

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF RUSSIAN AGGRESSION IN UKRAINE: ETHICAL DIMENSION

Full-scale Russian aggression in Ukraine raises a broad range of problems, and the direct/indirect and short-term/long-term destruction of the natural and human (rural and urban) environment is among them. In short, environmental impacts of aggression and hostilities may present themselves in the following ways:

- destruction of landscapes, ecosystems, habitats, and populations of species; violation of natural life support systems and natural services (climate support systems, soil fertility, purification of water and air, pollination, etc.) that can be assessed as the violation of inherent “rights of Nature”, e.g. “Nature’s right to exist” and the principle of biophilia;
- raising the risks of technogenic catastrophes, including damage to nuclear facilities, and triggering widespread environmental technogenic pollution by the targeting of industrial objects;
- high level of emission of harmful substances into the atmosphere resulting from the use of military vehicles and other weapons systems and technogenic pollution by the targeting of industrial and infrastructure objects;
- destruction, pollution, and withdrawal from the use of farmlands; water pollution and restriction the water access, etc;

This is by no means a complete list of current and potential threats and risks, which combined and cumulative effects may endanger human life and health as well as the climatic, environmental, energy, and food safety of many people, etc.

The current Russian full-scale invasion (beginning on 24 February 2022) makes extensive and unprecedented impacts on nature, the human environment, and the quality of human life [Briefing on the environmental damage, 2022; Gardashuk, 2022]. Environmental problems don’t have national boundaries. This means that environmental harm from military actions becomes a challenge for Europe, asking for a new type of solidarity and reenvisioned model of environmental justice.

The ethical assessment of war raises questions about the guilt and responsibility of the warring parties (belligerents) for environmental harm. In fact, during the war, both sides (parties) namely the Russian Federation and Ukraine affect the environment. The approaches to the assessment of the actions of the aggressor [Rome Statute] and the victim of the aggression cannot be the same due to the following reasons:

- 1) Russian Federation committed unprovoked aggression in Ukraine, while Ukraine is defending its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. According to international legislation, an aggressor is solely responsible for the consequences of his aggression [Jeff McMahan, 2022].
- 2) All military actions and hostilities take place in the territory of Ukraine resulting in the environmental harm mentioned above. Thus, Ukraine’s territory is the most impacted one, however, other countries are also at risk of transboundary pollution from hostilities or collateral damage by missiles or their parts (as precedented in Moldova and Poland).
- 3) Nuclear terrorism which arises from the damage to nuclear facilities (Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology, Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant, Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, and The South Ukraine Nuclear Power Plant) remains one of the biggest global threats of the current war in Ukraine. The Russian invaders violate the basic principles of the international humanitarian law relating to the legal use of force in armed conflict (military necessity, distinction, proportionality) as well as the prohibitions of actions that

may result in widespread, long-term, and severe damage to the natural environment and cause transboundary damage of neutral states [Carlson, 2022].

- 4) Generally, in defending its sovereignty Ukraine uses conventional weapons according to internationally accepted laws and customs of war, while Russia violates these rules and even weaponizes food, water, electricity, fuels, etc. These result in additional pressure on the environment and natural resources.
- 5) Russian Federation purposefully attacks residential buildings and the civic infrastructure of Ukraine, which results in innocent victims, additional direct and indirect negative environmental effects, and changes in people's lifestyles and consumption, which is also reflected in the environmental footprint.

Apart from the legal assessment of the crimes of the current Russian aggression in Ukraine, this war needs in-depth ethical reflections in terms of the violation and valuation of the rights of Nature, humans, and non-human species, justice, and responsibility/liability.

From the ethical point of view, the Russian aggression in Ukraine is a manifestation of disrespect for life and a lack of empathy for it and the “connatural world”, or “the world as a community” (Mitwelt), which includes both nature and everything which is involved in it [Meyer-Abich 1993].

The Russian aggression is also a crime against future and future generations “compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” [Our Common Future] and, consequently, violates the principle of intra- and intergeneration justice.

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