

## Decarbonising and diversifying defence in the US and the UK: A workers' enquiry for a Just Transition

### Context to the study

- The defence sector recognizes that climate change, particularly in the form of the increasing number of extreme weather events, rising sea levels and desertification can potentially accelerate insecurity and armed conflict (e.g. NATO, 2021).
- This study focuses on the US and UK, as the two largest global defence exporters on a rolling 10-year basis (DFIT, 2020).
- Since defence accounts for 50% of UK, and 80% of US, Government greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, decarbonisation of the defence sector is vital to achieve the UK and US Governments' net-zero ambitions (Frazer-Nash, 2020).
- Although the data is unclear, since defence tends to be exempted from CO2 targets, a number of reports suggest exceptionally high rates of GHG emissions, pollution and use of non-renewable resources from the defence sector (e.g. Crawford, 2019; Belcher et al., 2020, Parkinson, 2020).
- Defence organisations in the US, UK and beyond are now addressing sustainability in recent reports, statements, innovations and strategies (e.g. Honeywell, 2021; MoD, 2021; Raytheon Technologies, 2021; Rolls Royce, 2021; US Army, 2022).

THE FULL AND SUMMARY PROJECT REPORTS ARE AVAILABLE AT [HTTP://DECARBONISING-DEFENCE.CO.UK/](http://decarbonising-defence.co.uk/)

### Introduction

The study highlights the views of a cross-section of current and former defence workers on transitioning the defence sector to environmental sustainability in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK). It is framed by the ethos of 'Just Transition' (JT), a call for securing workers' and communities' rights and livelihoods when shifting to sustainable production. Within the JT framework, this project focuses on 'decarbonisation' and 'diversification' as two key processes that are particularly relevant to defence.

### Method

The main strand of the project was a 'workers' enquiry', a method that encourages workers to think about and articulate their situation in the productive process. Fifty-eight interviews were carried out with current and former defence sector workers in the US and the UK between October 2021 and March 2022. Two trans-national focus groups were also conducted: (1) An 'International Expert Dialogue' and (2) an 'International Trade Union Dialogue'. Participants included the International Trade Union Confederation, and key unions with defence sector members in the US and the UK. The project was supported by an advisory committee with representatives from defence companies, government, NGOs, academia and trade unions in the US and the UK. Policy recommendations were developed by triangulating the data collected with a literature review, document analysis and advisory committee inputs.

### Research findings

The workers interviewed did not have homogenous views on decarbonisation, diversification and JT in the defence sector, though a number of themes were evident, as follows:

- All expressed concerns about climate change and a desire to see decarbonisation of the sector.
- Most had not heard of, or did not understand the terms, 'Just Transition' and 'diversification'.
- Most had not been consulted on decarbonisation, diversification or JT by their company or union.
- Many said they want to be involved in the development of strategies and planning on these issues.
- A range of interpretations of JT were apparent, from worker focused to environment focused to society focused.
- Most did not think their jobs were threatened by decarbonisation, although some were concerned about job insecurity arising from automation, outsourcing and offshoring.
- Some were proud of and excited by the efforts of their company to decarbonise while others considered these inadequate to address the environmental issues related to defence products and operations.
- Some of these workers would prefer to be doing non-military work, perhaps related to solving environmental problems, while others believe that their military work is essential for protecting their fellow citizens.
- These workers would support transitioning the sector to greater sustainability as long as they would continue to have equally secure, interesting and well-paid jobs.
- Many believed unions play an important role in mobilising workers so as to achieve a Just Transition.

## Worker voices

“Labour will either support decarbonisation, or they will oppose decarbonisation. That will be based on whether we do have that Just Transition, or not” (Male defence worker, US)

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“I think there’s a lot more to it than just environmental benefits with decarbonisation. There is an increase in resilience of our supply chain if we can...wean ourselves off reliance on fossil fuels” (Male defence worker, UK)

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“...instead of dealing with the environmental issue, they’ll just send the work to another country that doesn’t have the same restrictions that we do” (Female defence worker, US)

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“Do we really need any more weapons? ...I think we do need, given the current state of play with the world, I think we do need some kind of defence but, in the same token, are we producing too much?” (Female defence worker, UK).

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“...on the one hand, I am really grateful that I have such a secure job in a secure industry but, on the other hand, it would be wonderful if my job didn’t necessarily have to exist” (Male defence worker, US).

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“There is an awful lot we can do with minimal investment and, actually, it would incur long-term savings for the defence sector. For example, solar panels - the facilities that I work in don’t have a single solar panel” (Male defence worker, UK).

## Policy Recommendations

**For defence companies:** • Set up structures and programmes so as to include workers at all levels in decarbonisation and diversification planning and implementation; • Create contractual clauses for companies along your global supply chain to comply with, or improve upon, US and UK environmental and employment standards; • Make your GHG emissions and other environmental impact data publicly available; • Work with suppliers to estimate upstream emissions and environmental impacts for each product and identify opportunities for switching to more environmentally benign inputs; • Understand the downstream emissions of customers for each of your products and solutions.

**For trade unions:** • Create more opportunities for education and dialogue around decarbonization, diversification and Just Transition with rank-and-file defence sector workers; • Increase work on building solidarity with, and including the perspectives of, workers in Eastern Europe and the Global South who are supplying the defence sector; • Prioritise unionising the ‘green’ sector and improving job security and pay in this sector so that these jobs begin to become more attractive to workers; • Press for company forward planning, with consultation from rank-and-file workers, to ensure a Just Transition for their workforce.

**For national governments:** • Enact legislation to include defence sector greenhouse gas emissions in national carbon accounting; • Supply significant ring-fenced funding to enable the defence sector to decarbonise and address its other environmental issues, including the retraining of workers; • Create contractual obligations for private companies that supply the MoD/DoD to work to high environmental standards and reduced greenhouse gases; • Consider transitioning security policies and budget priorities to a ‘human security’ approach, addressing the global and national poverty, inequality, health and environmental crises and investing in the jobs that would accompany this; • Set up a UK-wide Just Transition Commission, and US-wide equivalent, to ensure that workers’ voice is central to guiding net zero and other environmental policies.

**For NGOs:** • Link up with trade unions on relevant shared interests around achieving a Just Transition; • Consider focussing on the defence sector as a possible contributor to the problems and solutions you are working on.

**For defence sector workers:** • Propose decarbonisation, diversification and Just Transition education and dialogue in your company and union; • Demand greater consultation and inclusion in company decision-making on these topics.

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**References (abridged):** Belcher, O. et al. (2020) ‘Hidden carbon costs of the “everywhere war”: Logistics, geopolitical ecology, and the carbon boot-print of the US military’; Crawford, N.C. (2019) Pentagon fuel use, climate change, and the costs of war; DFIT (2020) UK defence and security export statistics for 2019; Frazer-Nash (2020) Where next for UK Defence in an era of climate crisis?; Honeywell (2021) How we’ll reach carbon neutral by 2035 <https://www.honeywell.com/us/en/news/2021/04/how-we-will-reach-carbon-neutral-by-2035>; MoD (2021) Ministry of Defence climate change and sustainability strategic approach; NATO (2021a) Climate change and security action plan; Raytheon Technologies (2021) Sustainable aviation: How Raytheon Technologies is working to cut carbon emissions <https://www.rtx.com/news/2021/04/20/sustainable-aviation>; Rolls Royce (2021) Our decarbonisation strategy <https://www.rolls-royce.com/innovation/net-zero/our-decarbonisation-strategy.aspx>; Parkinson, S. (2020a) The environmental impacts of the UK military sector, Scientists for Global Responsibility, Lancaster, [https://www.sgr.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-05/SGR-DUK\\_UK\\_Military\\_Env\\_Impacts.pdf](https://www.sgr.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-05/SGR-DUK_UK_Military_Env_Impacts.pdf); US Army (2022) United States Army climate strategy.