My name is Robin Taubenfeld.

I was born on what is reported to be shared [Wichita](http://www.texasindians.com/wichita.htm), [Comanche](http://www.texasindians.com/comanche.htm), [Caddo](http://www.texasindians.com/caddo.htm), [Cherokee](http://www.texasindians.com/cherokee.htm) - 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 the ancestral lands of the Piscotaway people of Nacotchtank, or Anacostans.

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. Aboriginal people in Australia die young, often live in poverty, are disproportionately represented in prisons, foster care systems and suicide rates – and 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. 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. Mirrar people feel responsible for poison coming from their country and continue to oppose the mining and export of uranium.

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.

“*Currently we are being ‘buzzed’ 24/7 by military jets and helicopters and if the Singapore expansion happens it will be for 6 months each year rather than three, on top of the routine Australian Defence exercises and the joint bi–annual ones. Unimaginative local MPs and Councilors want us to be the Beef Capital, Coal Capital plus a military base rather than a leader in sustainable energy, biodiversity conservation and ‘livable community’.”*

*Correspondence mid-2016 from a friend in Rockhampton where the federal government is hoping to acquire land to expand the military training area for use by Australia and US ally, Singapore.*

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, in the Northern Territory and in the Coral, Arafura and Timor Seas. Talisman Saber 2017, involved 33,000 personnel – 20,000 US and 13,000 Aussies from late June – late July 2017.

Traditional owners of land and waters used by the military have access to their land determined by the military. The Great Barrier Reef, the Saumarez Reef, the Timor, Arafura and Coral Seas, the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (WTWHA), RAMSAR listed wetlands comprise ecosystems of global significance, important bird migratory routes, whale migration routes, seagrass beds for the endangered dugong and habitats of other endangered species such as the Northern Quoll and Gouldian Finch. In 2013, the US accidentally jettisoned 4 bombs on the Great Barrier Reef, when the pilot could not find his intended target. This accident is only the tip of the iceberg of regular ongoing environmental military impacts - publicized simple because it as they took place beyond the area of the reef designated for military use. In August, the US Osprey which crashed off the coast of Queensland when attempting to return to its ship had also taken part in Talisman Saber.

No matter where these war games are conducted, however, US and Australian battle fleets conducting nuclear-capable military exercises will set off political alarm bells in our region and remind the world that Australia is deeply involved and supportive of US military activity. They are in effect rehearsals for nuclear war.

In the pre-Trump era, it was clear that China had concerns about this show of military might in the region. With the Pacific Pivot in full swing, tensions in the South China Sea and around Korea, and a president calling for an expansion of the US nuclear weapons arsenal, the social, psychological and political ramifications of Australia’s continued military partnership with the US deserve a little exploration…

Australia sells uranium to the U.S., has sent troops to US led conflicts around the world and allows the US to use its military and civilian infrastructure – such as communication stations, ports and airfields. Australia houses one of the US’s key satellite spy stations: Pine Gap in the center near Alice Springs which helps guide US weaponry in the middle east and is part of its missile defence system or shield which still drops test missiles in the Marshall Islands. There are up to 2,500 US troops stationed at Darwin, strategically close to China and the South China Sea, Australia allows U.S. planes deployed from Guam - Gua’han 1/3 of which used by US miltary –to fly over the Northern Territory to drop bombs. Australia permits the US to conduct troop changeovers in Western Australia allowing US troops to deploy from Fremantle. Australia regularly conducts military exercises with the US and every two years, Australia hosts Talisman Saber conducted in parts from Pacific Command in occupied Hawaii.

As a key ally and Launchpad for US military endeavours, Australia has boycotted the talks to ban nuclear weapons and is refusing to sign the now-ratified treaty.

There are over 15,000 nuclear weapons on the planet today. The Trump presidency has seen the Doomsday Clock moved forward to 2.5 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.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

A swathe of climate-change-denying political appointees, flippant talk about weapons and an expanding list of nuclear weapons states, have scientists, and others, alarmed. 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.

Now, at least, it must be 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 small or large scale nuclear war - possibly nuclear winter– prior to or during climate mitigating processes.

My vision isn’t of a world that has had a 60% reduction in GHG emissions by 2050, but is of a habitable – socially and ecologically just and peaceful world that has done so.

Though instrinsically understood – and universally desired– I believe that peace as a concept has been relegated to the realm of the impossible – the unimaginable – and from an environmental campaign organisation perspective – unrealistic, unachievable and therefore unstrategic – an un-SMART goal!

Grassroots frontline anti-military/anti-bases or anti-war movements are, however, naturally "intersectional" - that is, communities experience: environmental, political, social, economic, health etc impacts of war/militarism and therefore their responses to war/militarism are – and need to be - multi-faceted and linked in to movements with which they share common goals.

2.5 minutes to midnight is therefore the perfect time look at challenging colonialism, racism, militarism, extractivism - and capitalism through ecological and social justice action- with a little bit of feminism thrown in for good measure!

Did you know that;

The US military “produces 750,000 tons of toxic waste annually, establishing the United State military as the “largest single polluter of any agency or organization in the world””?

And that of the 1300 EPA superfund sites in the US, almost 900 of them are active of 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 - as per Bryan T. Walsh Forgetting Histories of Toxic Military Violence)*

These issues – and toxic military sites – nuclear test zones, uranium tailings, undisclosed DU weapons use sites, PFAS contaminated regions dot Australia as well.

So, for a minute, forget about war and its social and political ramifications, even if you just live near military infrastructure you are possibly at risk of health and environmental hazard. Concern about military development could see you: challenge notions of land “ownership”, look at the issues around colonization, consider Native Title and other legal structures, look at land zoning and socio-economics, save the dugongs, stop increased sexual violence associated with living near bases, transform the local economy from its reliance on military spending, raise awareness about military toxins, veteran and community health, and PTSD or look at local building and car hire contracts, challenge the climate impacts, feel worried about invasive weeds or the down the line impact drone warfare practice, fear an Osprey accident, suffer from noise pollution, be alarmed by your nation’s support for the US nuclear umbrella, be worried about refugees rights, military recruitment in school, military funding for education, a nuclear accident, the nuclear cycle, a nuclear strike, local uranium sales, the political impacts, the roads, the waterways etc. etc. etc…

No matter how many of these you see, their impacts are replicated globally and then exponentially in actual warfare…Their inter-relatedness shows us the need to dig deeper and challenge, disrupt, dismantle or transform the structures behind them –the violence inherent in our global economic system/s. Capitalism is part of the problem – not the solution to it.

In 2014, Brisbane hosted the G20. A year of intense anti-protest media, enactment of laws to increase police and state power and militarisation of the police culminated in 5000 police on the almost empty streets of Brisbane. The leaders of the world’s largest economies and climate polluters and their business partners gathered to continue business as usual – the Australia Prime Minister had refused to have Climate placed on the agenda, nuclear disarmament was not even mentioned and except for the die-hards, most of the environment movement and general public, stayed away. A few assorted groups held highly controlled protest events, the Brisbane Aboriginal Sovereign Embassy set up a Decolonisation Before Profit Camp with forums, gigs and marches and a loose network of green, peace, social justice and assorted usual suspects calling ourselves BRisCAN (Community Action Network) coordinated a 3-day Peoples Summit, media center, activist legal support, first aid training and with BASE a Peoples March. Where there should have been 300,000 or at least 30,000 on the streets, our year of challenging the intensely brewing culture of fear brought 3,000 out to our biggest march. Other than BrisCan as far as we are aware, all groups who protested signed agreements with the police. Some who had intended to hold events cancelled due to fear. Unions closed their offices – cleverly included in the RED exclusion zone – or simply buying in to the notion that “security” could not be guaranteed. While the Climate Angels who would later be seen in Paris at COP21 made a beautiful presence, the environment movement was mostly silent…

Major organisations were worried about joining in marches as they accepted the state’s narrative and feared association with someone damaging an ATM or burning a police car… and along… the state and the power of the G20 built/based upon violence: genocide, colonization, slavery, military authority, inequality and poverty…was violent. They wanted us to proclaim our peacefulness while peacefulness was no-where on the G20 agenda.

Apologists will say there are other ways and times to protest, I say – Houston – we have a problem! When the first world predominantly white and living under the guise of “democracy” climate/environment movement fails to visibly respond to the polluters and the social justice movement to the perpetuation of economics of inequality – and the ongoing wars go on unchallenged, we have allowed ourselves to be so disempowered that we live in fear or we have bought in to the normalisation of violent structures of our society – or both.

Where do climate, ecological and social justice and peace intersect? When challenging “accumulation by dispossession” (David Harvey), the enclosure of lands and privatisation of resources/commodification of nature driven by the militarised (colonial) state in partnership with the private sector – or taking action to protect the earth and its inhabitants by dismantling the structures of capital and creating systems based equality and respect…

In other words, shifting our goal from mitigating symptoms of out-of-control, eco-system destroying development to one that challenges the structures that keep this paradigm in place AND dismantling the underlying system that sees a logic in the existence of nuclear weapons.

Mobilise, Resist, Transform.

Trump-phobia alone will not save us. We can’t continue to sit at the table asking our neighbours to reduce their carbon footprint while, in effect, pointing nuclear weapons at them. We need to take action to ensure that we remove our military ties to nuclear weapons states, and that not only are these weapons are eliminated, but that we eliminate all threat of use of force, no matter what its shape or format. We need to find the courage to disarm ourselves, so that we can get down to the business actually communicating and collaborating to saving the planet.

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

*Lilla Watson who is often attributed with this quote has that she was "not comfortable being credited for something that had been born of a collective process" and prefers that it be credited to "Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970s."[3]*

Personal brainstorm on opportunities and impediments to challenging militarism through environmentalism:

Legal and governmental frameworks that provide opportunities to challenge militarism through environmentalism:

* Nuclear Weapons Ban
* Nuclear Free Zones – expanded to not allow military nukes
* Peace budgets
* Legal frameworks: ecocide – omnicide, expansion of existing legal frameworks to include military activity,
* NPT – remove peaceful uses, enforce disarmament and non-proliferation
* Expansion of the law of war
* Crimes against humanity to include environmental destruction/ecocide
* Right to environment, safety, resources, water as part of Human Rights
* Rights of Indigenous People – to speak for and protect Country
* Nuclear safeguard measures
* Sovereignty – First Nations including review of Indigenous Land Use Agreements
* Banning of certain chemicals/weapons
* Precautionary Principle
* World Heritage and RAMSAR treaties
* Defining Defence, Necessity, Cooperation, Duty of Care
* Rights of Nature/Recognition of nature as living beings
* Treaties for Mother Earth
* EPA laws re toxic sites, water contamination etc

Impediments to challenging militarism:

* Criminalisation of protest
* Death, disappearance of activists
* Lack of financial capacity to pursue legal avenues/pay workers etc
* Erosion of civil liberties
* DGR status – governments auditing environment groups
* Fear of blow-back from donating constituents
* Fear of losing funding from government or corporations
* Lack of jurisdiction and capacity to enforce
* “National Interest”
* Political v Environmental- perception of issues as political not environmental
* Nationalism/Patriotism – fear of challenging dominant paradigm
* Confusion over role of military/ “just” or necessary wars/interventions/Security
* Breadth of issue
* Feelings of hopelessness
* Pigeon-holing/silo-ing of issues
* Need to address immediate issues – put out fires/deal with wars/illnesses/environmental rehabilitation/protection
* Disconnection between movements
* Lack of agreement within “peace”/anti-war movements re dimilitarisation/pacifism/defence
* Prioritising of ”Law and Order” and “security” over civil rights
* Issues around “prior use”
* Acceptance of war economies

Opportunities to challenge militarism:

* Directly challenging specific military actions and developments plus:
* Expanding campaign to Save the Reef, the Coral Sea etc to exclude military use of these areas
* Global PFAS/PFOS - military toxins network development
* Global Anti-Nuclear movement – against civilian and military uses of nuclear materials – including campaign to ban uranium mining
* Global Climate movement and divestment from fossil fuels
* Rights of Nature and treaties for the Earth
* Divestment from military in education and recruitment
* Supporting anti-colonial campaigns
* Social Defence (instead on NVA – Brian Martin)
* “Alternative” Economies – cooperatives/localized/ethical/Fair Trade etc
* Alternative power structures – community/localized/anti-hierachical/cooperative
* Community education: nonviolent practice, de-militarising schools and curricula, Peace Education
* Global veterans/peace support network
* Transformation of spaces – such as creating nuclear free zones, national parks, returning land to Traditional Owners
* Intergenerational equity
* Community Building – social inclusion
* De-colonisation and Sovereignty campaigns
* Global anti-bases campaigns
* Action for “justice” – equality/equity for first nations, veterans, workers, the poor, migrants, women, LGTBQI and other movements for social justice
* **Reframing of issues and language: Protectors not protectors: Nature fighting for itself**
* Etc etc
* Plus support Australian anti-military, anti-nuclear, anti-coal campaigns:

PINE GAP TRIAL PEACE PILGRIM TRIAL NOVEMBER 10-24 Alice Springs

Stop Adani Carmichael Mine

Don’t buy Australian Uranium

**Stop US military training in and use of Australia. Close US bases.**

**Other references**

**Maps:** Map: 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 Freedon (Aotearoa), the Disarmament and Security Centre (Aotearoa), and Pacific Connections (Australia), 1998, p34-35

Australian nuclear map https://australianmap.net/

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/26/doomsday-clock-closer-to-midnight-in-wake-of-donald-trump-election> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)