

Watching "The Burden: Fossil Fuel, The Military, and National Security"¹

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On January 28, 2016, US Army base Fort Hood, in Texas, broke ground on the Army's largest-ever hybrid solar and wind-power project. The USD 100 million project's 63,000 solar panels and 20 massive wind turbines will supply half the base's electricity needs "at a lower price than the power generated by fossil fuels," saving USD 168 million.² A week before, the US Navy, well along in its goal of 50% renewable energy by 2020, first used biofuels in its Great Green Fleet.

Source

The documentary's title deftly summarizes several costly problems posed by oil, still the lifeblood of military and civilian mobility. For one thing, oil-derived fuel makes up half or more of the supplies delivered to front-line troops, to be burned in transport and combat vehicles as well as generators to power an expanding array of electrified systems. An additional "burden" is the geographical and geopolitical tethering of the US military to oil-producing areas, particularly the Middle East.

Yet a further burden is that the US military is uniquely focused on protecting tankers. Crude oil and petroleum products made up a massive 26% share, by volume, of the nearly 10 billion tons of total seaborne trade in 2014. As the "Chokepoints" map shows, and as the documentary emphasizes, most of this fuel is carried through narrow straits, such as Hormuz and Malacca. These chokepoints are vulnerable to attacks by state and non-state actors, including pirates. The documentary points out that the military budget represents roughly 20% of US federal government spending, and that the cost of patrolling chokepoints is at least USD 85 billion per year.

<http://apjff.org/2016/03/DeWit.html>