

Independent and Peaceful Australia Conference, Darwin, August 3, 2019

Climate, War and the Environment

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My name is Robin Taubenfeld. I was born on what is reported to be shared Wichita, Comanche, Caddo, Cherokee - Kiowa, land known as Dallas, Texas of people of eastern European Jewish decent. I live and work on Jaggera and Turrbul Country in Meanjin – what is known as Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. Regions in which I work and live are already affected by climate change to the extent that climate mitigation and migration are a daily life reality – with sea level rise forcing some people off their ancestral lands while others have already been displaced, disfigured or destroyed by nuclear testing and ongoing militarization of their homelands and seas. Sovereignty of those lands has never been ceded. Australia shares the legacy of colonization, nuclearisation and militarization with her neighbours in the Pacific... and the USA. I am grateful for the opportunity to meet with you today on Larrikia Country.

As we gather, Hawaiians are fighting to protect Mauna Kea from a proposed Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT). In Aotearoa, people are rising to protect Ihumātao. Marshall Islanders are taking action in response to sea level rise and calling for more action on nuclear contamination and radioactivity leaking Runit Island, where the US has buried radioactive debris after conducting 67 nuclear tests in the region. As we heard, the youth, in particular, are rising in Guahan, to protest military development, where already 1/3 of the land is used by the US military.



Slide 1: Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific Pacific Women Speak Out for Independence and Denuclearisation, Zohl de Ishtar, Ed. A joint publication by Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (Aotearoa), the Disarmament and Security Centre (Aotearoa), and Pacific Connections (Australia), 1998, p34-35.

When and where I grew up in Texas, and later in Washington and Virginia, we rarely heard the histories of those regions as histories of invasion, colonization or dispossession. When we studied slavery, we rarely associated the brutality of the past with trauma and disadvantage in the present. When I taught “modern history” in an Australian school, history started with the industrial revolution

and basically consisted of WW1, WW2, Korea and Vietnam – European and American- involved wars were the markers of time. Frontier wars were never considered.

As you know, despite being the longest continuous culture in the world, Aboriginal people in Australia are under constant pressure to barter their culture and connection to Country/land for promised improvement of living conditions – that urban Australians take for granted.



Slide 2: Mirrar Traditional Owner Yvonne Margarula walks with Jacqui Katona and others to open the Jabiluka Blockade. Outside the Ranger uranium mine. Jabiru, NT Australia. 1998. Photo by Robin Taubenfeld.

In 1976, when the Ranger uranium mine was proposed in what is now World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park, the local traditional owners – the Mirrar people - consistently rejected the mine. The government invoked “national interest” and the mine was approved. The uranium mine brought with it services that the community did not have until then: electricity, yes – electricity! a healthcare centre, a school (up to year 10) and more – infrastructure that one would expect is the right of every Australian citizen. Now with the closure of the mine in sight, there is uncertainty around whether/how these services will continue – though the toxic legacy of uranium tailings will remain for thousands of years. Uranium from the Ranger mine was used by TEPCO in the Fukushima nuclear reactors which melted down.

The nuclear weapons and waste cycle starts in Australia with uranium mining – Australia has or has had uranium agreements with every nuclear weapons state – Australia has been a testing ground for British nuclear weapons and now Australia fuels a nuclear arms race with its loyalty to the US military nuclear umbrella. From where we sit, we cannot separate the issues of Aboriginal disadvantage and dispossession and desecration of Aboriginal land from the support for US warfare in our region. Our campaigns for environmental justice and our calls for peace are inextricably linked to justice and sovereignty for First Nations people here, in the Pacific and around the world.

I was invited to speak about War and the Environment. In an era of never-ending war, war and conflict are a part of our daily life, military training areas make up approximately 6% of the planet and Australian Defence claims 300 million hectares as its “estate.”¹ With their localised ecological,

¹ Wilkie, Ben, Australian Environments in War and Peace, presented at Deakin University, Warrnambool, 2016, <https://environmentandwar.wordpress.com/2016/07/08/australian-environments-in-war-and-peace/>

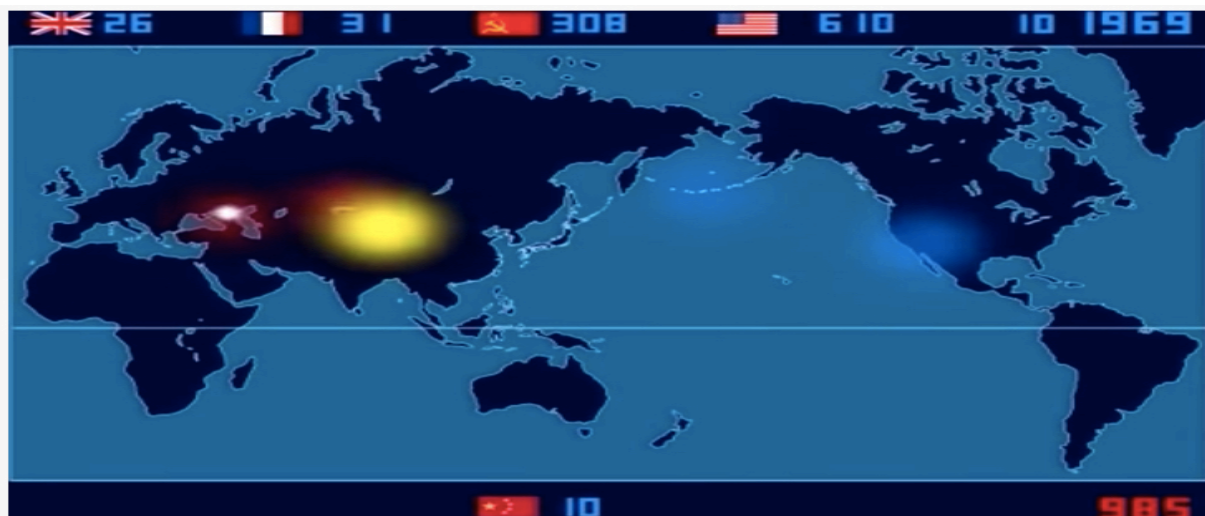
social and political impacts, these areas set the stage for military disruption around the world - on land, in our air, seas, waterways, cities, and in even space. While normalised as, built for or launched in the name of defence, military training and war have long-term, far-reaching impacts on all beings, most of whom have no say in the humankind's political machinations.

Who speaks for the insects, the butterflies, the dugong, the 18-species of shrimp or the sea-grass in Shoalwater Bay? The endangered brigalow, the whales, turtles, bats or migratory birds who visit the area? Our lives are intertwined with the story of the missing trees of My Son in Vietnam. Along with the birds, we breathe the white -phosphorous contaminated air in Fallujah and we eat the PFAS contaminated crops downstream from Australian Defence sites.



Slide 3: My Son – Vietnam. My Son, remains of the religious and political capital of the Champa Kingdom from 4th- 14th centuries. The U.S. sprayed de-foliants in these regions? Where are the ancient trees? Photo: <http://azumivillahoian.com/public/upload/service/tour-my-son-1.jpg>

Militarily affected environments are more than unfortunate collateral damage to conflict. We are part of them; they are part of us - and they can be remote, rural or urban. While we are not the only aggressive species on the planet, humans are the only species that knowingly destroys our own habitat, our home.



Slide 5: Screen shot from Soundtrack to presentation: Visual Soundscape: Nuclear Detonations from 1945-1998, Isao Hashimoto, 2003. Listen/watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjAqR1zICA0>

There are approximately 15,000 nuclear weapons on the planet today. The Trump presidency has seen the Doomsday Clock moved forward to 2 minutes to midnight. “The new “time” means experts at the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists believe the earth is closer to imminent peril than at any point in the last 64 years”² due to the combined threat of climate change and nuclear weapons. A swathe of climate-change-denying political appointees in the US, flippant talk about weapons and an expanding list of nuclear weapons states, has scientists, and others, alarmed. The politics, denial and talk of nuclear expansion are replicated here in Australia. The already rising of global temperature coupled with weapons proliferation increases insecurity, which nuclear weapons states then, predictably, use as a rationale to avoid disarmament commitments, further increasing insecurity.

Australia has refused to participate in talks to ban nuclear weapons. It is clear that while addressing climate change is certainly necessary – and mitigation of climate impacts, will certainly contribute to peace and security, addressing Climate Change alone will not eliminate the real possibility of global catastrophe. The threat of small or large scale nuclear war - possibly nuclear winter– prior to or during climate mitigating processes is real. Peace is the precursor to sustainability.

As a uranium port, Darwin plays a role in fuelling the nuclear cycle, despite assurances that Australian uranium is used for peaceful purposes. The nuclear power and weapons industries are inextricably linked – and, mining contaminates the land/water for eternity. When your Country becomes a de facto radioactive waste dump, there is no peace in uranium mining.

With 2,500 US troops now stationed here, reports that the HIMARS (High Mobility Artillery Rocket System) used in training at Shoalwater Bay will be moved to Darwin, talk of a US port in the region, permitted US bombing flyovers conducted from Guahan, frequent military exercises, military bases in and around town, Darwin is a heavily militarised town. Though it was identified as pivotal in WW2, in 1998, I certainly hadn’t realised the extent or intensity of the military build-up here and had heard little of the Japanese bombing. Visiting the waterside earlier this week, I was struck by this lapse in my knowledge and interested in how military realities can be normalised – and military histories romanticised. Though war is not family entertainment, I engaged in military tourism!

We visited the WW2 Oil storage tunnels, constructed after Japanese air-raids destroyed 7 of 11 oil tanks on the Stokes Hill wharf. Like grandiose military projects today, the tunnels proved to be a military engineering nightmare, with a blow-out budget, only mildly useful/usable and ultimately leaving their local environment contaminated – after leaking jet fuel into local environments. What struck me about the project was also that fuel was at the central to the Defence narrative. As fuel is key to military survival, access to fuel was the focal point for military actions from both sides of the conflict. Access to fuel continues to be a driving force behind military activity today –as a necessary commodity to support military activity and as the object of conflict in its own right.

While we are still seeking answers to Australia’s fuel consumption and emissions, it is clear that Defence has a large carbon footprint and that, despite talk of greening the army, current militaries will continue to be highly fossil-fuel dependent for the foreseeable future. The US military is known to be the world’s largest institutional consumer of fuel.

In their 2019 paper “Hidden carbon costs of the “everywhere war”: Logistics, geopolitical ecology, and the carbon boot-print of the US military” Belcher, Bigger, Neimark, and Kennelly examine US military fuel purchases, providing insight to military carbon emissions as well as the link between military strategy and fuel use, and the seemingly never-ending need for fuel and thus fuel-centric social arrangements. Their work focuses on the fuel supply chain.

² <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/26/doomsday-clock-closer-to-midnight-in-wake-of-donald-trump-election>

To give a picture of the (Defense Logistics Agency - Energy) DLA-E's daily energy operations, the agency handles 14 million gallons of fuel worth \$53 million per day (DLA, 2015). Operating from a nondescript building in Fort Belvoir, Virginia, the DLA-E has an extensive chain of sites for distribution and delivery, with 258 terminal operations worldwide (DLA, 2017). Moreover, the DLA-E has delivery capacity to 2,023 military posts, camps, and stations in 38 countries; 230 bunker contract locations in 51 countries; and 506 into-plane contract locations in 97 countries...

Their calculations are in line with others that identify that the “US military is the 47th largest emitter of GHG in the world, if only taking into account the emission from fuel usage. This calculation excludes emissions from the electricity and food the military consumes, land use changes from military operations, or any other source of emissions.”

The authors also note that “Critically, these emissions are not counted as a part of aggregate US emissions following an exemption granted in negotiating the Kyoto Protocol (which the Bush Administration refused to sign in 2001). This gap was to be rectified by the Paris Accord, from which the USA, famously, has withdrawn.”³

Military activity is not only heavily fuel dependent and emissions producing, but has at its core a disregard for life and nature which sees it destructive both at home and in its theatres of conflict. Defoliating Vietnam, placing millions of landmines in Cambodia, chemical warfare, even everyday explosives leave toxic legacies.

The US military “produces 750,000 tons of toxic waste annually, establishing the United States military as the “largest single polluter of any agency or organization in the world (Sanders, 2009, p.50).

Almost 900 of the EPA’s approximate 1300 superfund sites are active or inactive military bases or weapons manufacturing facilities; and, as of 2010, the DOD’s current cleanup program includes roughly 31,000 contaminated sites on more than 4,600 active or former defense properties in the United States and other countries (Woodward, 2004, p. 13; Earth Talk, 2010).”⁴

These issues – and toxic military sites – nuclear test zones, uranium tailings, undisclosed DU weapons use sites, PFAS contaminated regions dot Australia as well. And Australia has been, and continues to be. involved in theatres of war/conflict around the world. According to the Nautilus Institute, between 2001- 2010 Australia was active in:

Location/Region	Defence facility
British Indian Ocean Territory/Chagos Archipelago	Diego Garcia
East Timor	Dili Heliport FOB Baucau FOB Chauvel FOB Ermera FOB Gleno

³Belcher, Oliver & Bigger, Patrick & Neimark, Benjamin & Kennelly, Cara. (2019). Hidden carbon costs of the “everywhere war”: Logistics, geopolitical ecology, and the carbon boot-print of the US military. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers. 10.1111/tran.12319, p 8. First published <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12319> https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333873233_Hidden_carbon_costs_of_the_everywhere_war_Logistics_geopolitical_ecology_and_the_carbon_boot-print_of_the_US_military

⁴ Walsh, Bryan T, *Forgetting Histories of Toxic Military Violence: The Case of the Kelly Air Force Base*, in *A Communication Perspective on the Military, interactions, messages and discourses*, ES Parcell, ES & LM Webb, (Eds), p 392

⁵ <https://nautilus.org/publications/books/australian-forces-abroad/australian-bases-abroad/>

	<p>FOB Maliana Camp Phoenix Dili Heliport FOB Baucau FOB Chauvel FOB Ermera FOB Gleno FOB Maliana Defence Cooperation Compound Metinaro Training Base</p>
<p>Middle East and Central Asia Afghanistan</p>	<p>Bagram Airbase Camp Rhino Camp Russell Fire Base Tycz* FOB Anaconda* FOB Budwan (U.K.) (formerly FOB Armadill) FOB Coyote (Dutch) FOB Chora (ANA) FOB Cobra (aka FOB Tinsley)* FOB Davis (aka FOB Ripley) FOB Kajaki (U.K.) FOB Khyber-Lyddiard FOB Locke (ANA) FOB Lyddiard (ANA) FOB Martello* FOB Mashal FOB Mirwais FOB Phoenix FOB Poentjak* FOB Qudus FOB Ripley (aka FOB Davis) FOB Worsley ISAF Headquarters Kandahar Air Field Kamp Holland Kamp Hadrian* Multinational Base Tarin Kowt (MBTK) Patrol Base Atiq Patrol Base Buman Tarin Kowt</p>
<p>Bahrain</p>	<p>Muharraq Air Base</p>
<p>Iraq</p>	<p>Ali Base (Tallil Base), An Nasiriyah al-Asad Air Base, Anbar Australian embassy, Baghdad Baghdad Diplomatic Security Centre Balad Military Hospital Camp Smitty, Samawah, Al-Muthhanna Camp Taji Camp Terendak, Tallil Camp Ur, Tallil Camp Victory Cobra Base Forward Operating Base Union III, International Zone Baghdad Joint Base Balad</p>
<p>Kuwait</p>	<p>Camp Doha Billabong Flats</p>
<p>Kyrgystan</p>	<p>Manas Air Base</p>

Qatar	Al Udeid Air Base
United Arab Emirates	Al Minhad Air Base, Dubai
Solomon Islands	Camp RAMSI Henderson Field (Honiara International Airport) Rural police and military posts

The Iraq war was responsible for 141 million metric tons of carbon releases in its first four years, according to [an Oil Change International report](#). On an annual basis, this was more than the emissions from 139 countries in this period, or about the same as putting an extra 25 million cars onto U.S. roads for a year.⁶

The human cost of these emissions alone is enormous. The environmental and social cost of the warfare which accounted for these emissions is exponential. Death, disease, loss of habitat, clean water, air and infrastructure – and ironically/unfortunately, the perpetuation of systems/structures reliant on war or war-makers.

Every two years, Australia hosts some of the world’s largest military operations, Exercise Talisman Saber, joint US-AUS combined force training which sees thousands of personnel engaging in land, sea and air manouevers: live firing, bombing practice, the use of sonar, on shore landings – and nuclear powered and nuclear-weapons-capable vessels. With support locations in cities around the country, the majority of the action takes place in Queensland, on and around the Great Barrier Reef, Talisman Sabre 2019, involved 34,000 personnel.

On the first day of Talisman Sabre 2013, as part of our protest against the military exercises, we officially launched our report: US Bases in Australia: the social and environmental risks. Rockhampton’s Morning Bulletin had just run a 2-page spread headlined ***Talisman Saber 2013: Defending Australia While Protecting the Environment***. (July 12, 2013)



Slide 5: *Talisman Saber 2013: Defending Australia While Protecting the Environment*, Morning Bulletin July 12, 2013.

⁶ <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2015/12/paris-climate-deal-military-carbon-emissions-exemption/420399/>

⁷ <https://peaceconvergence.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/2019-master-for-printing-us-bases-in-australia-word-doc-edit.pdf>

Soon after the launch, it was revealed that the US had jettisoned four bombs on the Great Barrier Reef, when unable to drop them on their intended target, Townshend Island, an island excised from the Great Barrier Reef for bombing practice. There was a flurry of international media and condemnation. But the war games continued and continue today.

The demarcation of Townshend Island, and indeed Shoalwater Bay, as military zones is a human construct irrelevant to the biology of the region. The land, islands, beaches, marshes, rivers and seas earmarked for military training are connected and integral parts of their own ecosystems. In the case of Townshend Island as part of Shoalwater Bay, its value is diminished by referring to it as part of the Shoalwater Bay Military Training Area, as is the intrinsic value of Shoalwater Bay itself.

The wetlands at Shoalwater Bay are Ramsar listed wetlands significant to migratory birds. The sea grass beds at Shoalwater and other Talisman Sabre locations are critical to dugong. Only recently identified as a unique species, the Snub-Fin Dolphin has been found in these waters. Shoalwater Bay provides habitat for:

- “Thirty-six water bird species including eleven species of migratory shorebirds, particularly in Port Clinton, southern Shoalwater Bay and Island Head Creek.
- The largest Dugong population in the southern Great Barrier Reef since 1987 with a Dugong Protection Area covering the SWBTA waters;
- Important feeding habitat for Green Turtles,
- One hundred and one listed marine species; and
- Large numbers of whales and other cetaceans, migratory waders and shorebirds.

A previous survey concluded that SWBTA provides critical habitat for migratory shorebirds and supports more than 20,000 water birds...”⁸ Shoalwater Bay is, and has been, home to many. And it is contested space. Defence determines who can access to the region and when, denying Darumbal people the liberty to engage freely in cultural practices, let alone live on their land.

In the 90’s the Australian public was sold the idea that removing pastoralists and turning the Shoalwater Bay region into a military training area that would have the dual purpose of defence and conservation – would be better for the environment than farming. And so, it possibly was. But it is not what was BEST for the environment. What is best for the environment is neither military nor pastoral use, but the returning of the land and seas to their traditional owners, demilitarisation, remediation and protection of the site.

The jettisoning of bombs on the Great Barrier Reef, the expansion of military training zones and even the huge Talisman Sabre exercises are the tip of the iceberg of global military impacts on our environment. They are ongoing face of colonialism in this region and provide a local link to and reminder of the ongoing social, psychological, economic and environmental footprint of the era of never-ending war.

The legacy of the Frontier Wars looms here in Australia. Australia has been a nuclear-weapons testing grounds and now faced a PFAS crisis with up to 30 Defence sites, and an increasing number of others, under investigation for contamination with toxic fire-fighting foam. Australian universities are engaging in military-funded research, not only with investment from obvious aviation, tech or weapons industries, but also in projects such as Gene Drives.

⁸ Public Environment Report, *Talisman Saber 2017 21-Feb AECOM PER*, prepared for Defence by AECOM Appendix O O-4 <http://www.defence.gov.au/Exercises/TS17/Docs/TS17-PER-Part-1-Body.pdf>

In April this year, the Queensland government launched their 10-year Roadmap and Action Plan to make Queensland the “Khaki capital of Australia.”^o

We need make the links between the snubfin dolphin in a military training area at Shoalwater Bay, Indigenous dispossession, the rising sea levels in the Pacific, and the impending war in Iran. We need to disrupt or transform the structures behind them –the violence inherent in our global economic system/s.

We need to shift our goal from mitigating symptoms of out-of-control, eco-system destroying development, climate change and ongoing war to removing the structures that keep this paradigm in place. Nature is not a resource or commodity, nor is not external to us. We are the environment and, for our own future, it’s time to dismantle systems that prioritises the life of one being over another, normalises inequality and war and sees a logic in the existence of nuclear weapons.



Slide 6: *All Options Are On The Table*, Michael Leunig

Friends of the Earth: www.foe.org.au

See and Contribute to our report: *US Bases in Australia: The Social and Environmental Risks*

<https://peaceconvergence.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/2019-master-for-printing-us-bases-in-australia-word-doc-edit.pdf>

^o <http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2019/4/2/queensland-is-invested-in-defence>