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The US on the World: the socio-ecological impacts of America's global ascendancy

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Prof.dr. Dario Fazzi

**The US *on* the World:
The Socio-Ecological Impacts of America's
Global Ascendancy**



**Universiteit
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Bij ons leer je de wereld kennen

The US *on* the World:
The Socio-Ecological Impacts of America's
Global Ascendancy

Inaugural Lecture by

Prof.dr. Dario Fazzi

on the acceptance of his position as professor by special appointment

Transatlantic Environmental History

at Leiden University / Roosevelt Institute for American Studies

on Monday September 8, 2025



Universiteit
Leiden

Mevrouw de rector magnificus, geacht faculteitsbestuur, zeer gewaardeerde toehoorders, leden van het bestuur van het Roosevelt Institute for American Studies en leden van het curatorium van deze bijzondere leerstoel, lieve familie en vrienden, collega's en studenten, hartelijk welkom bij mijn oratie.

It is a pleasure for me to give a speech that summarizes my past, present, and future research interests. Titled “The US on the World: The Socio-Ecological Impacts of America’s Global Ascendancy,” this talk aims to give you a glimpse of how I try to contribute to the expansion of the field of study of my special chair in Transatlantic and Environmental History.

In October 1997, during the negotiations for the Kyoto Protocol – the first multilateral agreement to commit industrialized countries to reducing their own greenhouse gas emissions – the US State Department sent a terse but pointed note to its top diplomats, instructing them to gauge their counterparts’ views on an important exemption. Washington’s foreign policymakers wanted to insert a clause explicitly excluding military activities from the treaty’s provisions. After all, the note observed, the US federal government “is the biggest single user of energy, and much of that energy comes from defense installations and training operations.” A climate treaty that sought to cut carbon emissions without accounting for America’s exceptional(ist) military requirements – without, in other words, contemplating the “National Security Exemption” that the State Department envisioned – would have been, according to those officials, incompatible with the United States’ mission to lead the world and foster global stability and peace.¹

More than a bureaucratic formality, the note – hardly the first of this kind – captured the essence of America’s long-standing approach to environmental issues.² The

US government’s prevailing outlook on the environment, indeed, has consistently rested on a mix of utilitarianism and techno-optimism, infused with masculine, paternalistic, and at times even racist undertones, and shaped by persistent militarism. Together, these traits have rendered the pursuit of environmental protection – and the creation of an international system of environmental governance, as the note and the fate of the Kyoto Protocol and its later adaptations attest – contradictory at best and ineffective more often than not.³ Yet, beyond impeding environmental stewardship, what has the historical trajectory of the United States actually done to the environment? More specifically, what have the ascent of the United States as a global force, its transformation into an empire, and its projection of power and influence meant for the natural world? How have these processes reshaped the planet’s ecologies? And, ultimately, what has been America’s role in the making of today’s climate crises?

These questions, in part due to a widespread and renewed sense of climate urgency, are steadily moving to the forefront of US historiography.⁴ For decades, historians of America’s global entanglements have largely kept them outside the scope of their analyses. Their focus has rested on assessing the role the United States has played *in* the world, tracing how US actors – both state and non-state ones – have shaped international affairs and transnational relations.⁵ At the same time, they have addressed the evolution of the relationships between the United States *and* the world by nuancing America’s intricate web of connections, flows, and exchanges.⁶ At times, some of these historians have ended up interpreting the United States *as* the world itself – overemphasizing the American roots of modern events and phenomena.⁷ In recent years, however, historians have begun to assess the tangible impact that the United States has had *on* the physical world, illuminating how the transformation of the nation’s institutions, norms, culture, and power over the past two centuries has reverberated across the global environment.⁸

This scholarship is offering fresh insights into America's ascendancy by situating it within the wider context of planetary changes and challenges. As Dipesh Chakrabarty observes, the advent of the Anthropocene – the era in which humans have seemingly and irreversibly altered the planet's biogeochemical systems – demands a shift in historical thinking from the global to the genuinely planetary.⁹ Such a perspective requires acknowledging the profound impact of human actions on Earth's systems, a paradigmatic turn that redefines human agency as inseparable from its constant interactions with the more-than-human world.¹⁰ Bringing this planetary lens to the study of US global entanglements means asking not only how the natural environment enabled the United States' rise as a global power, but also how deeply that ascendancy has reshaped the planet's mechanisms and systems.

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Several contemporary environmental historians concur on a straightforward point: the United States has been among the most influential actors and most consequential agents in the latest stage of the Anthropocene – a phase commonly described as the “Great Acceleration.”¹¹ From the mid-twentieth century onward, the planet has experienced an unprecedented surge in human activity, producing profound alterations to Earth's systems. This acceleration is marked by sharp increases in both socio-economic and biogeochemical indicators, including ozone depletion, ocean acidification, population growth, energy consumption, and greenhouse gas emissions.¹² US-driven technologies and policies have propelled many of these transformations. In my own work, I argue that one of the most damaging drivers of America's planetary impact has been the relentless growth and virtually unchecked reach of the US military-industrial complex, whose influence has spanned the twentieth century and continues, with undiminished force, well into the twentieth-first one.¹³

Modern America's impact on, and transformation of, the global environment remains the subject of open historiographical debate. On one side, scholars such as Daniel Headrick favor a

long-term, deep-history approach in which US agency is read as part of humanity's intrinsic, almost inescapable, struggle against nature.¹⁴ From this perspective, human civilizations have, throughout history, altered and reshaped the natural world to enhance their chances of survival; the United States is no exception, representing instead the culmination of millennia of anthropic efforts to give the Earth an eminently human face. On the other side, scholars including Rob Nixon and Dorceta Taylor highlight the uniqueness of America's environmental impact, underscoring the racial, economic, political, and cultural features of US-led models of anthropogenic development.¹⁵ Both arguments hold weight and, in many ways, complement one another: the processes that have made the United States – and its contemporary history – one of the defining markers of the Anthropocene are shaped, quite evidently, by both continuities and ruptures.

European colonialism and imperialism, for instance, profoundly affected both local and global ecologies, leading to the extermination of native species across all realms – plants, animals, and, of course, human beings.¹⁶ The establishment of plantation economies and the proliferation of extractive practices proved especially consequential. The United States inherited this model and extended it first through its own westward continental expansion and then through its global – perhaps even ultra-terrestrial – projection of power.¹⁷ Similarly, as Ellen Arnold notes in a recent short book, the organization and control of water resources have been the hallmark of human societies throughout history, including those that developed in North America.¹⁸ Yet, the degree of engineering and the persistently unequal distribution of water resources implemented by the US government – integral to both the colonization of the American West and the creation of the modern American state, with its attendant degradation of watery environments – has been unprecedented.¹⁹ In the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century United States, access to water was structured around the needs of white settlers; once state-building was complete, these colonial

patterns persisted in the form of institutionalized socio-economic exploitation, producing some of the most enduring paradoxes of American democracy and long-standing forms of environmental injustice.²⁰ In sum, using the environment and natural resources to marginalize Indigenous and other underrepresented communities while safeguarding the interests of the wealthiest has been, quite literally, as American as apple pie.

It was between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, that the socio-ecological impact of the United States became truly planetary, beginning to affect the functioning of the Earth's most vital biogeochemical systems. This shift stemmed largely from the simultaneous consolidation of the formal US empire and the exponential rise in power and influence of its military-industrial complex.²¹ As Ian Tyrrell has shown in his pioneering studies, the transformation of the United States into a global colonial empire – operating alongside and interacting with other largely exploitative empires – introduced new ideas about the natural environment and the use of its resources.²² By elevating early discourses of sustainability to the international stage and by granting conservationists access to the highest levels of public policy, the US government made the utilitarian preservation of natural resources the prevailing norm.²³ The success of America's political, military, and economic machinery – set against the concurrent relative decline of the old European powers – helped to entrench a vision of human progress rooted in natural resource extraction. This vision heralded what historians have termed “petromodernity,” a fusion of cultural and economic ideals that placed oil and fossil fuels at the heart of human development.²⁴ Overabundant energy coming from polluting, extractive practices fueled production and consumption, encouraged exports, enabled mass immigration, supported economic growth and urban sprawl, and nurtured the belief that progress – so long as petroleum could be drilled and oil burned – would never end.²⁵ Early concerns over the environmental and health consequences of this oil-infused

modernity were, as historian Gaetano Di Tommaso has shown, pushed aside: nature became the primary engine of America's vision of progress.²⁶

One of the most significant drivers of this distinctly American approach to environmental resources, I argue, was the steady rise of the US military-industrial complex.²⁷ In his 1961 farewell address, President Dwight D. Eisenhower famously warned against the “unwarranted influence” of this growing, omnipresent behemoth – an apparatus that was marshalling national resources and political will to sustain an ever-expanding, war-prone machine.²⁸ Military and industrial elites, bound together by shared financial, manufacturing, and strategic interests, had forged an alliance capable of shaping US policy at multiple levels, both domestically and internationally, while stifling dissent with promises of stability, progress, and security.²⁹

To a certain extent, as historian Manu Karuka has argued, the marriage of military infrastructure and industrial progress has shaped American identity since the Republic's earliest days.³⁰ War-making and industrial systems were imposed on Native tribes and embraced by white settlers as tools to gain, maintain, and justify political and territorial control. By the early twentieth century, however, the rapid expansion of key industrial sectors – most notably petrochemicals and transportation – spurred a strategic alignment between public and private investments in military technologies. As Katherine Epstein explains in her seminal study of the Anglo-American partnership that developed the first torpedoes, it was in the years before World War I that the “replacement of market by command, public-sector investment in private-sector technological development, the role of technocratic elites in the policy process, the beginnings of big science, and government outreach to academia” emerged as the foundational pillars of the military-industrial complex.³¹ President Franklin D. Roosevelt expanded this structure dramatically, famously transforming the United States into

an “arsenal of democracy.”³² While setting the stage for the “American Century,” this process crucially reshaped the relationship between science and politics, and between public and private interests.³³ With the onset of the Cold War, then, the military-industrial complex became the gravitational center of American politics, bringing about what Pierre Guerlain has aptly described as an almost total “militarization of minds and politics” in the United States.³⁴

This militarization revealed itself in many forms – most visibly through its pervasive ideology and enduring economic and political influence. The creation and maintenance of a vast military-industrial apparatus – anchored in a myriad of facilities spread across the United States and around the globe – made the defense sector the central engine of American capitalism.³⁵ As Harvard economists Michael Reich and David Finkelhor observed in 1970, the military-industrial complex had driven its tentacles “deep in the heart” of the nation’s economy, to the point of becoming “entirely fused with it.”³⁶ Efforts to reduce military spending have faced bipartisan resistance ever since. Robert McNamara’s attempt to restructure America’s global military posture, for example, took decades to be only partially implemented.³⁷ Throughout the twentieth century and well into the twentieth-first one, US defense spending – despite periodic fluctuations, abrupt surges, and fleeting retrenchments – has consistently remained above three percent of GDP, one of the highest sustained shares in the world.³⁸

While the consolidation of the military-industrial complex has equipped the United States with the means to achieve and maintain superpower status, it has also carried a series of often-overlooked environmental costs.³⁹ These have translated into the global dissemination of toxic practices and enduring ecological legacies. Among the most studied are the cases of nuclear testing and fallout, which starkly illustrate the socio-ecological consequences of America’s modern global ascendancy.⁴⁰ The creation of semi-dystopian

nuclear geographies became a structural feature of twentieth-century America: from the Nevada desert to the shores of the Marshall Islands, the US government’s sustained reliance on nuclear gamble and deterrence strategies entrenched ecological marginalization, prolonged exposure, and the dispossession of underrepresented communities worldwide.

Likewise, scholars and journalists have uncovered the broader consequences of America’s biochemical warfare program, both at home and abroad.⁴¹ In 1968, the dispersal of toxic substances near a US Army proving ground in Utah killed thousands of sheep grazing downwind and exposed nearby communities to long-term contamination.⁴² The 1969 leak of chemical munitions at the Chibana depot in Okinawa led to elevated cancer rates among service members and decades-long marine pollution.⁴³ The extensive use of herbicides and tear gas in the Vietnam War altered precipitation patterns, disrupted plant growth, damaged vegetation, and affected the birth rates of both humans and animals.⁴⁴ More recently, the US Department of Defense’s authorized use of depleted uranium munitions in the Middle East and the Balkans contaminated local soil and water resources, harmed the health of US and allied soldiers, demanded costly and often ineffective cleanup efforts, and tarnished America’s international reputation.⁴⁵

America’s military-industrial complex has reshaped the global environment not only through its most visible effects – investments in armaments and active warfare – but also through the release of persistent, difficult-to-dispose hazardous waste. The fate of leftover Agent Orange is emblematic of this toxic legacy. The 2.3 million gallons of defoliant the United States did not deploy in the Vietnam War were first shipped to a remote storage facility on Johnston Atoll, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, and then incinerated at sea aboard the Dutch-owned vessel *Vulcanus I*.⁴⁶ The operation contaminated soil and groundwater near the storage sites, while the lagoon’s waters revealed dangerously high concentrations of dioxin, which entered local biota and spread through the surrounding

marine environment.⁴⁷ The incineration site itself was poisoned, and many crew members suffered neurological illnesses or sudden death.⁴⁸

For decades, the US Navy has used Kaho‘olawe, an island in Hawai‘i, as a testing ground, leaving such extensive waste that the island is now uninhabitable. As Kyle Kajihiro and others have shown, the contamination’s effects have reached far beyond the military operations and what is described by official environmental impact statements, altering identities, social relations, cultural geographies, and marine ecologies.⁴⁹ Similarly, as Joshua Reno has recently documented in a penetrating anthropological study of military waste, the United States’ posture of permanent war preparedness – often obscured by the rhetoric of dual-use technologies – has harmed communities far from battlefields, dispersing contaminants through air, soil, and water worldwide.⁵⁰

Another striking example of how the US military-industrial complex has fostered ecological vulnerability is represented by the community living in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, a border region already vulnerable to migration pressures, poverty, unemployment, and coastal erosion. Here, residents face the added threat of massive LNG infrastructure and the expropriation of key shoreline areas for privately owned SpaceX launchpads. Sonic booms, jet fuel discharges, toxic fumes, and precarious jobs compound the region’s chronic underdevelopment while disrupting the migratory and reproductive patterns of sea turtles and many other species that inhabit the Rio Grande delta.⁵¹

In sum, the impact of America’s military-industrial operations and waste has been so broad, diffuse, and pervasive that – without necessarily invoking new forms of ecocide, as historian Emmanuel Kreike does – the US armed forces and their contractors can be seen as perpetuating forms of “toxic colonialism.”⁵² America’s vast military operations, and the waste they have generated, have transformed war zones,

testing grounds, and communities living in the proximity of military-industrial facilities – both in the United States and abroad – into sacrifice zones, subjected to the degradation of collective ecologies and cultural imaginaries alike. Framing the US military-industrial complex through the lens of toxic colonialism highlights an abusive dynamic in which American polluting agencies have exploited asymmetrical power relations to perpetuate ecological harm and deplete natural resources. Given the planetary reach of America’s military-industrial complex, it is difficult to ignore this form of toxic colonialism – and its intersections with class, race, and gender – as one of the principal drivers of modern environmental injustice and degradation.⁵³

In its historical trajectory and through its enduring influence, the US military-industrial complex has inscribed many of the defining markers of the Anthropocene. It has dispersed radioactive isotopes with extremely long half-lives – tracers that will remain detectable for millennia in sediments, ice cores, and even in the deepest reaches of the ocean.⁵⁴ It has fueled, and continues to fuel, the exponential rise in greenhouse gas emissions, intensifying the very processes that drive climate change.⁵⁵ It has spurred vast increases in the production and consumption of plastics, much of which has entered terrestrial and marine ecosystems, altering food chains and leaving behind a near-permanent petrochemical signature.⁵⁶ And it has played a role in accelerating biodiversity loss, both directly through habitat destruction and indirectly through the cascading ecological disruptions of war, militarized infrastructure, and resource extraction.⁵⁷ Together, these legacies have not only transformed entire ecosystems but have also embedded the imprint of US military-industrial power deep within the geological and ecological record of the planet.

In my own research and writings, I seek to show not only how America’s modern military-industrial complex has contributed to the degradation of the global environment and the

worsening of today's climate crises, with particular reference to bodies of water, but also how the nation's democratic institutions, grassroots mobilization, and both collective and individual engagement have advanced new and effective forms of environmental stewardship and protection.⁵⁸ I have often found the most compelling and impactful environmental campaigns emerging from local initiatives. Sometimes acting independently, and at other times through coordinated transnational networks, such movements have built webs of interdependent interests, shared governance, and multichannel advocacy that have succeeded in limiting the damage caused by military and industrial practices. Yet, the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (so-called SLAPP) and the government's invocation of national security priorities – as in the case of the pipelines crossing Native American lands in the Dakotas – have undermined the strength of these efforts.⁵⁹ To me, these tensions and the enduring influence of the military-industrial complex reflect America's perhaps most striking structural paradox: to borrow Homer Simpson's famous line about alcohol, the United States is indeed “the cause of, and the solution to, all of life's problems,” including the most urgent environmental ones currently impinging upon us.⁶⁰

As I come to the end of my speech, I'd like to say a few words of gratitude. I want to acknowledge all those who have made my career path not only possible, but also extremely rewarding, apologizing in advance to those I won't be able, or I will forget, to mention. In the first place, I would like to thank the Rector and the Executive Board of Leiden University along with the Board of the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies (RIAS) for having created this chair and having appointed me. I am also grateful to the Board of the Faculty of Humanities, the members of this chair's *curatorium* and the whole management team, past and present, of the Institute for History, for their unwavering support and the trust they've placed in me. Also, my deepest appreciation goes to my RIAS director and Leiden

supervisor Damian Pargas, who constantly gives me the freedom to develop new projects and ideas, patiently enduring my loquacity and overenthusiasm (and my obstinate attempts to overspend the RIAS budget too). Along with Damian, who has been able to finely combine friendship with leadership, I want to thank all the colleagues I met at the RIAS in the last thirteen years: any intern, PhD student, postdoctoral researcher, and visiting fellow that I met in Middelburg has taught me something crucial about this profession and its broader societal outreach. These exchanges have contributed to transforming the RIAS into a genuine living lab. If this institute is now recognized as a leading academic center for the study of US history and environmental studies, in Europe and beyond, the merits and credits fully go to its amazing office manager, Leontien Joose, and academic coordinator, Gaetano Di Tommaso. It's their hard work and dedication that enable me, as the RIAS chair, to effectively steer the RIAS research agenda. I obviously can't avoid thanking my students and colleagues in Leiden, as well as the many friends who work within the broader American Studies community in the Netherlands. I feel privileged for having had the opportunity, over the course of the last decade, to teach and work at different universities in this country, meeting and exchanging views with so many smart and generous scholars that it would be impossible to name them all. As a small representation of them, let me at least mention Caroline Stolte, Anne Heyer, and Soledad Valdivia Rivera, who made me feel at home in Leiden since the first day I joined the Institute for History, Maud Rijks, whose fascinating PhD project I am very gladly supervising, and my self-selected mentor Michiel van Groesen, whose wisdom in any field of life but football keeps inspiring me. Let me also thank some of the colleagues who taught me how to become a decent scholar, including George Blaustein, Anne Foster, Petra Goedde, and Charles Postel, and the people who are responsible for my very presence in the Netherlands, Cees van Minnen, Hans Krabbendam and Giles Scott-Smith, who hired me at the RIAS (at that time still Roosevelt Study Center) back in 2012. They saw potential in a stranded postdoc who arrived

from Italy with a big backpack and a dangerous passion for Dutch coffeeshops. Your foresight and lack of prejudices will always be appreciated.

That I've been able to become a professor is down largely to my family and their sacrifices. They have always supported me even though they never quite understood what I was actually doing. When I was first hired by the RIAS, my dad told me: "So now you are a researcher, that means you are looking for something. But, if you are really good at it, why haven't you found it yet?". My sister Alessia has had the merit to be a sort of cultural mediator between my world and my family's, so I need to thank her too, especially for her patience. None of what I have achieved, however, would have been possible without the two most important human beings in my life. Laura and Leonardo are the ones who truly know the costs of all of this. Their everyday, patient efforts to juggle between the exigencies of a family and the eccentricities (i.e. weirdness) of a scholar are to be praised and genuinely admired. It's in their eyes, steadfast support, and unbounded love that I find the true meaning of both my personal and professional life.

Ik heb gezegd.

Notes

1. Cable, State Department, State 202013, to U.S. Del Mark Hambley and All NATO Post Collective, Subject: National Security Exemption on Climate Change, October 26, 1997 [Confidential], National Security Archive, online at <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/27354-document-1-cable-state-department-state-202013-us-del-mark-hambley-and-all-nato-post>, accessed on August 13, 2025.
2. See Zoë Schlanger, “Military Emissions Are Too Big to Keep Ignoring,” *The Atlantic*, January 17, 2024, accessed on August 13, 2025, and Dario Fazzi, *Smoke on the Water: Incineration at Sea and the Birth of a Transatlantic Environmental Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023), 38.
3. Robert L. Paarlberg, “Lapsed Leadership: U.S. International Environmental Policy Since Rio,” in Norman J. Vig, Regina S. Axelrod (eds.), *The Global Environment: Institutions, Law and Policy* (London: Routledge, 1999), 236-255; Elizabeth R. DeSombre, *Domestic Sources of International Environmental Policy: Industry, Environmentalists, and U.S. Power* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000); 73-93; Paul G. Harris, “International Environmental Affairs and U.S. Foreign Policy,” in Paul G. Harris (ed.), *The Environment, International Relations, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (London: Routledge, 2001), 3-21; Glen Sussman, “The USA and Global Environmental Policy: Domestic Constraints on Effective Leadership,” *International Political Science Review / Revue internationale de science politique*, 25:4, 2004, 349-369; Joanna Depledge, “Against the Grain: The United States and the Global Climate Change Regime,” *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 17:1, 2005, 11-27; Robert Falkner, “American Hegemony and the Global Environment,” *International Studies Review*, 7, 2005, 585-599; Joshua W. Busby, “A Green Giant? Inconsistency and American Environmental Diplomacy,” in G. John Ikenberry, Wang Jisi, Zhu Feng (eds.), *America, China and the Struggle for World Order* (London: Palgrave, 2015), 245-274; Richard N. L. Andrews, “Environmental Politics and Policy in Historical Perspective,” in Michael E. Kraft, Sheldon Kamieniecki (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Environmental Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 23-47.
4. James Gustave Speth, *Red Sky at Morning: America and the Crisis of the Global Environment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Patrick Allitt, *A Climate of Crisis: America in the Age of Environmentalism* (New York: Penguin, 2014); Robyn Eckersley, “Great Expectations: The United States and the Global Environment,” in Robert Falkner, Barry Buzan (eds.), *Great Powers, Climate Change, and Global Environmental Responsibilities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 51-70; Robert MacNeil and Matthew Paterson, “Trump, US Climate Politics, and the Evolving Pattern of Global Climate Governance,” *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 32:1, 2020, 1-18.
5. Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective since 1789* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Andrew Preston, Doug Rossinow (eds.) *Outside In: The Transnational Circuitry of US History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Jeffrey A. Engel, Mark Atwood Lawrence, and Andrew Preston (eds.), *America in the World: A History in Documents since 1898, Revised and Updated* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023).
6. See the four volumes published by Cambridge University Press under the title *The Cambridge History of America and the World* and Mark Bradley’s general editorship in 2021-2022.
7. Campbell Craig, Fredrik Logevall, *America’s Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020).
8. While traditional accounts, like Ted Steinberg’s *Down To Earth: Nature’s Role In American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) provide excellent reconstructions of the role played by nature in the shaping

- of US history, new studies, like Mark Fiege's *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012) flip the script and show how environmentally impactful America's institutions have been. See also Joshua Howe, "America and the World in the Anthropocene," in David C. Engerman, Max Paul Friedman, and Melani McAlister, *The Cambridge History of America and the World: Volume 4, 1945 to Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 731-753. Perrin Selcer's *The Postwar Origins of the Global Environment: How the United Nations Built Spaceship Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), is a notable exception, as the emphasis is placed here on UN institutions rather than on American ones, though read through the lenses of Elizabeth Borgwardt's *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), this book contributes to this strand as well.
9. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (University of Chicago Press, 2021). See also Simone M. Müller, Lucas M. Mueller, "Visions of the One Planet: The Planetary Age in International and Environmental History," *Diplomatic History*, 49: 3, 2025, 339-351.
 10. William Connelly, *Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and the Politics of Swarming* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
 11. John R. McNeill, Peter Engelke, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); Erle C. Ellis, *Anthropocene: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). See also the National Security Archive's *Climate Change Transparency Project*, at <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/project/climat-change-transparency>, accessed on August 13, 2025.
 12. See International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme, *Global Change and the Earth System: A Planet Under Pressure* (Berlin, Springer, 2004) and its update Will Steffen, Wendy Broadgate, Lisa Deutsch, Owen Gaffney, and Cornelia Ludwig, "The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration," *The Anthropocene Review*, 2:1, 2-15, 81-98.
 13. Luckily, I'm not the only one thinking along these lines. See, among the others, Michael Brzoska, "Climate Change and the Military in China, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 68:2, 2012, 44-54; Edwin Martini (ed.), *Militarized Landscapes, Weapons Testing, and the Environmental Impact of U.S. Bases* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017); Neta C. Crawford, *The Pentagon, Climate Change, and War: Charting the Rise and Fall of U.S. Military Emissions* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2022).
 14. Daniel R. Headrick, *Humans Versus Nature: A Global Environmental History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020)
 15. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Dorceta Taylor, *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility* (New York: NYU Press, 2014) and *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection* (Durham: Duke university Press, 2016)
 16. Corey Ross, *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire: Europe and the Transformation of the Tropical World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Tom Griffiths and Robin Libby (eds.), *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019); Tao Leigh Goffe, *Dark Laboratory: On Columbus, the Caribbean, and the Origins of the Climate Crisis* (New York: Penguin, 2025).
 17. Paul Frymer, *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Gretchen Heefner, *Sand, Snow, and Stardust: How US Military Engineers Conquered Extreme Environments* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2025); Dagomar Degroot, *Ripples on the*

- Cosmic Ocean: An Environmental History of Our Place in the Solar System* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2025)
18. Ellen F. Arnold, *Water in World History* (London: Routledge 2024).
 19. See, among others, Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (New York: Penguin 1993); Donald J. Pisani, “Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: Nationalizing the History of Water in the United States,” *Environmental History*, 5:4 (2000), 466-482 and *Water and American Government: The Reclamation Bureau, National Water Policy, and the West, 1902-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); David Owen, *Where the Water Goes: Life and Death Along the Colorado River* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2018); Traci Brynne Voyles, *The Settler Sea: California’s Salton Sea and the Consequences of Colonialism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021); Theo Claire, Kevin Surprise, “Moving the Rain: Settler Colonialism, the Capitalist State, and the Hydrologic Rift in California’s Central Valley,” *Antipode*, 54:1 (2022), 153-173.
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DARIO FAZZI

SUMMARY

I am a Professor by Special Appointment in Transatlantic and Environmental History at Leiden University and the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies in the Netherlands. I work on the history of transatlantic relations, US politics and society, and international environmental governance. More specifically, I am interested in exploring the broader socio-ecological impact of the US military-industrial complex and in analyzing how environmentalist networks have emerged among local communities across the Atlantic from the second half of the twentieth century onward. My studies are therefore situated at the crossroads of transatlantic, environmental, and diplomatic history. I am also interested in teaching innovation, and I have coordinated a number of international virtual exchanges and immersive learning programs.

EDUCATION

- 2007-2010: PhD in History, University of Bologna, Italy
- 2004-2006: MA in International Relations, Roma Tre University, Italy
- 2001-2004: BA in Political Science, University of Bologna, Italy

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

PRESENT POSITION

- Professor of Transatlantic and Environmental History, Leiden University and Roosevelt Institute for American Studies (RIAS), the Netherlands

PAST POSITIONS

- 2021-2025: Assistant Professor, Leiden University, the Netherlands
- 2015-2023: Senior Researcher, RIAS, the Netherlands
- 2020-2021: Lecturer, Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands
- 2018-2020: Lecturer, Leiden University, the Netherlands
- 2016-2018: Lecturer, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- 2015-2016: Lecturer, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

- 2012-2015: Postdoctoral Researcher, Roosevelt Study Center, the Netherlands
- 2010-2012: Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Bologna, Italy

PUBLICATIONS

BOOKS

- D. Fazzi, *Smoke on the Water: Incineration at Sea and the Birth of a Transatlantic Environmental Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023)
- D. Fazzi, *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Anti-Nuclear Movement: The Voice of Conscience* (New York: Palgrave, 2016)

EDITED VOLUMES

- G. Scott-Smith, G. Di Tommaso, D. Fazzi (eds.), *Public Health and the American State*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024)
- D. Fazzi, A. Luscombe (eds.), *Eleanor Roosevelt's Views on Diplomacy and Democracy: The Global Citizen*, (New York: Palgrave, 2020)

REFEREED ARTICLES

- D. Fazzi, "Transnational and Translocal Environmental Activism," in Lisa M. Brady (ed.), *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Environmental History* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2025, 1-32
- D. Fazzi, "An army of students: the college of special and continuation studies and transatlantic cultural relations, 1950-1960," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, Volume 22, 2024, 103-123
- D. Fazzi, "'Ban the Burn': At-sea Incineration, Trans-local Activism, and Ocean Health," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 59, Issue 2, 2024, 275-292
- D. Fazzi, W.R. Glass, B. Heiskanen, E. Long, M. Lütke, "Teaching American History and Culture in Europe in an Age of Uncertainty," *Modern American History*, Volume 6, Issue 3, 2023, 366-375
- D. Fazzi, "Tone-Deaf Propaganda: American Perceptions and Misperceptions of Italy during the Great War," *Contemporary European History*, Volume 32, Issue 3, 2023, 1-12
- D. Fazzi, "Imperial Constraints: Labor and U.S. Military Bases in Italy, 1954-1979," *Diplomatic History*,

- Volume 45, Issue 3, 2021, 1-25 (Honorable Mention, 2022 American Studies Association Shelley Fisher Fishkin Prize)
- D. Fazzi, "Ban the Burn: The Translocal Campaign against Ocean Incineration, 1983-1988," *Arcadia: Explorations in Environmental History*, Issue 19, Spring 2021
- D. Fazzi, "People's Histories of the US Empire: A Trans-Local Approach to Study the Environment and the Cold War," *USAbroad: Journal of American History and Politics*, Volume 3, Issue 1, 2020, 97-106
- D. Fazzi, "Embodying the American Century: The Long-Lasting US Military Presence in Europe and the Case of Schinnen," *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity*, Volume 7, Issue 1, 2019, 653-672
- D. Fazzi, "A Voice of Conscience: How Eleanor Roosevelt Popularized the Nuclear Debate in the Fifties," *Journal of American Studies*, Volume 50, Issue 3, August 2016, 699-730
- D. Fazzi, "The Blame and the Shame: Kennedy's Choice to Resume Nuclear Tests," *Peace and Change*, Volume 39, Issue 1, 2014, 1-22
- D. Fazzi, "La Storia della pace. Tradizioni e orientamenti nella storiografia anglosassone" ["Peace History. Traditions and Tendencies within the Anglo-American Historiography"], in *Ricerche di Storia Politica*, Volume 15, Issue 1, 2012, 49-62

SPECIAL ISSUES

- D. Fazzi, E. Bini, T. Bishop (eds.), "American Apocalypse(s): Nuclear Imaginaries and the Reinvention of Modern America," *RSA Journal: Rivista di Studi Americani*, 31/2020
- D. Fazzi, A. Luscombe (eds.), "A Trustworthy Public Diplomat? Recent European Scholarship on Eleanor Roosevelt," co-edited with Anya Luscombe, in *European Journal of American Studies*, Volume 12, Issue 1, 2017

BOOK CHAPTERS

- D. Fazzi, G. Di Tommaso, "Fostering Intercultural Skills and Environmental Democracy through Virtual Exchange: A Case Study of the Leiden-W&M Coastal and Delta Communities Program," in Kelly A. Tzoumis, Elena Douvrou (eds.), *Intercultural Competence Through Virtual Exchange: Achieving the*

UN Sustainable Development Goals (Cham: Springer, 2025)

- D. Fazzi, "Better Dead than Red, or Not? Nuclear Physics and Public Health at the Dawn of the Cold War," in G. Scott-Smith, G. Di Tommaso, D. Fazzi (eds.), *Public Health and the American State* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024)
- D. Fazzi, "Eleanor Roosevelt and the Nature: Bridging Conservationism with Environmentalism," in D. Fazzi, A. Luscombe (eds.), *Eleanor Roosevelt's Views on Diplomacy and Democracy: The Global Citizen* (New York: Palgrave, 2020)
- D. Fazzi, "A Different and Better Future': Eleanor Roosevelt and the Global Atlantic," in J. Olthof and M. Zwiers (eds.), *Profiles in Power: Personality, Persona, and the U.S. President* (Leiden: Brill, 2020)
- D. Fazzi, "Human Rights vs. Human Life: The US-Soviet Bottom-Line," in A. van Stipriaan, G. Oonk, S. Manickam (eds.), *Histories of Encounters* (ESHCC: Rotterdam, 2018)
- D. Fazzi, "The Nuclear Freeze: Transnational Pursuit of Positive Peace, 1979-1983," in W. Knoblauch, M. Loadenthal, C.P. Peterson (eds.), *The Routledge History of World Peace since 1750* (London: Routledge, 2018)
- D. Fazzi, "The Nuclear Freeze Generation: The Early 1980s Anti-Nuclear Youth Revolt between 'Carter's Vietnam' and 'Euroshima,'" in K. Andresen and B. van der Steen (eds.), *A European Youth Revolt in 1980-1981* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016)

SELECTED CONFERENCE PAPERS

- "Empire by Negotiation: Normalizing the U.S. Military Presence in Western Europe, 1950-2003," SHAFR, Arlington, June 2025
- "Facing the Abyss: Delta Regions and Catastrophic Risk," Center for the Study of Existential Risk, Cambridge, September 2024
- "Hazardous Past, Wasted Futures? An Exploration of Human Entanglements with Toxic Waste," 2024 Anticipation Conference, Lancaster, September 2024
- "'Ban the Burn': The Trans-Local Struggle against Ocean Incineration," American Society for Environmental History, Denver, April 2024
- "Water Justice in US History: The More-Than-American Struggle for Water Rights," American Historical Association, San Francisco, January 2024
- "Virtual Exchanges and Environmental Education:

- Teaching American Studies in the Planetary Age,” American Studies Association, Montreal, November 2023
- “‘Ban the Burn’: At-Sea Incineration, Trans-Local Activism, and the Fate of Oceans’ Health,” European Society for Environmental History, Bristol, June 2021
 - “Poisonous Paradises: US Hazardous Waste and Toxic Colonialism in the Pacific,” SHAFR, New Orleans, 2022
 - “Ban the Burn: The Trans-Local Campaign against Ocean Incineration, 1974-1988,” Peace History Society, Online, October 2021
 - “Out of Sight, Out of Mind: The Lure of At-Sea Incineration and the Neglect of Oceans’ Health,” (SHAFR), Online, June 2020
 - “The Shock of the Local: US Military Exceptionalism at Test in Italy,” SHAFR, Arlington, June 2019
 - “Small is Beautiful: Local Anti-Nuclear Protests and the Quest for a Safe Environment, 1978-1979,” Historians of Twentieth Century United States (HOTCUS), Lincoln, February 2019
 - “Incongruous Propaganda: American Perceptions of Italy during the Great War,” Webster University, Geneva, November 2018
 - “‘A different and better future’: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Global Atlantic, 1939-1945,” SHAFR, Arlington, June 2017
 - “The U.S. among Us: A Transnational Approach to the American Military Presence in Europe, 1945-1989,” LSE Cold War Seminar Series, London, January 2017
 - “Awoken from a Nightmare: The (Un)Coordinated Response to the Three Mile Island Accident,” HOTCUS, Dundee, February 2016
 - “The Transatlantic Roosevelts: How the Atlantic Became a Space of Security, Freedom, and Equality, 1901-1948,” University of Turin, Turin, December 2015
 - “The Early Cold War Anti-Nuclear Protests and the Tragedy of American Radicalism, 1945-1963,” LSE Cold War Seminar Series, London, September 2015
 - “Eleanor Roosevelt as a Modern Pacifist Leader: Pragmatism, Realism, and Political Efficacy in Interwar America,” University of Venice, Venice, November 2014
 - “The Unexpected Anti-Nuclear Heroine: ER against the Nuclear Arms Race,” Netherlands American Studies Association Conference, Nijmegen, March 2013.

- “Hot Peace and Cold War: The American Protests Against Nuclear Weapons and the Overcoming of the Deterrence”, Popular Culture Association, Boston, April 2012
- “The Birth of an Antinuclear Conscience,” Peace History Society, Rock Hill, October 2009

ORGANIZED CONFERENCES

- May 21-23, 2025, “A Water’s History of the United States,” Middelburg
- May 24-26, 2023, “Theodore Roosevelt: Global American,” Middelburg
- October 12-14, 2022, “Environmental Justice in US History,” Middelburg
- May 21-22, 2022,” A Superpower by Nature: The Environment and American Studies,” Utrecht
- October 20-22, 2021, “Public Health and Disease in the American Century,” Online
- May 22, 2019, “American *Islands*: Outposts of Security, Prosperity, and Culture,” Middelburg

ORGANIZED POLICY WORKSHOPS

- The Montreal Moment: Ozone Depletion and the Rise of International Environmental Governance, Middelburg, June 2025
- Immersive Learning and Participatory Governance: The Role of Virtual Exchanges in Sustainable Development, Middelburg, June 2024
- Beyond Risk? Understanding the Threats of the Anthropocene, Leiden, May 2024
- An Environmental Education for an Environmental Democracy, Middelburg, June 2023
- Soil Salinization: Global Problem, Local Solutions, Middelburg, June 2022
- Nuclear Power Plant Decommissioning: Lessons and Challenges in Transatlantic Perspective, Online, June 2021
- Lifelong Equality, Middelburg, June 2017

TEACHING

UNDERGRADUATE – CURRENT/LEIDEN UNIVERSITY

- Politics: North America (International Studies)
- Archival Research on Environmental Justice (International Studies)
- The US and the Global Environment (History)

- Democracy in Action: Radical Cultures and Protest Movements in Modern America (History)

UNDERGRADUATE – PAST/LEIDEN UNIVERSITY

- Thesis Seminar (International Studies)
- The Global Cold War (International Studies)
- History: North America (International Studies)
- The *Intermestic* Cold War: The Bipolar Conflict and US Foreign and Domestic Policies (History)
- The Quest for Peace and Justice: Pacifism and Peace Activism in Twentieth Century America (History)
- Transatlantic Relations Inside Out: Europe and the U.S. in the 20th Century (History)

UNDERGRADUATE – OTHERS

- Europe and the U.S. in the 20th Century (History, Erasmus University Rotterdam)
- Transnational History: People, Ideas, and Institutions (History, Erasmus University Rotterdam)
- Cultural and Social History (History, Erasmus University Rotterdam)
- The Rise and Fall of the American Empire (History, Erasmus University Rotterdam)
- Identity and Cultural Diversity (American Studies, Radboud University Nijmegen)
- Planetary Cultural Politics (American Studies, Radboud University Nijmegen)
- American Political System (American Studies, Radboud University Nijmegen)
- The Cultural Cold War: American Cultural Diplomacy, 1945-present (History, Utrecht University)
- The Roosevelt Legacy (Arts and Humanities, University College Roosevelt)
- U.S. Government and Politics (Social Sciences, University College Roosevelt)
- The “Rooseveltian” Century and the Rise of the U.S. (History, University of Eastern Piedmont)

GRADUATE – CURRENT/LEIDEN UNIVERSITY:

- A Water’s History of the United States (North American Studies)
- The US in the Anthropocene

GRADUATE – PAST/LEIDEN UNIVERSITY:

- Major Issues in American History and Culture (North American Studies)

- The *Rooseveltian* Century: The Rise of the U.S. as a Global Power in the Twentieth Century (History)
- American Radicalism: Challenging and Empowering U.S. Democracy (History)

GRADUATE – OTHERS:

- The Future of American Power (American Studies, Radboud University Nijmegen)
- International Relations Theories (History, Erasmus University Rotterdam)
- Global History and International Relations (History, Erasmus University Rotterdam)
- The Quest for Peace and Justice: Peace History in the US (American Studies, University of Amsterdam)
- Thesis Seminar (American Studies, Gent University)

PHD PROJECTS (SUPERVISED)

- Paul Brennan (Leiden University), *Foreign Yet Domestic Liberties: The Colonial Reformism of The ACLU in The U.S. Empire, 1920-1940* (Defended: 2025)
- Adna Camdzic (University of Turin), *Nuclear heritage: Italian nuclear deindustrialization between local government and international governance* (Expected defense: 2026)
- Maud Rijks (Leiden University), *Water for Life: Greenpeace toxic Tours of the Great Lakes* (Expected defense: 2029)

MOOC & COIL

- The Rooseveltian Century (available at <https://www.coursera.org/learn/roosevelt>)
- Environmental Democracy in Delta Regions (available at <https://studiegids.universiteitleiden.nl/courses/116251/environmental-democracy-in-delta-regions-a-transatlantic-approach>)

ADMINISTRATIVE DUTIES

- Academic Director, RIAS
- Coordinator MA-track Beyond Borders: Global and European History, Leiden University
- Coordinator Research Seminar, Politics, Culture, and National Identity, Leiden University
- Member Core Group MA in Environmental Humanities, Leiden University
- Member Core Group Interdisciplinary Minor in One Health and Sustainability, Leiden University
- Member Digital Skills Advisory Committee, Leiden

- University
- Member MA Revision Group, Leiden University
- Member Self-Steering Committee on Sustainability, Una Europa, Leiden University
- Board Member, PhD Program in Global History of Empires, University of Turin
- Project advisor, Brill Digital Collections
- External advisor, Clingendael Institute
- External advisor, John Adams Institute
- External advisor, XR Era
- Panel Member, QANU Independent Academic Assessment Committee (Visitatiecommissie)

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

OP-ED

- “Is Melania Trump living up to her role as first lady?” *The Washington Post*, October 18, 2017

INTERVIEWS

- Dirk Waterval, “Hoe Amerikaanse superrijken de politiek naar hun hand zetten,” *Trouw*, November 21, 2024
- David Kabel, “Ondanks haarscheurtjes in de verhoudingen behoudt Oekraïne de steun van Westen,” *Het Financieele Dagblad*, October 2, 2023
- David Kabel, “Yellen slaat verzoenende toon aan in toespraak relatie China-VS,” *Het Financieele Dagblad*, April 23, 2023

VIDEOS/PODCASTS

- Greenhouse Environmental Humanities Book Talk Series, <https://newnatures.org/greenhouse/events/booktalk/online-book-talk-fazzi-smoke-on-the-water/>
- Iconen van de Geschiedenis Series, <https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/franklin-d-roosevelt-presidenten-van-de-verenigde-staten/id1777031064?i=1000674994872>
- New Books Network, <https://newbooksnetwork.com/smoke-on-the-water>
- RIAS 2020 US Election Chats, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBte6q-6JEiY198pJPNrcjvsv9Z7EZYx>

BLOGS

- G. Di Tommaso and D. Fazzi, “Blue Paper #12: Blue History - A Research Agenda,” June 10, 2022

<https://www.portcityfutures.nl/news/blue-paper-12-blue-history-a-research-agenda>

WEBSITES & COLLECTIONS

- Blue History Network (founder and coordinator), at <https://bluehistorynetwork.org/>
- New Diplomatic History Network (webmaster), at <https://newdiplomatichistory.org/>
- Editor-in-Chief, Transatlantic Relations Online, at <https://brill.com/display/package/rias?language=en&srsrtid=AfmBOooXwMKgULvAkuYMouFTiNeyALuqp9ZxcBK JEHTuz8JgH2z8FW>

MEMBERSHIP

- Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations
- American Studies Network
- Netherlands American Studies Association
- American Society for Environmental History
- European Society for Environmental History
- Peace History Society

OTHER SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS

- Mother tongue Italian; English (C1); Spanish (B2); Dutch (B1-B2)
- BKO – Dutch Teaching Qualification (2020)

FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS

- 2026-2028: Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership ((€400,000)
- 2024: Una Europa-Kiem Grant, Leiden University (€15,000)
- 2023: Starting Grant Program, Leiden University (€300,000)
- 2023: Educational Innovation in the Humanities (ECOLe) Grant (€5,000)
- 2023: Kiem Grant, Leiden University (€10,000)
- 2022-2024: Dutch Ministry of Education Virtual Exchange Grant (€45,000)
- 2018: Visiting Fellow, SciencesPo, Reims Campus (€4,000)
- 2012: Visiting Fellow, Brown University, Providence, RI (\$6,000)
- 2009: Visiting Fellow, State University of New York, Albany, NY (\$2,000)

PROF.DR. DARIO FAZZI

