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The US military is responsible for the most egregious and widespread pollution of the planet, yet this information and accompanying documentation goes almost entirely unreported. In spite of the evidence, the environmental impact of the US military goes largely unaddressed by environmental organizations and was not the focus of any discussions or proposed restrictions at the recent UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. This impact includes uninhibited use of fossil fuels, massive creation of greenhouse gases, and extensive release of radioactive and chemical contaminants into the air, water, and soil.

The extensive global operations of the US military (wars, interventions, and secret operations on over one thousand bases around the world and six thousand facilities in the United States) are not counted against US greenhouse gas limits. Sara Flounders writes, "By every measure, the Pentagon is the largest institutional user of petroleum products and energy in general. Yet the Pentagon has a blanket exemption in all international climate agreements."

While official accounts put US military usage at 320,000 barrels of oil a day, that does not include fuel consumed by contractors, in leased or private facilities, or in the production of weapons. The US military is a major contributor of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that most scientists believe is to blame for climate change. Steve Kretzmann, director of Oil Change International, reports, "The Iraq war was responsible for at least 141 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MMTCO₂e) from March 2003 through December 2007. . . . That war emits more than 60 percent that of all countries.

. . .

This information is not readily available

. . .

because military emissions abroad are exempt from national reporting requirements under US law and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change."

According to Barry Sanders, author of *The Green Zone: The Environmental Costs of Militarism*, "the greatest single assault on the environment, on all of us around the globe, comes from one agency

. . .

the Armed Forces of the United States."

Throughout the long history of military preparations, actions, and wars, the US military has not been held responsible for the effects of its activities upon environments, peoples, or animals. During the Kyoto Accords negotiations in December 1997, the US demanded as a provision of signing that any and all of its military operations worldwide, including operations in participation with the UN and NATO, be exempted from measurement or reductions. After attaining this concession, the Bush administration then refused to sign the accords and the US Congress passed an explicit provision guaranteeing the US military exemption from any energy reduction or measurement.

Environmental journalist Johanna Peace reports that military activities will continue to be exempt based on an executive order signed by President Barack Obama that calls for other

federal agencies to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. Peace states, “The military accounts for a full 80 percent of the federal government’s energy demand.”

As it stands, the Department of Defense is the largest polluter in the world, producing more hazardous waste than the five largest US chemical companies combined. Depleted uranium, petroleum, oil, pesticides, defoliant agents such as Agent Orange, and lead, along with vast amounts of radiation from weaponry produced, tested, and used, are just some of the pollutants with which the US military is contaminating the environment. Flounders identifies key examples:

- Depleted uranium: Tens of thousands of pounds of microparticles of radioactive and highly toxic waste contaminate the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Balkans.
- US-made land mines and cluster bombs spread over wide areas of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East continue to spread death and destruction even after wars have ceased.
- Thirty-five years after the Vietnam War, dioxin contamination is three hundred to four hundred times higher than “safe” levels, resulting in severe birth defects and cancers into the third generation of those affected.
- US military policies and wars in Iraq have created severe desertification of 90 percent of the land, changing Iraq from a food exporter into a country that imports 80 percent of its food.
- In the US, military bases top the Superfund list of the most polluted places, as perchlorate and trichloroethylene seep into the drinking water, aquifers, and soil.
- Nuclear weapons testing in the American Southwest and the South Pacific Islands has contaminated millions of acres of land and water with radiation, while uranium tailings defile Navajo reservations.

□ Rusting barrels of chemicals and solvents and millions of rounds of ammunition are criminally abandoned by the Pentagon in bases around the world.

The United States is planning an enormous \$15 billion military buildup on the Pacific island of Guam. The project would turn the thirty-mile-long island into a major hub for US military operations in the Pacific. It has been described as the largest military buildup in recent history and could bring as many as fifty thousand people to the tiny island. Chamoru civil rights attorney Julian Aguon warns that this military operation will bring irreversible social and environmental consequences to Guam. As an unincorporated territory, or colony, and of the US, the people of Guam have no right to self-determination, and no governmental means to oppose an unpopular and destructive occupation.

Between 1946 and 1958, the US dropped more than sixty nuclear weapons on the people of the Marshall Islands. The Chamoru people of Guam, being so close and downwind, still experience an alarmingly high rate of related cancer.

On Capitol Hill, the conversation has been restricted to whether the jobs expected from the military construction should go to mainland Americans, foreign workers, or Guam residents. But we rarely hear the voices and concerns of the indigenous people of Guam, who constitute over a third of the island's population.

Meanwhile, as if the US military has not contaminated enough of the world already, a new five-year strategic plan by the US Navy outlines the militarization of the Arctic to defend national security, potential undersea riches, and other maritime interests, anticipating the frozen Arctic Ocean to be open waters by the year 2030. This plan strategizes expanding fleet operations, resource development, research, and tourism, and could possibly reshape global transportation.

While the plan discusses “strong partnerships” with other nations (Canada, Norway, Denmark, and Russia have also made substantial investments in Arctic-capable military armaments), it is quite evident that the US is serious about increasing its military presence and naval combat capabilities. The US, in addition to planned naval rearmament, is stationing thirty-six F-22 Raptor stealth fighter jets, which is 20 percent of the F-22 fleet, in Anchorage, Alaska.

Some of the action items in the US Navy Arctic Roadmap document include:

- Assessing current and required capability to execute undersea warfare, expeditionary warfare, strike warfare, strategic sealift, and regional security cooperation.

- Assessing current and predicted threats in order to determine the most dangerous and most likely threats in the Arctic region in 2010, 2015, and 2025.

- Focusing on threats to US national security, although threats to maritime safety and security may also be considered.

Behind the public façade of international Arctic cooperation, Rob Heubert, associate director at the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary, points out, “If you read the document carefully you’ll see a dual language, one where they’re saying, ‘We’ve got to start working together’ . . . and [then] they start saying, ‘We have to get new instrumentation for our combat officers.’ . . . They’re clearly understanding that the future is not nearly as nice as what all the public policy statements say.”

Beyond the concerns about human conflicts in the Arctic, the consequences of militarization on the Arctic environment are not even being considered. Given the record of environmental devastation that the US military has wrought, such a silence is unacceptable.

Update by Mickey Z.

As I sit here, typing this “update,” the predator drones are still flying over Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan, the oil is still gushing into the Gulf of Mexico, and 53.3 percent of our tax money is still being funneled to the US military. Simply put, hope and change feels no different from shock and awe . . . but the mainstream media continues to propagate the two-party lie.

Linking the antiwar and environmental movements is a much-needed step. As Cindy Sheehan recently told me, “I think one of the best things that we can do is look into economic conversion of the defense industry into green industries, working on sustainable and renewable forms of energy, and/or connect[ing] with indigenous people who are trying to reclaim their lands from the pollution of the military industrial complex. The best thing to do would be to start on a very local level to reclaim a planet healthy for life.”

It comes down to recognizing the connections, recognizing how we are manipulated into supporting wars and how those wars are killing our ecosystem. We must also recognize our connection to the natural world. For if we were to view all living things, including ourselves, as part of one collective soul, how could we not defend that collective soul by any means necessary?

We are on the brink of economic, social, and environmental collapse. In other words, this is the best time ever to be an activist.

Update by Julian Aguon

In 2010, the people of Guam are bracing themselves for a cataclysmic round of militarization with virtually no parallel in recent history. Set to formally begin this year, the military buildup comes on the heels of a decision by the United States to aggrandize its military posture in the Asia-Pacific region. At the center of the US military realignment schema is the hotly contested agreement between the United States and Japan to relocate thousands of US Marines from Okinawa to Guam. This portentous development, which is linked to the United States’ perception of China as a security threat, bodes great harm to the people and environment of Guam yet remains virtually unknown to Americans and the rest of the international community.

What is happening in Guam is inherently interesting because while America trots its soldiers and its citizenry off to war to the tune of “spreading democracy” in its own proverbial backyard, an entire civilization of so-called “Americans” watch with bated breath as people thousands of miles away—people we cannot vote for—make decisions for us at ethnocidal costs. Although this military buildup marks the most volatile demographic change in recent Guam history, the people of Guam have never had an opportunity to meaningfully participate in any discussion about the buildup. To date, the scant coverage of the military buildup has centered almost exclusively around the United States and Japan. In fact, the story entitled “Guam Residents Organize Against US Plans for \$15B Military Buildup on Pacific Island” on *Democracy Now!* was the first bona fide US media coverage of the military buildup since 2005 to consider, let alone privilege, the people’s opposition.

The heart of this story is not so much in the finer details of the military buildup as it is in the larger political context of real-life twenty-first-century colonialism. Under US domestic law, Guam is an unincorporated territory. What this means is that Guam is a territory that belongs to the United States but is not a part of it. As an unincorporated territory, the US Constitution does not necessarily or automatically apply in Guam. Instead, the US Congress has broad powers over the unincorporated territories, including the power to choose what portions of the Constitution apply to them. In reality, Guam remains under the purview of the Office of Insular Affairs in the US Department of the Interior.

Under international law, Guam is a non-self-governing territory, or UN-recognized colony whose people have yet to exercise the fundamental right to self-determination. Article 73 of the United Nations Charter, which addresses the rights of peoples in non-self-governing territories, commands states administering them to “recognize the principle that the interests of the inhabitants are paramount.” These “administering powers” accept as a “sacred trust” the obligation to develop self-government in the territories, taking due account of the political aspirations of the people. As a matter of international treaty and customary law, the colonized people of Guam have a right to self-determination under international law that the United States, at least in theory, recognizes.

The military buildup, however, reveals the United States’ failure to fulfill its international legal mandate. This is particularly troubling in light of the fact that this very year, 2010, marks the formal conclusion of not one but two UN-designated international decades for the eradication of colonialism. In 1990, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 1990–2000 as the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. To this end, the General Assembly adopted a detailed plan of action to expedite the unqualified end of all forms of colonialism. In 2001, citing a wholesale lack of progress during the first decade, the General Assembly proclaimed a second one to effect the same goal. The second decade has come and all but gone with only Timor-Leste, or East Timor, managing to attain independence from Indonesia in 2002.

In November 2009—one month after “Guam Residents Organize Against US Plans for \$15B Military Buildup on Pacific Island” aired—the US Department of Defense released an unprecedented 11,000-page Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), detailing for the first time the true enormity of the contemplated militarization of Guam. At its peak, the military buildup will bring more than 80,000 new residents to Guam, which includes more than 8,600 US Marines and their 9,000 dependents; 7,000 so-called transient US Navy personnel; 600 to 1,000 US Army personnel; and 20,000 foreign workers on military construction contracts. This “human tsunami,” as it is being called, represents a roughly 47 percent increase in Guam’s total population in a four-to-six-year window. Today, the total population of Guam is roughly 178,000 people, the indigenous Chamoru people making up only 37 percent of that number. We are looking at a volatile and virtually overnight demographic change in the makeup of the island that even the US military admits will result in the political dispossession of the Chamoru people. To put the pace of this ethnocide in context, just prior to World War II, Chamorus comprised more than 90 percent of Guam’s population.

At the center of the buildup are three major proposed actions: 1) the construction of permanent facilities and infrastructure to support the full spectrum of warfare training for the thousands of relocated Marines; 2) the construction of a new deep-draft wharf in the island’s only harbor to provide for the passage of nuclear-powered aircraft carriers; and 3) the construction of an Army Missile Defense Task Force modeled on the Marshall Islands–based Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site, for the practice of intercepting intercontinental ballistic missiles.

In terms of adverse impact, these developments will mean, among other things, the clearing of whole limestone forests and the desecration of burial sites some 3,500 years old; the restricting of access to areas rich in plants necessary for indigenous medicinal practice; the denying of access to places of worship and traditional fishing grounds; the destroying of seventy acres of thriving coral reef, which currently serve as critical habitat for several endangered species; and the over-tapping of Guam’s water system to include the drilling of twenty-two additional wells. In addition, the likelihood of military-related accidents will greatly increase. Seven crashes occurred during military training from August 2007 to July 2008, the most recent of which involved a crash of a B-52 bomber that killed the entire crew. The increased presence of US military forces in Guam also increases the island’s visibility as a target for enemies of the United States.

Finally, an issue that has sparked some of the sharpest debate in Guam has been the Department of Defense’s announcement that it will, if needed, forcibly condemn an additional 2,200 acres of land in Guam to support the construction of new military facilities. This potential new land grab has been met with mounting protest by island residents, mainly due to the fact

that the US military already owns close to one-third of the small island, the majority of which was illegally taken after World War II.

In February 2010, upon review of the DEIS, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rated it “insufficient” and “environmentally unsatisfactory,” giving it the lowest possible rating for a DEIS. Among other things, the EPA’s findings suggest that Guam’s water infrastructure cannot handle the population boom and that the island’s fresh water resources will be at high risk for contamination. The EPA predicts that without infrastructural upgrades to the water system, the population outside the bases will experience a 13.1 million gallons of water shortage per day in 2014. The agency stated that the Pentagon’s massive buildup plans for Guam “should not proceed as proposed.” The people of Guam were given a mere ninety days to read through the voluminous 11,000-page document and make comments about its contents. The ninety-day comment period ended on February 17, 2010. The final EIS is scheduled for release in August 2010, with the record of decision to follow immediately thereafter.

The response to this story from the mainstream US media has been deafening silence. Since the military buildup was first announced in 2005, it was more than three years before any US media outlet picked up on the story. In fact, the October 2009 *Democracy Now!* interview was the first substantive national news coverage of the military buildup.