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Weather as a Weapon?



Manipulating the Weather

A war of winds and lightning in the future? Researchers say it would be an asset no military power could afford to be without. (AP Photo)

By Michele Norris
ABCNEWS.com

Feb. 17 — In one scene from the movie *Patton*, the general demands of his military chaplain “I want a prayer ... a weather prayer. Let’s see if we can’t get God working with us on this thing.” We now live in an age of such advanced technology, that rather than just praying for the weather, it may one day be possible to control it.

Consider what might happen on some battlefield of the future where the U.S. military could gain a tactical advantage by changing the weather. There are several ways they might try to do that. One way would be to create rain that turns battlefields into mudbaths in order to immobilize enemy troops and enemies. Another is by triggering lightning storms over airfields to keep hostile aircraft on the ground. Yet another possibility would be to burn through a heavy fog by firing lasers to give U.S. fighter pilots a better view of enemy targets. An Air Force research paper called “Owning the Weather in 2025” predicts that weather modification could reshape battlefields.

Agreement Bars Weather Manipulation

But there is a problem with turning theory into fact. Using weather as a weapon is a clear violation of international agreements. In 1977, the United Nations passed and the U.S. signed, a resolution that prohibits changing the weather for hostile purposes on the grounds that too many civilians could be harmed. So

SUMMARY

A look at the possibility of using weather as a weapon of war.

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video
ABCNEWS' Michele Norris discusses the possibilities of changing the weather.
[RealVideo](#)

the U.S. military, which once seeded clouds in Vietnam to produce heavy rains along the Ho Chi Minh trail, can now only concentrate on better weather forecasting. “We want to anticipate and exploit the weather, not modify it.” says U.S. Air Force Director of Weather Brig. Gen. Fred Lewis.

But that does *not* mean the research has stopped. In the U.S. and in many other countries, the private sector continues to work on weather modification technology — work that could also be used on the battlefield. And as this research continues on, for example, cloud seeding techniques that produce heavy rain to help farmers in time of drought or laser technology that could clear heavy fog for passenger jets, the military is watching. Armies have never been able to conquer Mother Nature. But if new technology were to make that possible, researchers it’s a weapon no military power could afford to be without. ■

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“The thing that is fascinating is figuring out in 20 to 25 years from now, how much of that fiction is going to be turned into fact.”

John Pike, Federation of American Scientists

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