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## Domestic Military Expansion Spreads Through the US, Ignites Dissent

By Dahr Jamail  
3/9/2015



What if you lived in a country that allowed its Navy to fly the loudest aircraft in the world over your home day and night, generating sonic booms that rattled the windows of people living in a neighboring country, and test new weapons in areas that would knowingly harm, or possibly kill, humans and wildlife?

Welcome to the United States, which has a military with an increasing domestic expansion that may soon be coming to your town, city or national forest.

That the US military knowingly tested new weapons on US citizens (possibly in the thousands), wildlife or even its own soldiers is nothing new. Publicly available documents reveal how the US military has even released nerve gas in public areas, as well as farms, to see the effects on civilians and animals. This occurred during the 1960s, when the United States secretly tested both chemical and biological weapons on US soil, including releasing deadly nerve agents in Alaska and spraying bacteria over Hawaii.

Hence, the fact that in recent years the US Navy moved ahead with increasing its sonar testing (which is presently ongoing, off the coasts of California, Hawaii and the Gulf of Mexico), despite reams of evidence showing its extremely harmful impact on whales and dolphins, is but one example of the military's tendency to expand in any way it pleases, damn the consequences.

The US Department of Defense's 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review minces no words when it comes to the Navy's expansion:

"Through an aggressive effort to reduce acquisition costs and temporary ship lay-ups, the Navy will modernize its fleets of surface ships, aircraft, and submarines to meet 21st century threats," its executive summary says. "We must ensure that the fleet is capable of operating in every region and across the full spectrum of conflict."

The "full spectrum of conflict" includes the now ever-expanding field of electromagnetic warfare training.

The Navy is already using the sea and airspace of literally every US coastal state for its training, and in many of them, its war gaming.

By way of example, the far northwest quadrant of the United States provides a clarifying example of what the Navy is doing, how government agencies tasked with protecting wild lands and wildlife are enabling and assisting its expansion, and how citizens are standing up to resist it.

In a country where military spending already accounts for 55 percent of all federal discretionary spending and military expenditures are greater than all the military spending of the next 10 largest countries combined, the Navy's domestic training footprint, along with other branches of the military, is growing ever-larger and taking on frightening new forms.

### **An Expanding Naval Footprint**

The US Navy, along with the Air Force and Army, are currently engaged in and expanding their warfare-training exercises across the United States. Right now, however, the Navy's expansion appears to be the most pronounced, given the US military "pivot" toward building up its forces in the Asia-Pacific.

The Navy's warfare training expansion is to be particularly extensive along the West Coast states of California, Oregon, Washington and Alaska, but will also include Idaho. Trainings are set to expand across the Pacific, Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico.

Warfare training regions and the 12 training ranges began to expand in 2007 in scope and size, as well as the amount of activity, according to Rosalind Peterson, a researcher and co-founder of

California's Agriculture Defense Coalition, who has been tracking the Navy's training ranges since 2009.

"The Navy is conducting bombing and gunnery exercises, submarine warfare exercises, drones, missiles, and other 'live-fire' exercises in many of their ranges," Peterson told Truthout.

The Navy's Northwest Training and Testing Area includes undersea warfare centers, explosive ordnance disposal areas and vast amounts of air space for their warplanes. Their Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing Area is equally massive.

A 2009 Navy document makes it very clear why their ranges are expanding, and how they intend to train:

Realistic training is the single greatest asset the military has in preparing and protecting Navy personnel ... "Train As We Fight;" is not just a phrase. It is a statement of the absolute necessity to train the men and women in uniform for the precise conditions in which they may find themselves while protecting the nation. Realism requires access to areas and environments that closely match the locations where our Sailors may face.

According to the Navy, the purpose of its training expansion is to "conduct training and testing activities to ensure that the Navy meets its mission," which aims to "maintain, train, and equip combat ready naval forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression, and maintaining freedom of the seas."

While the Navy has denied involvement, the fact that explosive ordnance disposal is part of its mission in its training areas, of which Washington State's Strait of Juan de Fuca is one, could explain "mysterious" loud explosions that vibrated floors and rattled windows in people's homes there recently.

But mysterious, loud undersea explosions that are possibly linked to the Navy's undersea warfare training exercises are mild in comparison to some other impacts of its training.

In 2009, US Senators Barbara Boxer, Olympia Snowe, Maria Cantwell, Sheldon Whitehouse, Ron Wyden, Jeff Merkley and Dianne Feinstein co-authored a letter to Dr. Jane Lubchenco, the undersecretary for oceans and atmosphere, regarding their concerns about the Navy's ongoing training expansion at that time.

The senators were alarmed that some of the naval exercises could "occur in the nation's most biologically sensitive marine habitats, including National Marine Sanctuaries and breeding habitat for the endangered North Atlantic whale," and were also concerned that the Navy "anticipates more than 2.3 million takes (significant disruptions in marine mammal foraging, breeding, and other essential behaviors) per year, or 11.7 million takes over the course of a five-year permit."

In another 2009 letter to the Navy, Senators Wyden and Merkley (both D-Oregon) cited environmental and economic concerns over the Navy's expanded warfare training off the Oregon coast, writing, "We are concerned that many of the Navy's training proposals, including

underwater minefield testing, explosive ordinance use, expanded land and air-based exercises, and widespread sonar training in particular, pose substantial environmental and economic risks."

The Navy's expansion included exercises with guided missile submarines and unmanned aerial systems, along with the implementation of new air and sea surface targets, new electronic signal emitters and development of a "small-scale" underwater training minefield.

Similar to the letter penned earlier by the seven senators, the two Oregon senators brought attention to four specific areas of concern, including: "The potential for irreparable harm to the fisheries and the many related industries along the Oregon Coast, the significant impacts of sonar on marine mammals, the potential impacts on endangered species, and the potential release of a variety of hazardous materials into sensitive marine ecosystems."

Despite the broad extent of domestic military expansion, it is rare to see coverage of this growth in larger national media outlets.

"The Navy has taken the position that they can train anywhere they want, using any methods," Peterson said of the ongoing expansion, and added, "And they don't want this in the national news."

Instead, local news sources tend to cover the stories, like a recent article about a proposed naval pier expansion in Port Angeles, Washington, or a 2014 article in a Key West, Florida, paper about a Navy veteran who called the FBI on the Navy over its plans to expand training there, including 52,000 flight operations a year out of one of its airfields.

Carol Miller, founder of the nonprofit Peaceful Skies Coalition in New Mexico, began researching domestic military expansion when the Air Force tried to turn an area beside her community into "a realistic bombing initiative."

"We don't really have public lands in the US," Miller told Truthout. "We have military lands."

According to the Pentagon, between 1985 and 2012, the US military had completed at least 92 joint land use studies in preparation for expanding its domestic training, which proposed expansions in all but 16 US states.

There are scores of examples of massive training areas already in existence around the country.

The San Juan National Forest Training Area in Colorado is 633,011 acres, and Colville National Forest in Washington State, another training area, encompasses 550,000 acres.

Other recent expansions include 2014 plans for the Utah Test and Training Range having 700,000 acres added around the perimeter of a bombing range to create more ground and air space for F-35 pilots to test their aircrafts' missiles.

Miller told Truthout there are three key elements of US base expansions underway.

The first two, she said, encompass "new and expanded land bases, airspace and sea space; and military activities on public lands, tribal lands [and] culturally important indigenous sites.... The third is 'encroachment' planning, the least publicized and understood category, where the military

basically dictates what activities can happen around military bases even on public and private land."

The Obama administration recently proposed an increased \$534 billion Pentagon base budget plus \$51 billion in war funds, as it urged Congress to end cuts it claimed "erode US military power."

Defense Department officials claim the increased military spending was needed to carry out the planned stationing of more forces in the Asia-Pacific, in response to "the rise of China."

### **Hazardous Materials**

Miller told Truthout she is increasingly concerned about the types and amounts of hazardous materials the military is using in its training. She said that in New Mexico, the Air Force plans to expand the number of landing spots they have for their Osprey aircraft, which means they will use a polymer called TerraLOC, which military officials describe as "Gorilla Glue on steroids" to bind the dirt in their landing zones so that dust won't blow around when their aircraft land.

Miller, who worked in public health for 40 years, said, "They plan to treat the soil with a vinyl chloride polymer that they claim is 'organic.'"

She said the military already has 17 landing spots located in national forest lands in New Mexico and Colorado, but "they are applying for more."

Miller is concerned about the health and environmental impact of the military's use of vinyl chloride. "Clearly they are more concerned with the health of their aircraft ... than the environment. Vinyl chloride workers have the highest liver cancer rates," she said.

Truthout previously reported on how the Navy's plans to conduct electromagnetic warfare training on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State would dramatically impact human health, as well as wildlife and the environment.

Another Truthout report included details about the Navy's warfare training's impact on wildlife in the region, which includes threatening already endangered species, as well as disrupting the bio-navigational abilities of over 1 billion birds that use the proposed training area as a migratory pathway.

According to the Navy's own so-called environmental impact statement (EIS) for its Northwest Training Range Complex, "In the Northwest Training Range Complex Study Area, hazardous materials would be used in the Pacific Northwest Operations Area, including specific offshore areas such as Warning Area W-237; inshore areas in Puget Sound where underwater detonation training occurs; and land areas designated for land-based explosives training."

Other impacts include jet noise, explosions and the use of live weapons, among others.

### **A Bad Neighbor**

The impact of the Navy's expansion does not end at US borders. Even members of the Canadian government are expressing their concern about the Navy's ever-growing footprint of militarism.

Canadian Minister of Parliament Elizabeth May recently sent a letter to US Ambassador Bruce Heyman, expressing her concerns about the proposed naval expansion of adding more Growler jets to the naval air base on Whidbey Island, just across the border from Canada, in order to use them in the proposed electromagnetic warfare training exercises.

"My constituents have raised concerns about considerable noise from the jets, which can be disruptive," May wrote in the letter, dated January 27, 2015. "They would like the residential impacts on nearby Canadian communities to be taken into account in evaluating the proposal ... In addition, many are concerned that noise from the jets, as well as the sonar activity that would result from a proposed increase of acoustic surveillance devices in the region, may have adverse environmental impacts on marine life, including the endangered South Resident Orca whale population and Leatherback turtles."

Ian Jessop, of CFAX radio in Victoria, Canada, told Truthout, "We've had a lot of complaints here on southern Vancouver Island about the noise level from the warfare training program in Washington State."

Helene Harrison, in Shirley, British Columbia, a small town located on the Strait of Juan de Fuca where Navy Growler jets regularly fly, also expressed concern about the Navy's expansion plans.

"We are currently subjected to 'sonic booms' often on Thursdays which we've been told may come from USN jets and Whidbey Island, they shake/rattle our houses and windows which is a bit unsettling," she told Truthout. Harrison said she recently contacted her MP, Randall Garrison, to express her concerns, and to enquire whether these disruptions are a violation of international treaties and agreements.

### **The Public Method: Military Propaganda and Exceptionalism**

Both Peterson and Miller were critical of the Navy's method of obtaining the permits necessary for conducting its warfare exercises, and of how the Navy treats the public who have questions about its practices.

Miller said that during a recent permitting process in her area, she followed Navy personnel around for 10 nights of public presentations around Colorado and New Mexico.

"They get a script, and they are not allowed to go off script during public meetings," she said. "They are polite and everybody shakes hands after the meetings, but I feel they are very mocking towards the public and they don't care what we say. Because base commanders only serve two years ... they rotate, and they don't really care. They lie knowingly, and repeat that lie over and over."

Peterson spoke similarly of the way the Navy treats public inquiry.

"I learned that their scoping meetings are not meant for people to ask questions," she said of the Navy's public meetings. "They put up these little tables using Navy contractors who travel from state to state, and these are the guys who wrote all these EIS's [environmental impact statements], and this group was hired solely to sell these ideas to the public."



**"WE HAVE NO FRIENDS IN THE GOVERNMENT ON THIS. WE HAVE A MASSIVE MILITARY EXPANSION ACROSS THE US, BUT NO GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS STANDING WITH US ON THIS, OR EVEN LISTENING TO US."**

Peterson added that the Navy's plan for holding public meetings, which it is required to do as part of the permitting process, "has always been to hold their meetings in the most remote locations. Like up in Washington, they tried to do this in Forks. And they try to pack them full of Navy personnel or other supporters. So nobody with any authority in the Navy ever even attends these meetings."

The meeting she mentioned was one of the first the Navy was to hold regarding their plans for electromagnetic warfare training on the Olympic Peninsula. Forks is a small town of 3,500 in the far west of Washington State. A resident there saw a small public notice flier in the post office about the Navy's scoping meeting, and alerted people of the Navy's plans, forcing it to hold more meetings in some of the larger cities on the peninsula, where the public outcry continues to escalate.

Another way the military has facilitated its ongoing domestic expansion is by control of government officials.

"Your congressmen and senators in Washington State won't talk on the record, due to the Navy's huge presence in that state," Peterson said. "The Navy basically considers Washington to be a military town."

A case in point: a town hall meeting that US Rep. Derek Kilmer (D) held in Port Townsend, Washington, to address public outcry over the Navy's proposed electromagnetic warfare training.

Only one participant voiced support for the Navy's plans, while over 100 others in a standing-room-only meeting voiced their anger and opposition to the Navy's plans, which Kilmer acknowledged but responded obliquely, "The relationship between the Navy and the North Olympic Peninsula is longstanding and valuable."

Later in the discussion, he added, "We need to be sure that these people are adequately trained, adequately funded and given the best equipment possible. This is shared sacrifice."

Miller agrees with Peterson on the possibility that Kilmer is an example of a so-called representative becoming an apologist for the military, regardless of public opposition.

**ANOTHER METHOD THE MILITARY USES TO COMBAT DISSENT: IT PLANTS ITS OWN ADVOCATES IN PUBLIC CONVERSATIONS.**

"I think Kilmer is playing people up there," Miller said. "He is on [the House] Appropriations [Committee], and has a lot of power. I've watched several of the public meetings, and he stands up there with the party line. He's not saying there is too much training, and this is an

inappropriate location for the Navy to do what they want to do. He could stand up and fight this, but he's not."

Miller and Peterson's critique of Kilmer is not without basis. In the 2012 report *Retaining and Expanding Military Missions* [for Washington State], the acknowledgements section on page 7 reads, "In addition, we would like to acknowledge the attention provided to our process by Attorney General Rob McKenna, Governor-elect Jay Inslee, Representative-elect Denny Heck and Representative-elect Derek Kilmer."

A US Army War College paper from 1989, titled *Military Training on Public Lands: Guidelines for Success*, written by Michael King, details how the military has gone about obtaining support from public officials. It is a document that likely informs the current strategy of the military.

"Because many Americans have an increased awareness of environmental, social, and economic issues related to natural resource management," the paper says on page 4, "the military often faces adverse public reaction to conducting training on these lands. My purpose here is to discuss the issue of military training on public lands and to identify guidelines that military decision makers can apply to meet their training objectives ..."

The document notes that by 1986 the Army alone already had access to 14.5 million acres of "non-Army, private, state and federal lands to conduct training and testing," 70 percent of which was national forest land.

It also mentions the Interdepartmental Agreement of 1988 between the secretaries of agriculture and defense, which affirmed a "longstanding policy that national forests can provide a variety of settings to conduct military training activities."

Poignantly, page 11 of the document outlines a strategy that is clearly still pivotal for the military:

Governor's offices, state conservation leaders, and elected officials should be considered participants in the decision-making process. *The congressional delegations and their staffs should be consulted and informed of the proposals to enter into agreements with public land or large private landowners. Often the first place a concerned citizen or group turns to is their senators or representatives in Washington DC.* [emphasis added]

Miller spoke of this portion of the document specifically.

"What has been most painful to me is the reaction of our congressional delegation," she said. "The War College document makes it clear they need to get to the congressional delegations first, because that is where people are going to come for help."

She went on to mention how Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont) supported the F-35 warplane expansions in Vermont, and added, "We have no friends in the government on this. We have a massive military expansion across the US, but no government officials standing with us on this, or even listening to us."

## **Trolls**



Miller spoke of another method the military uses to combat dissent: It plants its own advocates in public conversations.

"There are trolls, and they are all paid," she said. "The town of Taos [New Mexico] had a meeting of 400 people on a proposed military land use expansion, and the only person who spoke in favor of the military training who was a retired general who we found out was still on the military payroll."

A small newspaper on Whidbey Island, where the Navy's air base is located, has regularly run bellicose op-eds written by a retired member of the Navy, who regularly attacks those critical of the Navy's plans while writing under a pseudonym.

Miller and Peterson said this type of pro-military troll is common across the country.

Another comes in the form of trolls abusing comment sections on Facebook pages that oppose military expansionism.

For example, Protect Olympic Peninsula, a Facebook group that describes itself as "community members concerned with US Navy's proposal to develop electromagnetic warfare training in National Forest & surrounding areas," has received the following comments from Navy personnel on its Facebook page and by email:

December 20, 2014, *Retired Navy chief issues a threat to the three people who responded to a misleading op-ed by Naval Air Station Whidbey Island commander*: "I think the [letter writers] should be strapped into a GROWLER [warplane] and sent out to relieve a crew currently in combat over ISIS stronghold of their choice and allowed to demonstrate their superior knowledge and 'airmanship' and guts for the rest of us!"

December 22, 2014, *via email from a Navy pilot*: "Thanks for your expertise on how the military should work. The military is doing it's [sic] job fighting overseas terrorists and silly people at home. The Military doesn't answer to you. It answers to elected civilians like the President - not every lunatic with an opinion. Navy is exempt from most of the environmental laws you speak of and for obvious reasons. Fighter jets are not and never will be a Prius. Nor do Navy fighter pilots drive Priuses. We consider them to be wimpy along with their owners. New Growlers coming starting in February. New facilities being built on Nas every week. We're growing. Not shrinking. And we just bought more land around OLF [Outlying Landing Field]. COER [Citizens of Ebey's Reserve, Whidbey Island] is about to lose their homes to eminent domain."

January 16, 2015, *via email from a Navy pilot*: "... we already own all the airspace, and there's absolutely nothing you can do about that ... The Growlers fly there every single day from 6000 ft - 35,000 feet. Good news, we put up 2 new dart boards in the Officers' Club. Guess who's [sic] faces are on them - [two citizens named]. So congratulations, we through [sic] darts at your faces every single day over a beer. That's how much the Navy respects your group."

January 16, 2015, *via email from a Navy pilot*: "I assure you that you will be long gone before the Growlers are. Service life of the Growlers - 40-45 years. And man, we just built some

beautiful new facilities on NAS Whidbey. WA is the absolute best state for military airspace. Wide open skies in unpopulated areas. You are not important. In fact, you scumbags are completely expendable."

## **Resistance**

Public outcry over this type of bellicose military expansionism is now growing.

In response to the Navy's plans to war-game on the Olympic Peninsula, Washington State's commissioner of public lands, Peter Goldmark, sent a February 27, 2015, letter to the Navy informing them that the state would not allow them to use its forest roads for warfare training.

"Though we have not received a formal land use or lease application for this project, we feel that we are adequately informed to decide that we would not be interested in participating in this training exercise," Goldmark wrote.

Several environmental organizations and law firms, including the following, informed the Navy they opposed its environmental impact statement (which they found grossly inadequate and full of errors) for the Northwest Training and Testing range and called for a shift in policy: Animal Legal Defense Fund, Animal Welfare Institute, Center for Biological Diversity, Earthjustice, Environmental Protection Information Center, The Humane Society of the United States, InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council, Klamath Forest Alliance, Natural Resources Defense Council, North Olympic Group, Washington Chapter, Sierra Club, Ocean Mammal Institute, Olympic Environmental Council, Orca Network, Surfrider Foundation, Mendocino Coast Chapter, and the Whale and Dolphin Conservation, among several others. The letter reads:

The DEIS [draft environmental impact statement], however, included a picture of unremitting and inadequately mitigated harm. More than 500,000 instances of marine mammal 'take' (significant behavioral disruptions and injury) over five years (from 2015 to 2020), including almost 275,000 instances of temporary hearing loss, and more than 600 instances of permanent hearing loss from the use of sonar and explosives ... While these projections are shocking - and, we believe, still underestimate the harm to marine mammals from the Navy's activities - they confirm what stranding events have evidenced, scientists have studied, and the public has believed for years: Navy training and testing activities endanger whales and dolphins at intolerable levels.

The activities included in the Supplement add almost 415,000 instances (about 83,000/year for five years) of marine mammal take to this total - nearly doubling the total disclosed in the DEIS. Miller told Truthout that in New Mexico, a broad coalition of renewable energy landowners had formed, which includes a large number of ranchers.

This is due to the fact that, according to Miller, the Air Force opposes solar because "they say it affects their radars, and they are against wind, because of their low altitude training."

Public resistance and pushback against US military expansionism is happening in Montana, California, across the Pacific, across the Olympic Peninsula, and across New Mexico, to name a few areas.

The West Coast Action Alliance that supports members-based organizations and citizen groups on the West Coast, from California to Canada, is growing rapidly.

**"THE PUBLIC IS GOING TO BE UPSET ABOUT THE MILITARY DICTATING WHAT IS HAPPENING ON PRIVATE LANDS. AND SOMEHOW THAT SEEMS UN-AMERICAN. THIS IS THE LARGEST LAND-TAKINGS IN THE LAST 200 YEARS IN THE US."**

The group Citizens of Ebey's Reserve on Whidbey Island has been pushing back against Navy jet noise and expansionism for years, and is becoming more vocal and gaining support.

Miller believes lack of information remains one of the biggest challenges for those who believe this domestic military expansion should not be allowed.

"These battles are being fought and the public has no idea this is going on," she said. "Unless you are in an impact area and are seeing it directly."

Miller warned that the military encroachment is happening on a national level and "is expanding," and that the expansion included the buffer areas around pre-existing military bases. It would, she said, even go so far as to limit the heights of buildings in certain cities such as Fairbanks, Alaska.

"But the public is going to be upset about the military dictating what is happening on private lands," she concluded. "And somehow that seems un-American... This is the largest land-takings in the last 200 years in the US."

Peterson has seen some successful court cases brought against the expansionism, but she has also seen courts that "often take the position that the military needs to practice, so anything they need to do is OK."

Like Miller, she sees lack of public information and awareness as an ongoing problem.

"This is where the public has no voice, and no chance really, because no one is seeing how much the Navy has expanded," she said.

Of course, dozens of groups already actively opposing the military expansionism would disagree with her - they are speaking out about the Navy's actions loud and clear.

At the time this article was published, the Navy had not responded to Truthout's requests for comments.