does not include any regenerative measures. Greed, through globalized capitalism, is the driving force and value system behind the climate crisis. It is based on a world view and mindset that we need to consume to be happy or fulfilled.”

Madzimure also expressed frustration at how multilateral fora, such as the Conferences of the Parties, sustain inequalities. “My challenge with the COPs is that the leading countries in militarism are always the ones at decision-making tables. It is very difficult to see the perpetrator making decisions for you.” Dr. Al-Sakkaf further underscored the underlying power asymmetries between so-called Global North and Global South countries. “This is the white man’s rhetoric, who thinks he knows best. They’ve destroyed the earth, used up all the natural resources, and colonized other countries. Now, they are telling those countries what to do and to go green. It’s not black and white. There are no easy answers like completely shifting to renewable energy or halting all military action.” Dr. Al-Sakkaf also called for climate justice to

address structural inequalities. “Solutions to the climate crisis are not as simple as extracting carbon from the air. They require climate justice. What are countries with a large carbon footprint doing to help countries who have contributed less to the climate crisis?”

Lastly, Mukalazi said it is important to look beyond so-called Global North countries to find solutions. She specifically called out the European Union for not having security policies that are consistent with its efforts to mitigate the climate crisis. “The EU says they are supporting climate justice around the world, but at the same time, they are increasing their investments in the military and military equipment. There is a missing link because if the EU were so interested in climate justice, it would at least seek to diminish its military’s contribution to climate change and toxic materials waste. In some areas, the EU seems very progressive, but when you see the whole picture, you realize that the EU is reproducing colonial thinking – ‘we can bring climate justice to the Global South, but we still want to benefit from the status quo.’”

“The EU says they are supporting climate justice around the world, but at the same time, they are increasing their investments in the military and military equipment.”

MIRIAM MONA MUKALAZI

Key takeaways for the United States and European Union policymakers and governments

The following section includes **key takeaways for policymakers in the U.S. and the EU**. The aim of these takeaways is to stop the militarization and securitization of the climate crisis, which exacerbate greenhouse gas emissions and drive injustices. These takeaways focus on advancing feminist and gender-responsive solutions to the climate crisis. It is important to underscore that these takeaways are mutually reinforcing and should be implemented holistically. Partial or siloed implementation will not achieve the desired outcomes – demilitarization and desecuritization of the climate crisis; solutions that address the root causes of the climate crisis; and the adoption of a feminist foreign policy framework to better address the climate crisis.

1 Divest from militarized and securitized responses to the climate crisis

It is imperative that the U.S. and EU governments reduce greenhouse gas emissions and stop fostering injustice by demilitarizing and divesting from the military. Resources should be shifted and invested in climate finance, prioritizing climate action over

securitization and militarization approaches that fuel the climate crisis and deepen inequalities. The goal of demilitarization should be pursued in tandem with a ramping up of and fulfillment of global climate finance commitments, which the U.S. and the EU have betrayed so far. Accountability is also key, which is why the U.S. and EU countries should commit to reporting annual military greenhouse gas emissions under the Paris Agreement's Enhanced Transparency Framework. Military emissions reporting should be comprehensive and include emissions resulting from energy used at military bases, fuel to operate military equipment, military equipment procurement, and military supply chains, among other relevant practices and operations.

2 Follow the lessons and leadership of those at the forefront of the climate crisis

Those interviewed for the purpose of this brief made it abundantly clear that to address the climate crisis, countries from the so-called Global North, including the U.S. and those in the EU, must reckon with their legacies of colonization and the global consequences to date. Such countries should move towards accepting colonial and climate reparation frameworks for action and resource distribution mechanisms. Furthermore, the U.S. and EU countries should ensure the meaningful representation and participation of women, Black, Indigenous and People of Color, non-binary, and LGBTIQ+ folks at the negotiations and decision-making tables. Their stories should be amplified, shared, and incorporated into climate policies and solutions. Moreover, environmental defenders at the forefront of the climate crisis must be protected, with the U.S. and EU governments preventing and investigating threats and attacks against environmental defenders in their countries and abroad. Lastly, they should also establish funding structures and ease visa regulations for threatened and targeted climate and environmental defenders, within the broader goal of eroding the securitization and militarization of borders.

3 Adopt a feminist foreign policy framework and gender-responsive policies to the climate crisis

The U.S. and EU countries should pursue core tenets of feminist foreign policy, ensuring intersectional gender mainstreaming across their climate and security policies. Pursuing a feminist foreign policy means prioritizing the transformation of the U.S. and EU countries' fundamental orientations towards trade, debt, aid, defense, and beyond, with the aim of climate justice. A feminist foreign policy is instrumental to draw the links between militarization, securitization, gender, and the climate crisis. From an economic standpoint, governments in the U.S. and the EU should prioritize degrowth and regenerative frameworks that prioritize care-based models over extractivist-centered models (Movement Generation Justice & Ecology Project, 2016).

4

Leverage and replicate existing mechanisms that move away from normative frameworks of militarization and securitization

The U.S. and EU countries should build on existing mechanisms to address the climate crisis from a gender perspective. First, governments should build on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda to, at a minimum, address the climate crisis from a feminist intersectional lens in their National Action Plans. Second, governments should replicate the mechanisms created under the Escazú Agreement into Feminist Foreign Policy frameworks. Specifically, these mechanisms should seek to protect environmental defenders and guarantee rights to environmental information and participation in environmental decisions.

Immediate Next Steps

U.S. and EU governments should take immediate next steps to create and strengthen an ecosystem for gender responsive policy frameworks. Two crucial steps involve:

1. **Collecting and reporting gender-disaggregated data that includes data on LGBTIQ+ folks.**
2. **Increasing funding for feminist research in the field.**

Conclusion & outlook

Militarization and securitization increase greenhouse gas emissions, worsening the climate crisis and threatening people's livelihoods. Militarization and securitization approaches are also deeply harmful because they drive injustices, especially gender and racial disparities. Countries from the so-called Global North, especially the U.S. and some countries in the EU, are responsible for the bulk of historic greenhouse gas emissions and are therefore responsible for supporting those who are most affected by the climate crisis, namely women and other marginalized groups. To pursue social justice, including gender justice and racial justice, the U.S. and EU countries must adopt intersectional gender-responsive policies to address the root causes of the climate crisis. This includes divesting from the military to prioritize climate action and climate finance and pursuing the core tenets of feminist foreign policy.

Annex

List of Interviewees

Náme Villa del Ángel | Mexico

Non-binary anti-military and environmental activist

Miriam Mona Mukalazi

Member of the board of trustees at Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF)

Edwick Madzimure | Zimbabwe

President of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Zimbabwe Section

Mitzi Jonelle Tan | Philippines

Youth and climate justice activist with Youth Advocates for Climate Action Philippines (YACAP)

Michelle Benzing | Germany

Environmental and queer activist and member of the WILPF Germany section and the WILPF Environment Working Group

Moñeka De Oro | Mariana Islands (Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands)

Environmental activist and expert

Natalia Daza | Colombia

Researcher and environmental feminist activist

Lorah Steichen | U.S./Canada

Researcher and activist, Centre for Climate Justice at the University of British Columbia

Ramon Mejia | U.S.

U.S. Marine veteran and Anti-militarism National Organizer at the Grassroots Global Justice Alliance (GGJA)

Dr. Nadia Al-Sakkaf | Yemen

Former Chief Editor of the Yemen Times and the first female Minister of Information in Yemen

Definitions

Definitions are constantly changing, growing and being shaped by context and perspectives. Please see these definitions as an offering of a starting place, rather than where they end.

GENDER JUSTICE: The systemic redistribution of power, opportunities, and access for people of all genders through the dismantling of harmful structures including patriarchy, homophobia, and transphobia (WEDO).

RACIAL JUSTICE: Racial justice is a vision and transformation of society to eliminate racial hierarchies and advance collective liberation, where Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders, in particular, have the dignity, resources, power, and self-determination to fully thrive (Race Forward).

Military Emissions Gap Dataset 2022

COUNTRY	MILITARY EMISSIONS REPORTING
Austria	Very significant gap in reporting.
Belgium	Significant gap in reporting.
Bulgaria	Very significant gap in reporting.
Croatia	Significant gap in reporting.
Republic of Cyprus	Very significant gap in reporting.
Czech Republic	Gap in reporting.
Denmark	Gap in reporting.
Estonia	No comparison possible.
Finland	No comparison possible.
France	Significant gap in reporting.
Germany	Significant gap in reporting.
Greece	Very significant gap in reporting.
Hungary	Very significant gap in reporting.
Ireland	No comparison possible.
Italy	Significant gap in reporting.
Latvia	Very significant gap in reporting.
Lithuania	Very significant gap in reporting.
Luxembourg	Very significant gap in reporting.
Malta	Very significant gap in reporting.
Netherlands	Significant gap in reporting.
Poland	No comparison possible.
Portugal	Very significant gap in reporting.
Romania	No comparison possible.
Slovakia	Significant gap in reporting.
Slovenia	Very significant gap in reporting.
Spain	Significant gap in reporting.
Sweden	No comparison possible.
United States	Very significant gap in reporting.

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