

DEFENSE:

Forum discusses potential impacts of military's energy initiatives

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Legal experts and military officials today discussed key issues in keeping military and environmental objectives balanced and in step with the Department of Defense's energy initiatives.

Speaking at the Environmental Law and Policy Annual Review Conference, Sarah Light of the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School said the military's immense purchasing power, coupled with its energy initiatives, could create a "military environmental complex" that might prompt a broader market for renewable energy.

"There is a potential for the military to serve as a trusted source for those who may not otherwise support clean energy and conservation," said Light, speaking about a law review article she published last year.

Light's theory is a riff on a term coined by President Eisenhower during his farewell address in 1961. Then, he warned Americans of a "military industrial complex" in which the military's partnership with contractors and industry would have "unwarranted influence" on national politics and policy, potentially leading to unnecessary wars and spending.

By contrast, Light's "military environmental complex" is the theory that the Defense Department's relatively newfound emphasis on energy efficiency as a means of attaining its national security goals could spur broader growth in the renewable energy sector.

"Cooperation among the military, private financiers and technology firms has the potential to transform for the better not only our nation's energy profile, but also the military industrial complex," she said.

Light used the military's use of power purchase agreements with renewable energy providers as an example of how the Defense Department's \$19 billion energy budget could be used to influence the market. She did not put the Navy's biofuels initiative in the same category, instead questioning whether using biofuels would actually lower greenhouse gas emissions.

Light noted some concerns with the military's environmental standing by pointing out that the Defense Department is sometimes exempt from national environmental standards for reasons of national security and warning that Pentagon energy contracts could be just as vulnerable to graft as any other government contract.

Light's theory divided current and former Defense officials sitting on a review panel at the conference.

Sharon Burke, assistant secretary of Defense for operational energy, said Light's theory was interesting when it came to "how the Department of Defense runs the business of war," adding, "It's true that there is a ring of Saturn around the Pentagon of contractors and lobbyists" who see the Defense Department as a valuable customer.

But Burke noted that the Defense Department's "wonderful" energy initiatives are all to serve its core mission of protecting national security. And that goal is often not pretty for the planet.

"The heart of the Defense mission is to make war, and war is not environmentally friendly ever," she said while displaying slides of war-torn places like Hiroshima and Appomattox on a projector screen. "It takes a lot of resources to have a war, and war destroys everything in its path. Don't fool yourself, don't ever let yourself forget the mission."

Meanwhile, Amanda Simpson, executive director of the Army Office of Energy Initiatives, said Light's theory did not go far enough to illustrate the importance of the Army's environmental initiatives.

She said the military has rarely used a national security exemption to environmental regulations and noted that the Army is responsible for nearly 14 million acres of land, including 1,600 environmental cleanup sites.

Simpson noted that a significant portion of casualties in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars happened to fuel resupply convoys, and she characterized "resource efficiency" as a critical part of the Army's defense mission.

"We don't see the military and the environment in competition," she said. "The world's ultimate weapon, our soldiers, run on water. Everything else runs on fuel."

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