

The Pentagon – The Climate Elephant

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There is an elephant in the climate debate that by U.S. demand cannot be discussed or even acknowledged. This agreement to ignore the elephant is now the accepted basis of all international negotiations on climate change.

It is well understood by every possible measurement that the Pentagon, the U.S. military machine, is the world's biggest institutional consumer of petroleum products and the world's worst polluter of greenhouse gas emissions and many other toxic pollutants. Yet the Pentagon has a blanket exemption in all international climate agreements.

Ever since the Kyoto Accords or Kyoto Protocol negotiations in 1998, in an effort to gain U.S. compliance, all U.S. military operations worldwide and within the U.S. have been exempt from measurement and from agreements on reduction. The U.S. Congress passed an explicit provision guaranteeing U.S. military exemptions. (Interpress Service, May 20, 1998)

The complete U.S. military exemption from greenhouse gas emissions calculations includes more than 1,000 U.S. bases in more than 130 countries around the world, its 6,000 facilities in the U.S., its aircraft carriers and its jet aircraft. Also excluded are its weapons testing and all multilateral operations such as the giant U.S.-commanded NATO military alliance and Africom, the U.S. military alliance now blanketing Africa. The provision also exempts U.S./U.N.-sanctioned activities of "peacekeeping" and "humanitarian relief."

After gaining this giant concession, the U.S. government still refused to sign the Kyoto Accord, thus sabotaging years of international effort to forge an agreement.

The provisions of the Kyoto Protocol nevertheless became the basis of all future proposed international meetings on a climate treaty, including Copenhagen 2009, Cancun 2010, Durban 2011, Doha 2012 and the United Nations upcoming 21st Conference of the Parties on Climate Change meeting in Paris in 2015.

In all past international conferences it was again and again the U.S. government that sabotaged the meetings and refused to be bound by any treaty. The Obama administration on Aug. 27 again confirmed that at the U.N. meeting in New York in September to prepare for the 2015 Paris meeting, only a nonbinding agreement could be put forward.

Role of grassroots activists

Unless the climate activists at the grassroots level challenge this exemption of the U.S. military and begin to focus a laser light on the most dangerous source of global warming and climate change, the movement will become lost in vague generalities, utopian hopes and toothless accords.

The only hope that the mass outpouring in September in New York City will have an impact is if independent voices can begin to consciously challenge the greatest global polluter.

Exposing the horrendous social costs of U.S. militarism must also be part of the challenge. Washington's military role acts to constantly reinforce at every level the repressive state apparatus.

For decades, and at an accelerated pace since 2001, the military has provided an endless stream of free war equipment to local city and state police, National Guard units and sheriffs' offices. Youth of oppressed nations within the U.S. become targets of a vastly expanded police state. The fresh images of tanks and armored police in Ferguson, Mo., confirmed for millions the results of this racist policy.

Exposing the devastation of U.S. wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya is essential. These U.S. wars have spread hundreds of tons of radioactive waste from depleted uranium missiles. They have contaminated the soil and water of vast regions under U.S. occupation with benzene and trichloroethylene from air base operations and perchlorate, a toxic ingredient in rocket propellant. More than 1,000 military sites in the U.S. are contaminated with these toxins. Military bases top the Superfund list of contaminated sites. The poorest communities, especially communities of color, are the most severely impacted by this continuing military poisoning.

It is essential to connect the Pentagon exemption from international negotiations to its primary role as the protector and expander of corporate power on a global scale. The most powerful and profitable corporations are the oil and military corporations. These are the other primary polluters.

Pentagon admits climate change

Unlike the right-wing fanatics and climate change deniers in Congress, the Pentagon does not deny the devastating impact that climate change will have on every aspect of life on the planet.

Its own published studies confirm the danger. But the U.S. officer corps is committed to what they call "full spectrum dominance." So every study of climate change by the military planners is based on evaluating how to take advantage of the future crisis to more firmly entrench U.S. corporate power and protect the irrational capitalist system that has created this crisis that threatens all humanity.

The Pentagon studies are not on plans to deliver emergency aid in the face of climate disasters such as floods, droughts, famines, epidemics, typhoons, tornadoes, hurricanes, ice storms, water shortages and damage to infrastructure. The plans of their war colleges and think tanks are on how to extract political concessions on docking rights and future military access during a besieged country's hour of greatest emergency need.

For example, the U.S. Department of Defense releases every four years a Quadrennial Defense Review. This is a broad outline of U.S. military strategy. (tinyurl.com/pn4awm8)

The 2014 QDR describes the threat of climate change as "a very serious national security vulnerability." Similar to the 2010 QDR, it poses the problem of how to maintain global U.S.

military hegemony in the face of ever-worsening global climate disruptions.

The military officer caste is focused on maintaining Wall Street rule and capitalist property relations during a crisis. There is concern with preserving the authority of their puppets, allies and collaborators. The report stresses the importance of developing new policies, strategies and plans.

“Climate change poses another significant challenge for the United States and the world at large. As greenhouse gas emissions increase, sea levels are rising, average global temperatures are increasing and severe weather patterns are accelerating.

“The impacts of climate change may increase the frequency, scale and complexity of future missions, including defense support to civil authorities. ... The Department’s operational readiness hinges on unimpeded access to land, air and sea training.”

Military and corporate planning is callously focused on how to take advantage of the life-threatening changes.

A most frightening example is the “National Strategy for the Arctic Region.” This White House report opens by praising the Arctic as “an amazing place.” But then quickly defines the need for focusing on strategic priorities to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead.

The essence of the report is that the melting of the polar ice cap and the “new Arctic environment” means “ocean resources are more readily accessible as sea ice diminishes.” This is an opportunity to access the vast untapped oil, gas and mineral resources and increase the flow of fossil fuels. In other words, big profits for Big Oil. (tinyurl.com/cw2dvhk)

The Center for Naval Analyses has also prepared ominous reports of U.S. policy in this period of global climate crisis. Eleven retired generals and admirals came together in 2007 to examine the security implications of climate change.

In 2014, this federally funded research and development center produced a study headed by Michael Chertoff, former secretary of Homeland Security, and Leon Panetta, former secretary of Defense, and titled “National Security and the Accelerating Risks of Climate Change.” This report sees climate change as the source of international instability and the greatest threat to the established capitalist order.

This study, once again, is not on how to use the enormous technological ability of the U.S. military machine to provide solutions or emergency assistance. Everything is posed in terms of national security in the face of alleged potential terror threats.

“In Africa, Asia and the Middle East, we are already seeing how the impacts of extreme weather, such as prolonged drought and flooding — and resulting food shortages, desertification, population dislocation and mass migration, and sea level rise — are posing security challenges to these regions’ governments. We see these trends growing and accelerating.

“Climate change acts as a threat multiplier for instability in some of the most volatile regions of the world. ... It poses a serious threat to America’s national security.”

The report calls for “improved U.S. combat power” and “assessment of the impact on U.S. military installations worldwide due to rising sea levels and extreme weather events.” (tinyurl.com/lreswx8)

Based on these reports and on the destructive, self-serving U.S. role in every climate meeting in over 20 years, it is clear that U.S. corporate power and the monstrous military machine it has funded by expropriating more than half the federal budget every year for decades is an enemy of the people of the whole world and a threat to all forms of life on earth. This must become a focus of class-conscious climate activists. This would contribute greatly to an understanding of the source and the real solutions to this global crisis.

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