Speech for the ethecon Blue Planet Award

By Ann Wright

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Thank you very much for the Ethecon Foundation for Ethics and Economy’s Blue Planet award. I accept the award on behalf of all our colleagues working to end wars and the rampant militarism which create the worst hazards for humans and for our environment.

As you have heard, I was a part of the U.S. government and U.S. empire for most of my adult life. I was in the U.S. Army/Army Reserves for 29 years and retired as a Colonel. I also was a U.S. diplomat for 16 years and represented the United States in U.S. Embassies in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia.

I had worked in eight Presidential administrations beginning with the Lyndon Johnson administration in 1967 during the U.S. War on Vietnam. I was assigned here in Europe from 1970-1973 for 3 years-in the Netherlands, Greece and in Germany in Heidelberg.

I was in the war machine of the United States for 29 years. The U.S. military is the greatest polluter of our planet and the killer of humans across our earth.

You in Germany know too well about the pollution from U.S. military bases. Although the number of US military bases in Germany has been reduced from the Cold War numbers, the current bases and the remains of the former bases that have been turned back to German authorities no doubt have considerable environmental dangers and should be a warning for areas where the US military goes-Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Somalia.

Just to review some of the environmental dangers created by the U.S. military that have been found in Germany—with similar effects from U.S. military bases in the United States:
Over the years at Frankfurt International Airport and Rhine-Main Air Base a massive and fast spreading plume of jet fuel from underground fuel tanks and pipelines contaminated the subsurface water table.

Bitburg Air Base for years polluted the Kyll River and feeder streams with organic waste, chemicals and solvents because of inadequate sewage treatment facilities.

Mannheim: The motor pool area at Taylor Barracks in Mannheim was at the top of the Army's most-polluted list in Germany. Trichloroethylene and other chlorinated hydrocarbons used as solvents for cleaning military vehicles leached into the water.

Germersheim: During highway construction near Karlsruhe, West German engineers discovered a one-inch thick layer of heavy oil sitting atop the subsurface water table traced to a leaking heating oil tank inside the fence line of a U.S. Army depot.

Mainz Army Depot where tanks, armored personnel carriers and heavy trucks were stripped down and cleaned, using a variety of powerful chemical solvents generating tons of industrial wastes, some of which contaminated ground water supplies.

Bad Kreuznach: A dry cleaning plant at the Army's Rose Barracks leaked toxic and carcinogenic chemicals into drinking water supplies for 25 years with four civilian employees, including one American, were indicted for ground-water contamination after the pollution was discovered.

Wurzburg: Another Army dry cleaning plant here is known to have contaminated the underground water table.

Landfills at Grafenwohr and Hohenfels military exercise centers contained a variety of dangerous wastes, including unexploded rifle and artillery ammunition. Any military dumps built before 1975 according to the general in charge of the US Army Corps of Engineers in Europe, “were nothing more than holes in the ground.”

And in another part of the world, fifty years ago, in a war crime of using chemical weapons on a civilian population, the US military dropped millions of gallons of Agent Orange on the Vietnamese people. The effects of Agent Orange is still evident in many families in Vietnam, whom we have visited in trips sponsored by Veterans for Peace—and in many veterans themselves and their offspring in the United States.

During the past 18 years, U.S. military bases in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, have been notorious for their toxic burn pits and vehicle cleaning stations which have polluted the environment in these countries.

U.S. military installations in South Korea, Japan, Okinawa, Guam, Hawaii and 440 bases in the continental United States, have continuing problems with dangerous and toxic materials that are endangering persons who live near the bases.

https://www.nps.gov/nagpra/documents/basesmapindex.htm

I ended by thirty years in the U.S. government with my resignation from the George W. Bush administration in March 2003 in opposition to the U.S. War on Iraq. I was one of only three persons who resigned in opposition to the war on Iraq, although hundreds of colleagues from both the military and the diplomatic worlds got in touch with me and the other two Foreign Service officers who had resigned, thanking us for our resignations-- but saying as much as they wished they could resign, mortgages, kids in college, financial reasons prevented them from acting on their conscience.

Since my resignation fifteen years ago in 2003, I and millions of U.S. citizens have been challenging each Presidential administration on a variety of issues including:

-- the war culture of the United States;

--the massive military budget; huge weapons sales to countries around the world; the unnecessary curtailment of civil liberties, first through the Patriot Act and now through countless illegal electronic invasions of privacy-including our mobile phones;
--Indefinite detention in CIA black sites and in the Guantanamo US military prison where 779 persons have been imprisoned since early 2002, over sixteen years and 40 still in Guantanamo as “forever prisoners” who the U.S. administrations have said will never receive a trial as through a trial, they would have the opportunity to talk officially about the criminal acts U.S. government officials have perpetrated on them, including the current Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Gina Haspel;

--779 prisoners have been held by the U.S. military at Guantánamo since the prison opened on January 11, 2002. Of those, 729 have been released or transferred, including one who was transferred to the U.S. to be tried, and nine have died in the prison, the most recent being Adnan Latif, in September 2012;

--40 men are still held, and five of these men were recommended for release by high-level governmental review processes under President Obama, decisions that Donald Trump has chosen to ignore since taking office in January 2017. Trump has only released one man since taking office, Ahmed al-Darbi, who was returned in May 2018 to Saudi Arabia for ongoing imprisonment, six weeks later than he was supposed to have been repatriated under the terms of a plea deal he agreed to four years earlier;

https://www.closeguantanamo.org/Prisoners

--the use of assassin drones that despite the rhetoric have killed thousands of civilians in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Somalia and Yemen;

--U.S. invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq which triggered the war in Syria and the flight of over 4 million Syrians to flee the violence;

--U.S. complicity with Israel in the horrific criminal treatment of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza;

--U.S. complicity with Saudi Arabia for the bombing and blockade causing the starvation of millions of people in Yemen.
With the 2016 election of Donald Trump, the signature policies of the Obama administration have been under assault and reversal. Healthcare, the Paris Climate treaty, the Nuclear Agreement with Iran, opening of diplomatic relations with Cuba, environmental regulations on the air, water and land, long standing trade agreements, opening environmentally sensitive areas on land and in the oceans to drilling for oil, and most recently the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) agreement have first been publicly ridiculed and then destroyed.

The singular accomplishment of the Trump administration in my opinion has been the diplomatic opening with North Korea and the meetings of the North Korean leadership with the leaders of China, South Korea and the United States (in that order)—actually more of a decision of the North Korean leadership that believed its national defense strategy of developing nuclear weapons would protect it from U.S. sponsored regime change.

Trump’s racist Immigration policies, including the travel bans on persons from seven Muslim countries; the separation of families seeking political asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border, the detention/imprisonment of children, the theft of migrant children from their parents, putting children in put children in pens; madding young children defend themselves in immigration court, have made Trump’s immigration policy the subject of investigations by global human rights organizations,

These policies have tapped into a part of the American public that wants to be isolationist and have little to do with the rest of the world except take their resources by force. U.S. bullying of other nations to bend to the will of the U.S. in trade policies that, in Trump’s words, “Make America First.”

There are few traditional pillars of “legitimacy” that the U.S. government has left. The Trump administration is relying on its bullying though a massive ten percent increase in the U.S. military budget that brings it to $700 billion, more than the military budgets of China, Saudi Arabia, Russia, UK, India, France and Japan, the next seven largest military budgets combined.

The U.S. military budget is almost three times as large as the military budget of China and the military budget of Russia is less than the ten percent increase of this year’s U.S. military budget.

https://www.nationalpriorities.org/campaigns/us-military-spending-vs-world/
U.S. military continues to kill people in seven countries. The Bush-Obama and now Trump administration assassin drone program is assassinating people in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Mali and in places we do not know of—yet. The eighteen years the U.S. has been in Afghanistan has resulted in tens of thousands being killed in Afghanistan—and here in Pakistan. The Taliban is now controlling large sections of the country and U.S. talks with the Taliban are led by a Bush era figure, former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan and Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad.

The next two years will be years of increasing anger both domestically and internationally toward the policies of the Trump government and toward the American empire that he personifies probably more realistically and blatantly than any other administration.

Our work as human rights and stop the wars activists is never ending as the economic profits from outfitting the U.S. military to wage wars are so huge!

But, we will not give up and will continue to challenge our government’s war mongering disease.

To end, I want to show you some photos of actions around the world to give us hope that citizen activism will continue to strong challenge the destructive policies of our governments.

Ann Wright