

EDITORIAL

Mutual Reinforcement of Peace and Planetary Health for Conflict-Driven Health Burdens and Epidemiologic Shifts

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This summer served yet another reminder that climate change is no longer a distant threat. The rising temperatures observed this year are not confined to Pakistan and South Asia; Europe has also experienced a drastic increase in average temperatures, underscoring the global nature of climate change. The concurrent rise in global temperatures and armed conflicts represents two of the defining challenges of our time, both of which are threatening planetary health.

Armed conflicts, in addition to humanitarian crises, disrupt the interconnected system that sustains human, animal, and environmental well-being. Human health and all life on Earth are affected by war, directly and indirectly, including morbidity and mortality, food security, air pollution, and chemical contamination of soil, air, and water.¹⁻⁴ The consequences overwhelm societies, and the impact is not only immediate but also long-term, with epidemiological shifts reshaping disease patterns across populations.

Health threats from conflicts, whether acute or sustained, not only persist in affected regions but also transcend national borders and sectors through pathways including forced migration, disruption of health systems, and economic instability. The environmental consequences of armed conflict are not geographically contained either. For example, the concentration of fine particulate matter increases due to bombing, structural fires, the burning of fuel depots, and attacks on industrial facilities that release hazardous air contaminants, including nitric acid and ammonia.²⁻⁴ These greenhouse gas emissions and airborne pollutants extend beyond the immediate conflict zones, undermining global climate mitigation efforts. The health infrastructure, such as shelter, electricity, water, and sanitation, is essential for disease prevention, but its destruction during war exacerbates the public health burden. During ongoing unrest, conflict zones have been rendered inaccessible to health workers, forcing aid groups to scale back operations while global health appeals face massive funding gaps.¹⁻⁴ Spillover effects from healthcare system dysfunction, disruption of pharmaceutical supply, and interruption of life-sustaining care for non-communicable diseases highlight the importance of viewing armed conflicts with implications for global health security and sustainable development. Landscape and habitat destruction, and later reconstruction and resource use, have a heavy carbon footprint. The same resources could have been used to support a green and moral economy.

Conflicts, whether armed or arising from competition over shared resources, pose a risk to planetary health. The water distribution under the Indus Treaty exemplifies how planetary health extends beyond environmental protection, as water is not merely an economic asset; it is a shared resource whose responsible management influences present and future generations. Commitment towards a healthy planet reminds us that shared natural resources can either become sources of conflict or foundations for cooperation. Whether they divide or unite societies depends not only on economics and politics, but also on the moral values of fairness, equity, stewardship, and collective responsibility that guide their governance.

All in all, the greater imperative for humanity is the prevention of conflict itself. Global resources should be redirected toward sustainable development, resilient healthcare infrastructure and systems, climate action, and the protection of planetary health. Peace is not only a humanitarian necessity but also a prerequisite for overall planetary well-being, a response to shared global risks, and a shift from competing national interests toward a collective international commitment to our common survival.

Editor-in-Chief

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