



WAR, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND THE WPS AGENDA: IMPLICATIONS FOR CANADA'S CNAP3 AND BEYOND

by Nahid Azad

This chapter examines the negative environmental and climate impacts of war within the framework of Canada's third National Action Plan on WPS (CNAP3) and the 25th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. Armed conflict is a key driver of environmental degradation and an overlooked catalyst of climate change. From scorched landscapes and poisoned water systems to the decimation of ecosystems and carbon-intensive military operations, war undermines the resilience of both communities and the planet. One of the biggest culprits for Canada's failure to decarbonise is its costly militarism, with military emissions accounting for 61% of all federal government emissions. Yet CNAP3 does not fully acknowledge these impacts, leaving an important gap in Canada's feminist foreign policy approach.

These consequences disproportionately affect women and girls, especially in fragile and conflict-affected areas. Climate change and conflict are increasingly interconnected: war exacerbates environmental degradation, weakens climate resilience, and often reverses hard-won gains. At the same time, environmental stress and climate-related disasters can intensify underlying social and political tensions. Despite the WPS agenda, women are often excluded from negotiations and decision-making during and after conflicts, while institutions and laws that protect their rights are destroyed. At this 25-year milestone of the WPS agenda, it is vital to recognize that a sustainable peace cannot be achieved without addressing the environmental and climate costs of war, both globally and in Canada's CNAP3.

War as an Environmental Catastrophe

Armed conflicts cause both immediate and long-term damage to the environment. The destruction of natural ecosystems through bombing campaigns, deforestation for military purposes, and land degradation irreparably harms biodiversity and natural habitats.



The use of heavy weaponry, oil spills, chemical contamination, and the destruction of infrastructure pollute air, soil, and water, creating toxic environments that often persist for decades. Warring parties frequently exploit natural resources such as forests, minerals, and water to fund military campaigns, accelerating ecological collapse and deepening the vulnerability of already fragile communities.

In addition to these direct forms of destruction, military operations are among the most carbon-intensive human activities. The big powers such as China, United States Department of Defense, and India are the world's largest institutional emitters of greenhouse gases. These emissions contribute directly to climate change, even as wars undermine the ability of states and communities to respond to its impacts. The environmental destruction caused by war threatens food security, clean water access, and public health. It also undermines the planet's capacity to adapt to climate change. For Canada, this means that its climate objectives and feminist foreign policy ambitions, as expressed in CNAP3, are weakened by the absence of sustained attention to the environmental costs of war.

How War Undermines the WPS Agenda

The environmental consequences of armed conflict erode each of the four pillars of the WPS agenda. War restricts the meaningful participation of women in peace processes, governance, and climate decision-making. Displacement and insecurity severely limit mobility and voice, while environmental stress—such as water scarcity—places additional unpaid labour burdens on women, reducing their opportunities for civic engagement. Militarized spaces are often dominated by male actors, sidelining women from both environmental recovery and peace negotiations.

CNAP3's commitment to women's participation must therefore be expanded to include decision-making on climate and environmental recovery. Environmental degradation also worsens conditions for women and girls in conflict zones, undermining the protection pillar. Diminished access to clean water and sanitation increases health risks, especially during pregnancy or menstruation. Competition over scarce resources can intensify gender-based violence, including sexual violence in conflict, while displacement due to environmental collapse often leads to unsafe living conditions that heighten the risks of trafficking and exploitation.



Although CNAP3 highlights protection, it does not explicitly link environmental degradation to these heightened gendered insecurities. The prevention pillar is similarly compromised. Ignoring environmental and climate factors in peacebuilding undermines long-term stability. Degraded environments and climate shocks can reignite conflict, particularly in resource-scarce regions where competition for survival is acute. When women are excluded from climate and environmental governance, efforts to build resilient societies are weakened. The militarization of environmental resources often triggers cycles of violence that prevent the establishment of sustainable peace. Canada's prevention agenda under CNAP3 would benefit from systematically incorporating environmental and climate resilience.

Finally, relief and recovery are delayed and distorted by environmental destruction. Post-conflict reconstruction frequently prioritises military or economic infrastructure at the expense of ecological restoration. Women's specific needs, such as access to sustainable livelihoods and secure land rights, are often neglected. The loss of ecosystem services—including agriculture, fishing, and water filtration—makes community recovery significantly more difficult. CNAP3's relief and recovery commitments could be strengthened by centring women-led environmental peacebuilding and sustainable livelihoods.

Policy Gaps in CNAP3

Despite its cross-cutting commitments, CNAP3 does not systematically integrate environmental security or climate justice. This silence undermines Canada's feminist positioning and limits the plan's transformative potential. Canada, like other signatories to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol / Paris Agreement, does not fully include military emissions in its national greenhouse gas inventories. Without recognizing the environmental dimensions of militarism, Canada risks weakening both its WPS and its climate agendas. At a moment when Canada frames itself as a leader in feminist foreign policy, its failure to grapple with these intersections is especially striking.



Towards Feminist Climate-Responsive Peacebuilding

To align CNAP3 with feminist principles and address the climate harms of conflict, Canada must move beyond rhetorical commitments and adopt concrete measures. Environmental and climate considerations should be mainstreamed across all WPS pillars. Military emissions must be included in national climate policies, and defence budgets should be reallocated toward climate resilience, gender-responsive adaptation, and ecological restoration.

Women's leadership and traditional knowledge¹ must be prioritized in environmental peacebuilding, ensuring that recovery is not only gender-just but also environmentally sustainable. At the same time, state and non-state actors must be held accountable for environmental damage in war, including through international legal mechanisms and reparations. Demilitarizing climate action by redirecting military budgets to climate resilience would not only advance Canada's decarbonization goals but also reinforce the feminist commitments of CNAP3.

Community-led environmental protection in conflict and post-conflict zones should be a cornerstone of Canada's WPS engagement. By supporting women's leadership in these initiatives, Canada can demonstrate the integration of feminist, environmental, and peacebuilding agendas. These steps would transform CNAP3 into a truly climate-responsive action plan that meets both the urgent challenges of our time and the feminist principles it claims to uphold.

¹ Women's leadership and traditional knowledge are intrinsically linked, particularly within Indigenous communities, where women often hold significant authority in environmental stewardship, community governance, and knowledge transmission, a practice often disrupted by colonialism but now experiencing a revitalization and support for Indigenous women leaders.



Chapter 3

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Conclusion

War is both a human and an environmental catastrophe. It accelerates climate breakdown, decimates ecosystems, and undermines the very foundations of peace. The feminist analysis of CNAP3 offered in this chapter demonstrates that Canada cannot achieve its WPS commitments without addressing the environmental and climate dimensions of armed conflict. By failing to integrate climate justice, CNAP3 risks reinforcing a narrow and incomplete vision of peace that does not match the urgent realities of the 21st century.

In Canada, this means confronting militarism as both a gendered and ecological issue: demilitarizing to decarbonize, redirecting defence budgets toward climate action, and ensuring military emissions are included in climate reporting. As the WPS agenda marks its 25th anniversary, Canada's CNAP3 must integrate climate justice if it is to deliver on the transformative promise of UNSCR 1325. Only by uniting feminist, environmental, and peacebuilding agendas can sustainable peace be achieved.