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The U.S. Navy is set to begin a major war exercise in the Gulf of Alaska amid protests from local communities concerned about environmental damage. The Navy is reportedly unleashing thousands of sailors, soldiers, airmen, marines and Coast Guard members along with several Navy destroyers, hundreds of aircrafts, untold weaponry and a submarine for the naval exercises. The Gulf of Alaska is one of the most pristine places left on Earth; the region includes critical habitat for all five wild Alaskan salmon species and 377 other species of marine life. The Navy's planned live bombing runs will entail the detonation of tens of thousands of pounds of toxic munitions, as well as the use of active sonar in fisheries. The Navy has conducted war games in the Gulf of Alaska, on and off, for the last 30 years, but these new exercises are the largest by far. They come at a time when scientists are increasingly worried about climate change causing Arctic melting. Meanwhile, the unprecedented melting has created an opportunity for the military to expand its operations into previously inaccessible terrain. We are joined by Dahr Jamail, staff reporter at Truthout, whose latest piece is "Destroying What Remains: How the US Navy Plans to War Game the Arctic."

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AARON MATÉ: The U.S. Navy is set to begin a major war exercise in the Gulf of Alaska amid protests from local communities concerned about environmental damage. The Navy is reportedly unleashing thousands of sailors, soldiers, airmen, marines and Coast Guard members, along with several Navy destroyers, hundreds of aircrafts, untold weaponry and a submarine for naval exercises.

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AMY GOODMAN: The Navy has conducted war games in the Gulf of [Alaska], on and off, for the past 30 years—the Gulf of Alaska—but these new exercises are the largest by far. They

come at a time when scientists are increasingly worried about climate change causing Arctic melting. Meanwhile, the unprecedented melting has created an opportunity for the military to expand its operations into previously inaccessible terrain.

For more, we go to Seattle, where we're joined by Dahr Jamail, who is staff reporter at Truthout. He has just written a [piece](#) there, for Truthout and TomDispatch, called "Destroying What Remains: How the US Navy Plans to War Game the Arctic"

Dahr Jamail, welcome to *Democracy Now!* So what are its plans? What is it doing, Dahr?

DAHR JAMAIL: The naval exercises actually began yesterday and are slated to continue for 12 days in total and continue on an annual basis. And they are basically permitted to conduct war games that involve a very, very large number of ships, aircraft and personnel, as was just described, and they are permitted over the next five-year period to use over 350,000 pounds annually of what they call expended materials. That means they're permitted to use bombs, torpedoes, missiles, gun shells, and this type of material, including chaff and other expended materials, none of which is intended to be recovered. For example, some of the propellants used in the torpedoes even contain cyanide. The EPA's so-called allowable limit for cyanide is one part per billion in the water, and the Navy's torpedoes—and this is all according to their own environmental impact statement on the exercises—actually will release between 140 and 150 parts per billion of cyanide. So that's just one example of the type of toxics that are likely to be introduced into the environment.

And the exercises also are going to entail the use of over 16—around 1,600 explodable five-inch Navy gun shells, 45 of which contain 8.8 pounds of explosives that are set to detonate with a fuse approximately three feet above the water. And the type of marine acoustic impact of that is the equivalent of a 500-pound bomb. The Navy EIS, environmental impact statement, also says that the Navy is permitted to generate 182,000 takes, which is a direct—a "take" is a direct death of a marine mammal or species and/or an indirect take, indirect death, which basically means the breeding, surfacing or migratory patterns would be impacted, which would ultimately lead to death. So that's a brief overview of the type of environmental impact.

And also, in addition to all five Alaska salmon species being in the area, it's a prime breeding and migratory period. This is the prime time of salmon fishing season, of so many species moving through this area in the Prince William Sound, as well as further north into the Arctic. This includes several species of whales, the blue, fin, Pacific right whale, which is an

endangered species—there's only about 30 of those left—in addition to the salmon and hundreds of other marine species that are going to be directly impacted. So, there's a lot of questions as to why is this happening right now in this particular area, right in the middle of migratory season and right in the middle of salmon fishing season.

AARON MATÉ: Dahr, I want to turn to Captain Raymond Hesser, the highest-ranking Navy official in Alaska. He told KTUU-TV all naval activities will not harm fragile ecosystems.

CAPTAIN RAYMOND HESSER: Temporary Marine Activities Area has been very carefully designed, in coordination with the National Marine Fisheries Service, to avoid critical habitats and other areas for naval activities. The Navy takes very seriously the environmental impacts and works very hard, and as does the rest of the DOD, to make sure that we don't cause any harm to the environment.

AARON MATÉ: "Don't cause harm to the environment." Dahr Jamail, can you respond? And also, have you reached out to the Navy? And what have they told you?

DAHR JAMAIL: Well, first, to respond to that statement, which is a blatant lie, or he is completely ignorant of what the Navy has actually done in regards to the National Marine Fisheries Service, which he quotes. I have a quote from their report from their consultation with the Navy right here in front of me, and that report states that potential stressors to the area include vessel movements, aircraft overflights, fuel spills, ship discharge, explosive ordnance, sonar weapons firing, non-explosive ordnance use and expended materials. It also—the report also goes on to say that the Navy activities could directly or indirectly cause impacts on individual species, modify their habitat or alter the water quality. And then, finally, according to the same National Marine Fisheries Service report, effects on habitats and communities from the Navy's Northern Edge exercises, quote, "may result in damage that could take years to decades from which to recover," end-quote. And it should also be pointed out that the National Marine Fisheries Service requested the Navy to do things like have independent scientific observers on board the ships during the exercises to monitor the impacts on fish, and the Navy has refused to allow that. There's no independent observers allowed in any capacity for these naval exercises. So, we basically are in a position where we have to take the Navy's word for their own reports on what's going to happen as a result and during these exercises.

I have contacted the Navy directly. I spoke with a Captain Anastasia Wasem in Alaska and asked her why this area, why this time, and she said that, basically—I basically got a lot of military propaganda from her, stating that this is, you know, for national security, this is an important area for the Navy to train in for battle preparedness, etc., etc. And the same type of information as far as what is the Navy doing to protect the area—the same type of kind of misinformation, I should state, misquoting from the National Marine Fisheries Service report and their consultations with the Navy, which essentially the Navy blew off at least 50 percent of the recommendations from the National Marine Fisheries Services about what they need to do in order to provide better environmental protections during their exercises.

AMY GOODMAN: Last month, Dahr, a group of Cordova fishermen and their allies organized a protest against the military's plans to conduct Northern Edge training exercises in the Gulf of Alaska. This is Emily Stolarczyk of the Eyak Preservation Council.

EMILY STOLARCYK: This area that they have picked to do these trainings in is the largest migratory path for salmon, birds, whales. I mean, there's a lot of life in this area, and it's very close to shore. The sonar that the Navy is going to use is very harmful, and in the Navy's own environmental assessment, they actually say that this has not been studied.

AMY GOODMAN: That interview also from KTUU-TV. So, Dahr, if you can talk—in a moment, we're going to talk about the "kayaktivists" who are protesting drilling in the Arctic—about the level of activism here, the level of awareness here, and the other pieces you've been writing, like about the electromagnetic war games that are being conducted on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington, where you live, and how that ties into Jade Helm? But start with this activism.

DAHR JAMAIL: There is a lot of popular furor aimed at the naval exercises. In fact, the city of Cordova, where Emily is working out of, passed a city resolution directly opposing the naval exercises, as did the City Council of Kodiak, Alaska. And fishermen across the coastal Alaska region that's going to be impacted by the exercise are all in a furor over it. We've seen a over 150-boat flotilla in Cordova happened a few weeks ago. About a week or two after that, another large flotilla of fishermen out of Kodiak did the same thing. And fishermen everywhere, as soon as they get word of this exercise, have risen up in opposition to it. Tribes in Kodiak have filed for government-to-government consultations with the federal government. They're completely opposed to this, very angry about what's going on. Natasha Hayden, with the Afognak Tribal Council in Kodiak, told me that this is, from their perception, a, quote, "direct frontal attack on [their] cultural identity," end-quote, by the Navy. So, there is a lot of popular uprising about this.

And how it ties into the bigger picture, we're seeing a very, very large domestic military expansionism that's very, very worrisome. Just across Puget Sound from where I'm speaking with you now, the Navy is in preparation to try to begin electromagnetic warfare training across the western Olympic Peninsula, right up against Olympic National Park, all over Olympic National Forest, again with total disregard to the environmental and human impacts to these trainings. And we're seeing this, similar with Jade Helm, other training exercises, all up and down the West Coast, as well as land exercises, as you mentioned, like Jade Helm, that encompass very, very large amounts of the continental U.S., as well. So, it's a very worrisome thing to see. It's not getting much press, until it starts to infringe directly upon people's homes and their livelihoods, as we're seeing right now in Alaska.

AARON MATÉ: Dahr, and quickly, the reason for this military expansionism, as you put it, into the Arctic, that's just to get access to the oil there? Is that the primary motivation?

DAHR JAMAIL: Well, the Navy hasn't stated that explicitly, but if you connect the dots, that's clearly what's happening. I'm talking to you right here in Seattle, where there's a big giant Shell Oil rig not far from this studio. And it doesn't take a genius to connect the dots. Look at this massive uptick. This is the single largest exercise the Navy has ever conducted up in the Gulf of Alaska. The timing of it—these rigs are in position. If the oil companies get their way, they are going to be moved up north. And the Navy certainly—if you look at a lot of their own literature, in fact, they estimate, by their own analysis, that the Arctic is going to start seeing ice freeze summer periods by the late summer of next year, and certainly satellite data seem to be confirming this. And so, clearly, if you look at the timing of this and when and where it's happening, certainly, it indicates that they are preparing for what's coming in the Arctic as the race for what's left is continuing.

AMY GOODMAN: Dahr Jamail, I want to thank you for being with us, staff reporter at Truthout, just written a [piece](#) for Truthout and TomDispatch, "Destroying What Remains: How the US Navy Plans to War Game the Arctic." We'll link to it at democracynow.org. When we come back, one of the "kayaktivists"—that's right, kayak activists—why they've taken to the Port of Seattle. Stay with us.