

Why Were There No Papers on War-Affected Soil at a Conference on the Effects of War on Soil

Version 1.0

Laboratory of Military Ecotones

28 September 2026

Journal: Pollution and Diseases

Issue: Research Infrastructure and Institutional Governance

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66659/rpharj84>

Protocol status: first published version

Status and purpose of the protocol

This protocol records a distinct stage of an expert-AI discussion that arose during preparations for the international conference War, Soil, and Freshwater Systems, Prague, 15-17 October 2026. The conference was originally created primarily to discuss the effects of war on soil and freshwater. However, despite a broad mailing campaign and direct approaches to specialists, the programme received virtually no independent papers whose object was soil affected by war.

The protocol is neither a transcript of the conversation nor a conventional scientific article. It preserves the development of the problem, the clarification of concepts, expert observations, proposed explanations, principal formulations, and questions that require further investigation. Its subject is limited to the institutional and cognitive conditions that obstruct independent research on affected soil. The scientific complexity of the soil system itself and its post-war transformation will be considered separately.

The main purpose of this text is neither to defend the conference nor to accuse individual specialists. Its purpose is to describe a situation in which the real object exists, the consequences of war continue, specialists and publications formally exist, yet almost no space emerges for free scientific discussion of the object.

Language of the discussion

The original discussion was conducted in Russian. This protocol was also prepared in Russian because, at this stage, the accurate preservation of thought is more important than the international standardisation of the text. Any English version must be a translation of the approved Russian protocol, not its academic normalisation, semantic softening, or replacement of the original position with a standard English-language text.

Abstract

A conference originally devoted to war, soil, and freshwater received virtually no papers directly investigating soil affected by war. This happened after hundreds of invitations and approaches, including approaches to authors who had published on the subject. Most did not reply, some limited themselves to routine messages, and substantive proposals were isolated. The protocol treats this absence not as an accidental organisational failure but as an empirical sign of how the scientific community is organised. Soil is an object of ownership, economic use, state regulation, and commercial interest. Access to territory, data, laboratory infrastructure, and the right to turn an observation into a recognised scientific fact is therefore controlled by institutional networks. Dominant organisations certify not only a specialist's qualifications but also the admissibility of the specialist's questions, methods, and conclusions. The priority of rapid recovery turns the question "what happened to the soil?" into "what must be measured to permit its further use?" As a result, complex ecological relations and long-term consequences disappear from the research, while an institutionally defined subject is presented as the real object. The protocol introduces and clarifies the concepts of the paradox of absent soil, the certified right to scientific statement, institutional appropriation of the object, the imperative of rapid recovery, permitting science, supporting soil science, controlled independence, and simulated research.

Keywords

war and soil; affected soil; scientific recognition; support regime; institutional appropriation of the object; certification of expertise; permitting science; simulated research; rapid recovery; long-term consequences; expert-AI protocol

Main question of the protocol

Why was there not a single independent paper specifically about soil affected by war at a conference on the effects of war on soil, despite the existence of specialists, publications, organisations, and potential project funding?

1 Initial observation

The original concept of the conference was concerned primarily with soil and freshwater. These environments were treated as central carriers of the long-term consequences of war. Humanitarian consequences were to be discussed in relation to the use of soil and water and their effects on populations, agriculture, settlement, and health.

The organisers sent hundreds of letters. Approaches were made to universities, scientific organisations, and individual specialists. Authors who had previously published work on the effects of war on soil were among those invited. Yet the overwhelming majority of recipients remained silent. A small number sent formal replies. Independent proposals in which affected soil would become the immediate object of research were virtually absent.

To save the conference, its thematic field had to be expanded urgently. A separate block on humanitarian, social, historical, and post-war consequences was added to the programme. This expansion enriched the programme, but it also revealed a paradox: discussion of human memory,

settlement, health, and post-war experience proved easier to organise than discussion of the soil that had originally been at the centre of the conference.

This observation does not prove that all invited specialists had the same motivation. Silence can have different causes. Yet the scale and persistence of the response turn it into material for analysis. The absence of papers becomes a fact not only of organisational reality but also of scientific reality.

2 The paradox of absent soil

The working name for the situation that was identified is the paradox of absent soil.

Soil is present in war, economic activity, state programmes, projects, and publications, but it is virtually absent from free scientific discussion as an independent object.

Soil has not disappeared from reality. What has disappeared is the expert community's willingness to discuss the correctness of its scientific investigation in relation to the consequences of war. One may speak endlessly about soil as a victim of war, but such a statement changes nothing if specialists refuse to discuss exactly how it should be investigated, what limitations existing methods have, and what should count as evidence of long-term transformation.

The paradox is intensified by the presence of potential participants in long and expensive projects around the subject. A willingness to carry out a project for two or three years does not mean a willingness, before that project begins, to define the object, discuss the limits of knowledge, and permit criticism of the familiar methodology. Project activity and cognitive activity prove to be different phenomena. Representatives of certified organisations have not the slightest doubt that their methodology is sufficient for understanding the consequences of military activity for soil as a natural object. The question of the correctness and limits of the methodology used to study soil is categorically excluded from discussion.

3 Project activity and cognitive activity

3.1 Two different forms of participation

Project activity begins after funding, a consortium, a distribution of roles, a technical assignment, and expected results have appeared. Cognitive activity begins earlier. It requires discussion of what the object is, what remains unknown about it, which methods correspond to its behaviour, and which observations could change the initial understanding.

In the case under consideration, potential readiness for a project exists, while readiness to define the object openly is almost absent. Specialists are ready to participate in institutionally organised work, but they are not ready to discuss its foundations without guarantees of status and outcome.

3.2 The zero sum of project vectors

In reality, the number of projects on soil and war is small. One reason may be competition among organisations, each seeking to make its own methodology, terminology, and infrastructure central. The many demands to "give the project to our organisation" do not add up to a common research programme.

Each institutional vector is directed towards securing its own competence, budget, data, and role. The sum of these vectors may equal zero. Everyone speaks about the need for funding, but the common object is not formed. When the question arises of what concrete result will exist after two or three years, activity declines. It is easier to justify the need for a project than to explain what new knowledge about soil will be obtained.

4 Substitution of the subject for the object

The object is the soil actually changed by war and continuing to change after active hostilities have ended. The subject becomes a limited fragment that a particular organisation is able and willing to investigate using its own methods.

The existence of a subject is not itself a problem. It is impossible to study an object immediately in its full entirety. The problem arises when an institutionally formed subject is presented as the object itself and everything left outside its boundaries is declared secondary, unproven, or non-existent.

The question "what happened to the soil?" is replaced by the question "what must be measured to permit its further use?" This substitution determines the time horizon, the set of indicators, the methods, the admissible conclusions, and the practical fate of the territory.

As a result, the research addresses not the new reality created by war but the former subject with one new factor added to it. This is not research on a new object. It is the application of an old institutional lens to a new reality.

5 Soil as an institutionally protected object

Soil is not an object detached from ownership and economic practice. It belongs to someone, is used by someone, and is included in a system of economic relations. Products are grown on it, structures and infrastructure are placed on it, asset values are calculated from it, and recovery is planned for it.

Soil therefore almost always has an owner, a user, a state regulator, a commercial value, an assigned purpose, and organisations claiming exclusive expert competence. Independent research can change the official status of land, the value of property, the possibility of production, the safety of products, export plans, and state reporting.

This produces the paradox of the institutionally protected object: the greater the economic and state importance of soil, the less freedom exists to investigate it independently. Soil is protected not only from contamination. It may also be protected from knowledge capable of changing its official and economic status.

6 The certified right to scientific statement

Scientific education, a degree, publications, and knowledge of the subject are not enough for a recognised statement about the condition of soil. What is required is actual permission to speak on behalf of recognised science. Such permission is granted by a community that is simultaneously a group of specialists and part of the state, academic, and economic establishment.

The certified right to scientific statement is actual permission to speak about the object on behalf of recognised science, granted not only on the basis of knowledge but also on the basis of membership in an admissible institutional network.

A person may possess data and ask substantive questions, yet outside the recognised network can easily be declared a non-specialist, a marginal figure, the author of an unrepresentative study, or someone who does not understand local specifics. A representative of the right organisation can retain expert status even when the initial model is weak, because the weight of the statement is created not only by evidence but also by the organisation's position.

The system therefore controls not only access to the object. It controls the transition from observation to recognised fact.

7 The dual function of the expert community

The expert community genuinely possesses knowledge, laboratories, archives, personnel, and experience. At the same time, it performs a protective function. It determines who has the right to speak, which questions are admissible, which methods are considered serious, which results can be recognised, and which conclusions should be declared premature.

The professional and protective functions are almost never separated. Criticism of methodology is therefore perceived as an attack on the institution, and independent research as a violation of the established order of access to the object.

The condition "if you criticise me, I will not open my mouth at all" is not a private emotional reaction but an expression of a broader regime. A specialist agrees to participate only on condition that the specialist's initial positions, methods, and competence do not become objects of examination.

Scientific discussion is impossible under such a condition. One can respect a person while examining that person's theory, methodology, and conclusions. If the presence of a specialist is placed above the possibility of asking questions, discussion becomes a ritual of mutual recognition.

8 The dominance of the institutional standard

Each leading organisation sees soil through its own function. For an agricultural institute, it is primarily a means of production. For an environmental authority, it is an object of regulatory control. For a military authority, it is a territory of operations. For an owner, it is an asset. For the state, it is a land resource. For an exporter, it is the basis for producing a commodity.

In Ukraine, the dominant agricultural orientation of soil science is highly likely to determine the structure of future project research. The main questions will concern returning land to use, crop yields, permissible concentrations in products, and measures required for formal recognition of a territory as restored. Research on other questions may be declared a waste of time and money.

Such a decision may be presented at the highest possible level. It will be confirmed by specialised institutes, academic structures, ministries, and expert councils. Yet institutional certification confirms that the work conforms to an accepted standard. It does not confirm that the standard itself conforms to the behaviour of soil.

A different school may dominate in another country, producing a different subject of research. The object will remain the same, but the scientific picture will be determined by the local institutional structure.

9 Methodological inheritance of the project

A project does not begin with a blank sheet. Together with funding, it inherits the methodology of the leading organisation, its understanding of soil, its admissible indicators, its personnel hierarchy, state standards, commercial restrictions, and its idea of an acceptable result.

A project may be called new, international, and interdisciplinary, while its research logic remains unchanged. Military impact is added to the existing subject as one more factor. The new object is not allowed to change the system of questions and methods.

The self-interested position of organisations connected with rapid recovery is especially important. Returning a territory to economic use creates funding, authority, contracts, and politically attractive results. Uncertainty and long-term observation contradict these interests.

10 The imperative of rapid recovery

The imperative of rapid recovery is an institutional requirement to return territories to their former economic function as quickly as possible, regardless of how fully their post-war transformation has been investigated.

This imperative sets the desired direction of the result in advance. Research is expected to confirm the possibility of recovery, determine the necessary extent of measures, and provide grounds for returning the land to use. An unknown result becomes undesirable not because it is necessarily negative, but because it cannot be incorporated in advance into an administrative and commercial plan.

At the level of soil, the task is formulated as removing the nuisance of chemical contamination. After remediation, reduction of selected indicators, or receipt of a finding that standards are met, the problem is considered solved. The independent transformation of the soil system may continue, but it lies outside the institutional formulation of the task.

11 Permitting science

Permitting science investigates not the condition of soil as a system, but the conditions for issuing administrative permission for its further use.

Its practical questions are clear: can crops be sown and harvested, can products be sold, can grain be exported, can land be returned to use, and can recovery be reported? A set of regulatory indicators is selected to answer these questions. If dangerous values are not detected in a particular product in the current or following year, there is a temptation to extend that result to the condition of the entire territory.

Such an extension is incorrect. A negative result answers only the question of a particular substance, product, place, method, and sampling time. It does not describe substances that were not measured, their transformation products, combined effects, migration through the soil profile,

transfer into water, accumulation in animals, changes in microbiota, delayed consequences, or remobilisation during drought, fire, flooding, or cultivation.

Permitting science may use precise instruments, accredited laboratories, and qualified specialists. The limitation does not necessarily lie within the measurement. It is built into the question.

12 The support regime and supporting soil science

The support regime describes science that supports, regulates, and normalises the goals of the state, the military system, or an economic organisation. In the Soviet and post-Soviet institutional tradition, this regime is highly persistent. Science does not necessarily receive a direct order to falsify data. It translates an already selected course of action into admissible tasks, methods, and conclusions.

Supporting soil science is the application of a recognised scientific system to provide methodological support for a preselected course of land recovery and use.

A typical sequence is as follows:

1. The state and economic organisations establish the goal of rapid recovery of the territory.
2. Recognised organisations translate this goal into scientific tasks.
3. The methodology is selected within the existing institutional tradition.
4. The indicators required for an administrative decision are investigated.
5. The result is confirmed by academic and state institutions.
6. Processes outside the selected subject are declared secondary, unproven, or practically insignificant.
7. Criticism is treated as an obstacle to recovery rather than as a test of the adequacy of the research.

An admissible version of reality is formed in this way. It may include reliable individual measurements while excluding questions capable of changing the predetermined course of action.

Nikolaenko, Dmitry. 2026. "Military Contamination and Regimes of Scientific Recognition: A Conceptual Framework". *Pollution and Diseases*, June, 15 pages.
<https://doi.org/10.66659/bb4q9n88>.

13 Why independent research is practically impossible

The expert assessment formulated during the discussion is that, under the existing conditions in Ukraine, independent research on soil after war is practically impossible. This statement does not concern funding alone. Even if an independent group has money, specialists, and equipment, it does not automatically gain the ability to investigate the object.

This is only one example. There are many analogous examples. What matters is that soil affected by war is not investigated from a consistently scientific position.

13.1 Physical access

Military territories may be mined, restricted, or dangerous because of unexploded ordnance. Control does not disappear after demining. The land belongs to an owner, is used by a company, or

falls under an administration. Systematic sampling and repeated access require permission and cooperation.

13.2 Access to source information

Interpreting changes requires knowledge of the pre-war condition of the territory, the history of land use, the nature of military activity, the locations of destroyed facilities, the composition of stored materials, the directions in which contaminated water and soil moved, and the recovery work already carried out. This information is fragmented, closed, or distributed among agencies.

The absence of accessible data can later be presented as natural scientific uncertainty. Yet part of the uncertainty is institutionally created and maintained.

13.3 Access to the infrastructure of recognition

Independently collecting a sample is not enough. Questions arise concerning laboratory accreditation, recognition of the method, chain of custody, sampling permission, and the authority of the organisation. A high-quality result can be excluded not by refuting it but by refusing to recognise it as an admissible fact.

13.4 Access to relations among data

A full investigation requires soil data to be connected with water, plants, animals, food products, and population health. These data belong to different agencies and organisations. The separation of data destroys the possibility of tracing a complex ecological relation.

13.5 Access to publication and practical recognition

Publication of a result does not guarantee its recognition. Organisations that control the territory, standards, and state decisions can classify an independent conclusion as insufficiently official, unrepresentative, or practically inapplicable. Scientific visibility and administrative reality remain separate.

14 The paradox of independent research

Independent research is necessary precisely because the official system has an interest in a particular result. Yet for the same reason, an independent group does not receive full access to the territory, data, and infrastructure of recognition.

Controlled independence emerges: a researcher may be considered independent for as long as the researcher does not leave the boundaries of the permitted subject. The researcher may be allowed to measure individual indicators but not to determine independently the boundaries of the object, the duration of observations, the list of hypotheses, the links with health, or the conditions for publishing the result.

The short formula of this paradox is: independent research is blocked not by a lack of scientific capacity, but by control over the object and over the right to turn an observation into a recognised fact.

15 What disappears from the research

When research is subordinated to the rapid return of land to use, everything concerning complex ecological relations and long-term consequences systematically disappears. What remains is what makes it possible to show the absence of selected dangerous indicators in grain or another product produced during the current and nearest economic cycle.

Outside the subject remain:

- unmeasured and unknown contaminants;
- transformation products of substances and new combinations of contamination;
- interaction among chemical, physical, and biological changes;
- migration of substances through the soil profile and transfer into surface water and groundwater;
- accumulation in plants, animals, and food chains;
- changes in soil microbiota and possible changes in the pathogenic properties of microorganisms;
- reproductive, hereditary, and chronic consequences;
- changes in the structure of morbidity over years and decades;
- remobilisation of contamination when land use changes and during fires, droughts, and flooding;
- relations among multiple environments and territories;
- processes for which no official standards yet exist.

The institutional interest dominates. There is no object of research in the form of soil. There is a nuisance in the form of chemical contamination that must be removed or administratively declared admissible.

16 Temporal compression of the object

A soil system may change for decades. A contaminant moves, binds, transforms, and becomes mobile again under new conditions. Permitting science, however, subordinates the object's time to the economic and political calendar.

It must be determined whether sowing can proceed, crops can be harvested, products can be exported, and recovery can be declared. Temporal compression of the object thus emerges: the long-term transformation of soil is assessed through indicators required for a decision in the current agricultural season.

What has not appeared in today's harvest is effectively recognised as absent. This is not the result of research on a long-term process, but a consequence of the selected timescale.

17 Simulated research

Simulated research does not necessarily involve falsifying samples or figures. It may include real samples, accredited laboratories, correct calculations, and qualified specialists.

Research is simulated when it formally applies scientific procedures but excludes in advance questions capable of changing the accepted decision about the object.

Its principal features are:

- the object is replaced by an institutionally defined subject;
- the questions are determined by an administrative goal;
- the time horizon is reduced to the duration of the project or the agricultural season;
- complex ecological relations are excluded;
- unknown parameters are not sought;
- a negative result from a limited test is turned into proof of general safety;
- the official status of an organisation replaces independent verification;
- successful completion of a procedure is presented as understanding of the object.

Such research may appear to be organised to the highest standard. This is precisely why it is difficult to recognise. The high quality of procedures within an artificially narrowed subject conceals the absence of research on the real object.

18 What does elimination of contamination mean?

A claim that contamination has been eliminated requires explanation. It may mean removing part of the soil, isolating a site, reducing the concentration of one substance, changing the designated use of the land, restricting access, obtaining values below a standard, stopping measurements, or administratively removing the territory from monitoring.

These actions have different meanings. Some physically change the condition of the site. Others change only its official status. Contamination can disappear from reporting without disappearing from the soil.

Recognition of a territory as restored must therefore be treated as a separate institutional event. It is not identical to the completion of an ecological process.

19 Main causal scheme

1. Soil belongs to the state, an owner, or a user and is included in economic relations.
2. Recognised organisations receive the certified right to determine its condition.
3. The state and economic organisations set the goal of rapid recovery.
4. The dominant scientific school translates this goal into a set of admissible questions and methods.
5. The method measures the indicators required to permit further use.
6. Complex relations and long-term consequences remain outside the research.
7. Academic and state institutions confirm the correctness of the procedure and result.
8. Independent verification is restricted through control of the territory, data, laboratory infrastructure, and rules of recognition.
9. The institutionally defined subject is presented to society as the real condition of the soil.

20 Principal formulations preserved from the discussion

- Soil is present in war, projects, and publications, but absent from scientific discussion as an independent object.
- The question "what happened to the soil?" is replaced by the question "what must be measured to permit its further use?"

- This is not research on a new object. It is the application of an old institutional lens to a new reality.
- Institutional certification confirms that work conforms to an accepted standard. It does not confirm that the standard conforms to the condition of the soil.
- Independent research is necessary precisely because the official system has an interest in a particular result. Yet for the same reason, independent research does not receive full access to the object.
- What is investigated is not what happened to the soil, but what must be measured to permit its continued use.
- Contamination can disappear from reporting without disappearing from the soil.
- Independent research on soil after war is blocked not by a lack of scientific capacity, but by control over the object and over the right to turn an observation into a recognised fact.

21 Concepts introduced and clarified in the protocol

The paradox of absent soil

A situation in which soil is present in war, economic activity, projects, and publications but absent as an independent object of free scientific discussion.

Institutional appropriation of the object

The assignment of the right to determine the boundaries, condition, and admissible methods of investigating soil to a limited network of state, academic, and economic organisations.

The certified right to scientific statement

Actual permission to speak about an object on behalf of recognised science, based not only on competence but also on membership in an admissible institutional network.

The imperative of rapid recovery

The requirement to return territories rapidly to their former economic function regardless of the completeness of knowledge about their post-war transformation.

Permitting science

Research on indicators required for administrative permission to use a territory, instead of research on the condition of soil as a system.

Supporting soil science

The application of a recognised system of soil knowledge to provide methodological support for a predetermined course of recovery and economic use.

Controlled independence

A condition in which a researcher retains formal independence only within a previously permitted subject and set of methods.

Temporal compression of the object

Assessment of the long-term transformation of soil through indicators required for a decision within the current project or agricultural season.

Simulated research

Research that formally follows scientific procedures but excludes questions and observations capable of changing a predetermined decision about the object.

22 Limits of the statements made

The protocol does not claim that every Ukrainian specialist acts from self-interest, that every official study is false, or that agricultural use should not be restored. It claims something different: the institutional structure creates a systematic advantage for questions, methods, and results compatible with rapid recovery and obstructs independent research on complex and long-term processes.

The observation that papers were absent from one conference does not by itself prove the entire causal scheme. It became the starting point for an expert interpretation based on experience of working with Soviet and post-Soviet scientific organisations, organising the conference, and analysing regimes of scientific recognition. Further work must test individual elements of the scheme in specific projects, access procedures, methods, and decisions.

This distinction does not soften the criticism. It makes the criticism testable.

23 Conclusion

The absence of papers on affected soil at a conference originally created around war, soil, and freshwater cannot be explained only by poor outreach or an accidental lack of interest. It indicates a structural contradiction.

The expert community possesses knowledge and methods, but it is embedded in a system of ownership, regulation, commercial interests, and state recognition. It is more willing to participate in a project that has already been organised than to discuss the object before the budget and roles have been distributed. The dominant organisation brings its own subject and methodology into the project. The imperative of recovery determines in advance which questions will be considered practical. The right to scientific statement is institutionally certified. Independent research is restricted through control of territory, data, and the infrastructure of recognition.

The central problem is therefore not an absence of instruments or specialists. The problem is that affected soil is not allowed to act as an object capable of contradicting the interests of its owners, users, regulators, and official experts.

A new research approach must begin not with the question of which indicators are required to permit the use of a territory. It must begin with the questions: what happened to the soil, which processes are continuing, and which observations can reveal what the existing institutional system did not plan to see?

Changes from the previous version

First published version.

Open questions and next stage

- Which specific legal, administrative, and organisational mechanisms restrict independent access to affected soils in Ukraine?
- How can institutionally produced uncertainty be documented and distinguished from the objective complexity of a natural process?
- Which models of ownership of data and samples permit repeated independent verification?
- How can the necessary verification of qualifications and work safety be distinguished from certification of a politically admissible result?
- Which organisational conditions would allow the object to change the research programme rather than adapt to the technical assignment?
- Which complex ecological relations and long-term processes should be investigated in soil actually affected by military activity?

The final question is deliberately deferred to the next protocol. This document records the objective and institutional constraints on research. The next stage will address the scientific complexity of soil itself after it has been affected by war.

Statement of responsibility for the protocol

Artificial intelligence supported the discussion, formulated questions, proposed concepts, systematised arguments, and prepared the structure of the protocol. Dmitry Nikolaenko defined the initial problem, provided empirical observations, accepted, rejected, and clarified proposed formulations, determined the boundaries of the document, and authorises its publication. Responsibility for the published protocol belongs to the author.

Recommended Citation

Nikolaenko D. 2026. “Why Were There No Papers on War-Affected Soil at a Conference on the Effects of War on Soil. Protocols of Expert-AI Scientific Inquiry. Version 1.0.” Pollution and Diseases. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66659/rpharj84>

Licence

Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).