

Keswick Reminder 20.06.25: NfWW No.89 The tragedy of rearmament.

Earlier this month the 32 members of NATO signalled their intention to raise defence spending to 5% of GDP by 2035 – that's about \$2.5 trillion (a trillion is a million million). This will be made up of 3.5% in hardware and 1.5% in infrastructure and defence related activities.

While I am well aware of the rationale for this – the Russian threat to Europe, the US becoming a less reliable ally and demanding that Europe steps up its military spending – I have to set this spending against that committed to averting the worst effects of climate change. But first, some global figures.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the world's most authoritative source of information on military spending, total global military expenditure in 2024 was \$2.7 trillion. This was a 9.4% increase on 2023 and a 37% increase on 2015.

Now consider this: currently the world spends about twice as much on the military as on climate finance, which in 2022 was estimated to be \$1.3 trillion – that was for climate mitigation and does not include finance for adaptation which was relatively small.

What this means is that while the planet increasingly floods, dries and burns, and biodiversity collapses, nations are funnelling billions – trillions even – into instruments of war rather than tools for survival. To me this is tragic derangement. First, because increased military spending will increase greenhouse gas emissions, which we are trying to curb.

Second, because modern warfare seriously damages fragile ecosystems, which we are trying to protect.

Third, because every dollar spent on the military is a dollar that could have been spent on climate mitigation and adaptation.

Finally, because our priorities are inverted.

'There is a real concern around the way that we are prioritising short-term security and sacrificing long-term security,' said Ellie Kinney, a researcher with the Conflict and Environment Observatory and a co-author of a recent study.

Being existential in nature, climate change represents by far the greatest security threat of our time. It will make parts of the world uninhabitable, displace millions, destabilise entire regions, and create conditions for multiple conflicts.

Rather than putting the root causes of our long term security first, by rearming we are stoking the fires beneath them.

It seems to me that we have lost sight of what truly matters on two counts. First, we place our vastly enhanced capacity for killing way above our duty of care to the Earth, our home.

And second, in so doing we are telling our children and grandchildren that we think arming ourselves against each other is more important than defending their right to a stable climate and a thriving natural world.

Unless we reorder our priorities, generations to come will judge us harshly – not for our failure to build enough weapons, but for our failure to save ourselves from ourselves.

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