

By **Kim Scipes**

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The Green Zone: The Environmental Costs of the Military By Barry Sanders (AK Press, 2009)

As a US military veteran—USMC, 1969-73, who turned around while on active duty—I have been incredibly frustrated at the impotence of the anti-war movement in the United States to stop the wars in particularly Iraq, Afghanistan and, increasingly, Pakistan. I am, obviously, not alone. Many other people—veterans, as well as many more civilians—also share this frustration.

Barry Sanders' new book, *The Green Zone*, takes a different angle than any I've seen before, and I believe it's an approach I believe we all need to consider: Sanders focuses on the environmental costs of militarism, particularly those from the US military.

Sanders recognizes the incredible threat by greenhouse gases to the worlds' peoples well-being and, in fact, to our very survival. [Percentage of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has risen from 280 parts per million (ppm) before the industrial revolution started in 1750 to where the latest readings are 392 ppm—should it reach 450, the accompanying temperature rise would lead to uncontrollable melting of the tundra across Russia and Canada, and the release of untold amounts of methane: methane has 20 times greater impact on the atmosphere than carbon dioxide.]

James Hansen of NASA believes we must go below 350 ppm to prevent serious environmental

damage worldwide—KS.]

Sanders also knows the environment is not just threatened by greenhouse gasses, but recognizes pollution of the water, air and soil as joining with greenhouse gases to imperil us all.

Yet he makes an incredibly important point, trying to put things into perspective and to focus our attention: "... here's the awful truth: even if every person, every automobile, and every factory suddenly emitted zero emissions, the Earth would still be headed head first and at full speed toward total disaster for one major reason. The [US] military—that voracious vampire—produces enough greenhouse gases, by itself, to place the entire globe, with all its inhabitants large and small, in the most immanent danger of extinction" (p, 22).

To put it plain language, that social institution that is said to protect Americans is, in fact, hastening our very extermination along with all the other people of the planet.

Sanders addresses the military's affects on the environment in many ways. He starts off with trying to figure out how much (fossil) fuel the military uses, with their resulting greenhouse emissions there from.

Despite diligent efforts, he cannot find out specific numbers, so he is forced to estimate.

After carefully working through different categories, he comes to what he calls a conservative estimate of 1 million barrels of oil a day, which translates to almost 20 million gallons each and every day!

He puts this number into international perspective:

"If that indeed turns out to be the case, the United States military would then rank in fuel consumption with countries like Iran, Indonesia and Spain.

It is truly an astonishing accomplishment, especially when one considers ... that the military has only about 1.5 million troops on active duty, and Iran has a population of 66 million, Indonesia a whopping 235 million" (54)

The cost, incidentally, is also quite high. He quotes a US Army General as estimating that the cost of this fuel averages \$300 a gallon! (55)

Yet, how does this contribute to global warming? He reports that the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that "each gallon of gasoline produces 19.4 pounds of CO₂" (carbon dioxide). If his estimate of 1 million barrels of oil a day is correct, he writes, "then the combined armed forces sends into the atmosphere about 400 million pounds of greenhouse gases a day, or 200,000 tons.

That totals 146 billion pounds a year—or 73 million tons of carbon a year" (67-68).

And that's just regarding fuel use.

Sanders further discusses the military's impact on the environment. He talks about the impact of exploding bombs, cluster bombs, napalm, cannon rounds, depleted uranium, etc.

He points out that the US military estimates they need about 1.5 billion rounds for their M-16 rifles a year.

He talks about the impact of US military bases around the world, including in the Philippines and Puerto Rico.

To me, the most sickening chapter was the one on depleted uranium or DU. He explains, "Depleted uranium is essentially U-238, the isotope after the fissionable isotope, U-235, has been extracted from uranium ore."

DU has a half-life of 4.7 billion years.

He continues:

"... a good deal of the country of Iraq, both its deserts and cities, hums with radioactivity. For since 1991, the US has been manufacturing 'just about all [of its] bullets, tank shells, missiles, dumb bombs, smart bombs, and 500- and 2000-pound bombs, and everything else engineered to help our side in the war of Us against Them, [with] depleted uranium in it.

Lots of depleted uranium.

A single cruise missile, which weighs 3,000 pounds, carries within its casing 800 pounds of depleted uranium.'

Recall that the Air Force dropped 800 of these bombs in just the first two days of the war.

The math:

800 bombs multiplied by 800 pounds of depleted uranium equal 640,000 pounds, or 320 tons of radioactive waste dumped on that country in just the first two days of devastation" (83).

The impact is devastating. When DU hits something, it ignites, reaching temperatures between 3,000-5,000 degrees Celsius (5,432-9,032 degrees F). It goes through metal like a hot knife through butter, making it a superb military weapon.

But it also releases radiation upon impact, poisoning all around it.

Its tiny particles can be inhaled—people don't have to touch irradiated materials.

Thus, Iraqis are being poisoned by simply breathing the air!

And, once inhaled, DU hardens, turning into insoluble pellets than cannot be excreted.

DU poisoning is a literal death sentence.

It not only kills, however, but it can damage human DNA—it's the gift that keeps on giving, to generations and generations.

Yet, radiation is an equal opportunity destroyer: it also poisons those in occupying armies. Evidence from the Gulf War I ("Desert Storm") shows the impact on American troops.

Sanders quotes Arthur Bernklau, who has extensively studied the problem:

"Of the 580,400 soldiers who served in Gulf War I, 11,000 are now dead.

By the year 2000, there were 325,000 on permanent medical disability.

More than a decade later, more than half (56 percent) who served in Gulf War I have permanent medical problems."

Bernklau then points out that the disability rate for soldiers in Vietnam was 10 percent (87).

Yet the impact is not just on Iraqis, or the soldiers who fought there. Sanders points out that, according to the London Sunday Times, radiation sensors in Britain reported a four-fold increase in airborne uranium just a few days after George W. Bush launched the March 19, 2003 attack on Iraq. That sounds bad enough, that the uranium can travel the approximately 2500 miles from Baghdad to London.

But what Sanders does not note is that global weather does not travel east to west:

it travels west to east.

In other words, this uranium had to cross North America to get from Iraq to Britain!

There is much more detailed information included in this small, highly accessible book. AK Press deserves our respect and support for publishing such a worthy volume: and this is one we each should purchase and urge others to do so as well.

The biggest strength of this book is Sanders' clarity: this man is, if you will permit, "on target." He sees the problem being not just the illegal and immoral wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.

He sees the US military as being an essential part of the US Empire, along with the major multinational corporations.

He sees the military as an institution as a threat to global environmental survival.

He recognizes that politicians won't address the problem; they are too incorporated in the US Empire.

It says it is up to us, individually and collectively, in the US (primarily) and together with people around the world.

Basically, his argument is this: the US military can continue to launch wars and continue killing people (including Americans) around the world, or we can end war, and devote resources to the well-being of people in this country and others around the world.

The choice is our's.

But we also need to realize that if we let the US military continue on its path of continual war with its on-going quest for global domination, it will destroy all the humans, animals and vegetation on the planet.

Your move, good people.

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