

The U.S. Military Is the World's Biggest Climate Destroyer. No to War and Occupation! No to Environmental Degradation

Emerging Dynamics of Antiwar and Climate Justice Movements

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Talk by Alison Bodine at the United National Antiwar Coalition National Conference held from February 21-23, 2020, at the People's Forum in New York City.

To begin, I hope everyone has been able to see actions across Canada in solidarity with the people of Wet'suwet'en media and social media lately, footage and their hereditary chiefs who are standing against a fracked gas, or what they call a "natural" gas pipeline, up in northern British Columbia. This struggle is part of my talk today, however, the focus of what I wanted to say is about the importance of bringing the anti-war movement and the climate justice movement together or anti-war organizers and the climate justice movement together.

The Devastating Human and Environmental Impact of War & Occupation

I want to start with just three short examples of the impact of war on the environment that I think are very important to remember.

On January 24th, over a million people protested in Iraq. The streets were full in Baghdad of people demanding the U.S. Out of Iraq Now! It was incredibly inspiring.

Iraq is a country that has been devastated for 17 years by U.S. led war and occupation. Over a million people have been killed, not to mention the millions who were killed before the war began in 2003 when the U.S. and the United Nations Security Council imposed severe sanctions between 1991 and 2003. Iraq is a devastated country where the U.S. has set up 500 big and small military bases throughout 17 years of occupation, and deployed countless bullets, bombs, chemical weapons, depleted uranium and burn pits filled with toxic plastics, heavy military machinery and shells of weaponry.

No wonder people in Iraq were demanding U.S. Out of Iraq Now! Because of the devastation that has been brought upon them. But I wanted to further centre our discussion on climate justice by talking about one example of what climate devastation and climate justice means to people in Iraq.

In 2010, the [International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health](#) wrote an article where they reported a 38-fold increase in leukemia, a tenfold increase in breast

cancer, and an infant mortality rate eight times higher than in neighboring Kuwait, following what had then been seven years of U.S. war and occupation in Iraq. A big cause of this could be linked to the chemical weapons used, and especially to depleted uranium, which has a half-life of 4.5 billion years. According to a [2007 report by the U.N. Environment Program](#), between 1000 and 2000 metric tons of depleted uranium were fired into Iraq.

The city of Nagasaki is shown as a teeming urban area, above, then as a flattened, desolate wasteland following the detonation of an atomic bomb, below. Circles indicate the thousands of feet from ground zero.

Now I will bring it back home to the U.S. and Canada. In Canada, an Indigenous Dené nation community in the Northwest Territories became known as the “Village of Widows” because men of the population died of cancers that they developed when mining for uranium. This was the same uranium that was used in the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As well, the radium and the uranium mines in the community released tailings into the lake and landfills. The devastating effects of this are still experienced in the community today.

That brings us to what has been said many times, importantly, in this conference already, which is that the U.S. Department of Defense is the world’s largest polluter. We are talking about [1.2 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases](#) emitted annually. That is the equivalent of 257 million cars on the road for a year.

In Canada, the Department of National Defence also makes an enormous contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. A portion of this is through the fueling of the warplanes of Canada and other imperialist countries. The government of Canada is often claiming that they are not participating in U.S.-led wars, but then refueling all the jets that are dropping the bombs. The Canadian military provided [65 million pounds of fuel](#) to refuel aircraft used in the bombing of Iraq and Syria between 2014 and 2019. This is incomparable, of course, to the fuel consumption of the vehicles that any of us here in this room drive.

The Department of Defense in the United States is the largest institutional consumer of fossil fuels. In Canada, the [Department of National Defence](#) is the largest consumer of petroleum and Canada’s largest landholder.

This is added to the continued environmental and human impact of chemical and radioactive weapons such as Agent Orange and depleted uranium. Also, the military bases of the United States and its allies around the world persist in poisoning and in polluting.

Another topic to talk about that is important to the discussion about environment and war is military emissions, because specific sources of greenhouse gases are excluded from federal reduction targets due to their important role in “ensuring the national safety and security of all Canadians” — as Canada’s previous environment minister, Catherine McKenna, justified why the declared emissions of the Department of National Defence in Canada has never been counted in Canada’s emission reduction targets.

Military emissions are explicitly stated as excluded in the targets set by the 2015 United Nations Paris agreements. Under these agreements, countries are “required,” as much as the Paris agreements can “require” anything, to report on their military emissions. Still, countries are not obligated or encouraged to do anything to reduce them. In the

international climate agreements that proceeded with the Paris agreement, the Kyoto Accords, military emissions were not even part of the discussion. Military emissions continue to be considered a so-called necessary expense for our planet.

Then, there is the issue of military budgets. For example, the world's biggest military budget ever has been passed yet again in the United States recently. Instead of being spent on human and environmental destruction, this money could go towards climate justice, meaning health care, education, jobs, public transit, and more.

As Martin Luther King Junior said, and I think this is a good quote for us to use when talking about the environment and war,

“Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.”

So, where is the technology that we need to save our planet earth now?

The War at Home: Wet'suwet'en & the Struggle for Indigenous Rights

The wars abroad by imperialist countries such as the U.S. and Canada are also carried out against people at home. And I think every once in a while, there are these escalated times when that reality can shake oppressed people and their very foundations. And that has happened with Indigenous people in Canada over the past few weeks.

There is a war against Indigenous people in Canada. There has been since the colonisation of Indigenous land. The Canadian state has the same roots as the United States of genocide, residential schools, and reservation systems. This history and the current reality of colonization are reflected in the mobilization of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in solidarity with Wet'suwet'en today.

It is important to understand that one year ago, the RCMP -the Canadian national police- first invaded the territory of the Wet'suwet'en people, and they kept a detachment there for an entire year. Then this January is when things escalated again because the RCMP moved further into the territory and cleared people off of a road to make way for the development of the Coastal GasLink pipeline, which is in violation of the demands of the Wet'suwet'en people. British Columbia is an unceded territory. No treaties, in 92 percent of the land, were ever signed. So hereditary chiefs and their system of governance are law in those unceded territories.

The Coastal GasLink pipeline is fracked gas. There has been a lot of talk, specifically in the Province of British Columbia about how the Coastal GasLink pipeline is going to “replace coal for the world,” and at the same time, not have a big impact on greenhouse gas emissions. However, the impact of “natural gas” emissions can only be considered minor when you ignore the methane and poisons that are released when it is extracted and considering that when it is burned, Canada does not have to count those emissions targets.

It is Time to Unite the Antiwar and Climate Justice Movement

That brings me to my final point, which is about bringing together the anti-war movement with the climate justice movement. One way to do this is by making sure “self-

determination for oppressed nations, including Indigenous nations!" is always part of our demands. This has always been part of our demands within Mobilization Against War and Occupation (MAWO) and MAWO has consistently brought this demand to the cross-border movement that we would like to strengthen and build together, including with this conference.

I think there are four strategies and demands that we need to bring into our antiwar, anti-pollution, and anti-imperialist movement. The first is that we must build a movement that is against imperialist war and occupation. Today, we live in what we in MAWO call "the new era of war and occupation," which is the never-ending wars that started in 2001, that we are all coming together to organize against. This era is characterized by a campaign to regain hegemony in the Middle East, North Africa, and Latin America by capitalist countries that are facing a grave economic crisis and a rapid falling rate of profit. These countries are on the war path to gain new markets and resources, which means more killing of our planet.

Secondly, self-determination for oppressed nations, as I said, must be part of our work, from Indigenous and Black people, to oppressed countries under attack and occupation. This important demand calls on us to have strategical unity against any occupation, domestic or international. We cannot just be talking about the U.S. occupying other countries but also what it means when there are oppressed nations within the U.S. and Canada borders.

Thirdly, we need to fight for a world without NATO and U.S. military bases, because of the environmental pollution and also because of the way that the United States uses these bases to increase their wars and occupations and consequently further ecological degradation.

Lastly, I think the environmental struggle ties into the movement against sanctions and blockades, which are war. These attacks do not allow countries to develop their economies or to use their resources for the good of their people. Sanctions and blockades enforce the hegemony of the world's biggest corporations, which are also the world's biggest polluters.

If we combine these four pillars, which bring together the war at home and abroad, this is how we can build an anti-imperialist movement, how we can move from just being against war to also being against imperialism. I think we cannot build an effective anti-war movement without centralizing and emphasizing the slogan of self-determination for all oppressed nations.

I will say that I think this slogan of self-determination for all oppressed nations is as important as "Workers of the world unite," from Marx and Engels.

People of oppressed nations face war and occupation and the denial of self-determination, which unites them in the fight against imperialism. The common struggle that unites workers is their exploitation by the capitalist class and the denial of their rights.

Within the antiwar and the climate justice movement, we must also emphasize that we are building an international movement, one that is also internationalist in character. The struggles of people against massive resource extraction projects are similar in Standing Rock in North Dakota or the Amazon rainforest in Brazil. The struggle for a sustainable world requires international cooperation between oppressed people. It requires solidarity

and, more importantly, unity across borders to become powerful and effective.

There are many opportunities for antiwar activists to bring the antiwar movement to the climate justice movement. There were massive protests around the world in September 2019; over 9 million people participated in global climate strike actions. And I think we need to continue to take advantage of that mobilization on the streets. We need to strategically bring the antiwar movement and the environmental movement together. Fighting against war is fighting against the degradation of the environment and fighting for climate justice is fighting against war and occupation. We are in an era of history that these two causes have become two struggles for one purpose, to save our lives and the planet.

I think we are now facing the opportunity to build a better and sustainable world. We must not feel inactive or depressed about the climate crisis or endless wars and occupations around us. In the face of this devastation, we have no choice but to take up the call and fight back.

People marching on the streets today against climate change can also be very capable of understanding that it is not just a clean planet we are fighting for. It will not matter if we have a clean planet if the earth is still full of poverty and human suffering and wars and occupations. The antiwar and climate justice movement now more than ever has one cause: Save the planet.

United we will win!

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