

ScareWatch

“X years to climate catastrophe”



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"X years to climate catastrophe"

The scare: In the late summer of 2008, the once-serious *Washington Post* published a joint op-ed article by the president of the formerly-prestigious Brookings Institute and a foreign-policy wonk who works there. The article, entitled "Seven Years To Climate Midnight", took a now-traditional form, claiming that we have only x years (x being declared equal to 7 in the present instance) to avert irreversible climatic catastrophe "within decades". The co-authors, who are currently working with Stanford University on a "global governance" project, whatever that may be, recite a well-worn litany about the "momentous political challenge" faced by the next US President because of warmer weather. They say greenhouse gases are warming the Earth; that it will warm by more than 4.5 F by as soon as 2050, causing "vast regions" to "slide towards being uninhabitable"; that arable land will turn into desert; that the sea will rise to flood coastal areas from Manhattan and Florida to Bangladesh, St. Petersburg, and Mali; that the Gulf Stream will be altered; that Nevada will have no water at all; that cap-'n'-trade, windmills, solar panels, biofuels, and carbon-capture are the answer to this "existential threat to civilization"; and that Americans are guilty because the United States emits four times as much carbon per head as the Chinese and 12 times as much as the Indians.

The truth is that every single one of the exaggerated claims made in this article, and in hundreds like it that are published daily in the media, has long been shown to have no scientific credibility.

"X years to climate catastrophe": This slogan is a favorite with environmental extremists and their fellow-travelers.

In 1989 the UN said we had just ten years to curb carbon emissions, or within that period several nations would be wiped off the map. Yet almost 20 years later not a single nation has been wiped off the map, for mean sea level has risen by little more than 2 inches in that time. Al Gore, in his movie about the climate, also uses the now-threadbare "ten-years-to-avert-catastrophe" line, but it is now even more implausible than usual because, in the past 18 months, sea level has actually fallen in line with the cooler weather. The central economic fact of climate change is that adaptation as – or, rather, *if* – necessary is orders of magnitude more cost-effective than the costly, job-destroying measures that are so often and so purposelessly advocated to reduce carbon emissions. In fact, those measures would merely transfer our industries and our working people's jobs to China and India, where carbon emissions per unit of production are many times higher than they are in the West. The net result of attempts at restricting carbon emissions in the West, therefore, would be to increase carbon emissions worldwide. At present, therefore, there is no urgency whatsoever. When and *if*, the weather gets warmer there will be plenty of time to adapt to the new conditions: there is not the slightest urgency now. There are many real problems in the environment. Currently, and for the

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foreseeable future, the climate is not one of them.

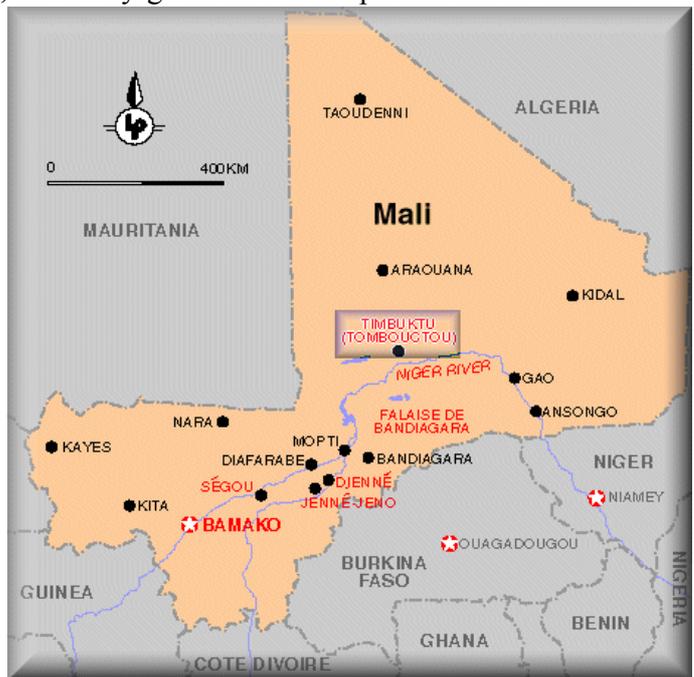
“Greenhouse gases are warming the Earth”: Without greenhouse gases, the Earth would be a very cold place. But the recent greenhouse-gas enrichment does not seem to be causing very much in the way of “global warming”. Indeed, today’s temperatures are broadly similar to those that prevailed worldwide 17 years ago, in 1995. There has been no increase in mean global surface temperatures since 1998. Since 2001, global temperatures have been falling. The drop in temperature between January 2007 and January 2008 was the greatest since global records began in 1880. Record sea-ice extent has been observed at both Poles, though most of the media have failed to report this, concentrating only on summer ice-melt in the Arctic. Record northern-hemisphere winter snow-cover in 2001-2 was surpassed in 2007-8. The sea as well as the air has been cooling, so that it is no longer credible to say that “global warming” is happening at all. In theory, adding greenhouse gases to the atmospheric mix ought to cause some warming: but it is now apparent that those who have been criticizing the IPCC and its adherents for overstating the effect of greenhouse-gas enrichment on temperature are right.

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“The planet will warm by 4.5 F by mid-century”: Here, the authors are predicting that temperatures over the next 40 years will rise by 0.1 F per year. Temperature has been falling throughout the past seven years, so this forecast is already looking over-ambitious. In fact, temperature rose by only 1 F between 1907 and 2007, a rate of just 0.01 F per year. There is no credible scientific evidence to the effect that this long-run warming rate, which began 300 years ago and shows absolutely no sign of increasing despite the extra carbon dioxide in the air, will suddenly accelerate tenfold. Forecasts of this kind are scaremongering plain and simple, and are no longer credible in the least degree.

“Vast regions will slide towards being uninhabitable”: Even if this unscientific and apocalyptic language had the slightest basis in hard science, a cursory glance at the map of the world will reveal that for every tract of land that becomes too wet or too dry for cultivation there will be other vast tracts of land that become usable in warmer weather. Northern Canada and Siberia, between them, have hundreds of millions of acres of land now under permafrost that would become both habitable and agriculturally productive if the weather grew warm enough.

“The sea will flood coasts from Manhattan and Florida to Bangladesh, St. Petersburg, and Mali”: It will do no such thing. The IPCC, under considerable pressure from independent scientists such as Professor Niklas Mörner, who knows more about sea level than anyone because he has been studying it for a third of a century, has been compelled to reduce its high-end forecast of future sea-level rise from 3 feet to less than 2 feet over the coming century: and it now agrees with Mörner that there is



The sea does not menace landlocked Mali

little reason to imagine an increase in sea level that is considerably above the 8 inches observed in the 20th century. Manhattan will not flood. Nor will San Francisco, where Al Gore bought a \$4 million condo just feet from the ocean in the very year in which he was pretending to predict that the ocean would imminently rise by 20 feet. Nor will Bangladesh, where the foreign-policy observers at the Brookings Institute do not seem to have observed that a recent report shows the land area growing more extensive – not less. Likewise, St. Petersburg is under no particular threat. As for Mali, the map above shows that it is landlocked, and is not, therefore, threatened by sea-level rise at all.

“Arable land will turn into desert”: It will do no such thing. By the Clausius-Clapeyron relation, of which the Brookings Institute has perhaps not yet heard, in warmer weather the space occupied by the atmosphere is capable of carrying near-exponentially more water vapor than in colder weather. This relation establishes scientifically what has long been observed: that, in general, warmer weather is wetter weather. Patterns of climate have always shifted: in the first half of the 20th century, for instance, there were repeated, severe droughts right across the American Great Plains. John Steinbeck’s book *The Grapes of Wrath* was set in these terrible droughts, and gives a graphic account of what it must have been like to live through them. But the generally warmer weather of the second half of the 20th century has not brought more droughts: though Professor Will Alexander in South Africa has observed a close relationship between the double sunspot cycle and the drought and rainfall cycle in Southern Africa, where he predicts that we are now due for a decade of drought. The truth is that changes in mean surface temperature are just one of many influences on the pattern of droughts and floods worldwide, and it is simply not scientifically credible to make silly predictions such as those made by the climatologically-illiterate president and foreign policy wonk of the Brookings Institute.

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“The Gulf Stream will be altered”: Well, this is a slight improvement on the usual rubbish about the Gulf Stream and the associated worldwide thermohaline circulation stopping altogether. Al Gore’s horror movie said the thermohaline circulation, which he called the “ocean conveyor”, would soon stop, causing terrible disasters worldwide. In fact it has long been established that, as long as the wind blows and the world turns and the land-masses are distributed as at present, the thermohaline circulation and hence the Gulf Stream must continue much as at present. Warmer weather may weaken the flow a little, just as it tends to weaken tropical and extra-tropical cyclones and storms: but the thermohaline circulation is not seriously at risk, and it is regrettable that as former-learned an institution as the Brookings no longer has anyone capable of keeping it informed of these things.

“Nevada will have no water at all”: It has very little water now. There is no particular reason to suppose that Nevada will run out of water because of “global warming” (if and when “global warming” resumes). If water becomes scarcer in Nevada, whether because of warmer weather or the recent cooler weather that brought snow last winter to the Grand Canyon itself, or because of other factors, the billionaire casino proprietors of Las Vegas will no doubt find an ingenious and affordable method of ensuring that the water supply to their gold-mines is suitably maintained.

“Cap-‘n’-trade will Save The Planet”: Not that the planet needs saving: carbon dioxide concentrations were 20 times today’s level back in the Cambrian era, and temperatures were only 12 F above today’s. The planet survived just fine. The notion that emissions trading will make the slightest useful contribution to the future evolution of the Earth’s climate is as absurd scientifically as it is economically. Transferring Western jobs and carbon emissions to China and India, which will be the direct result of any emissions-trading program, will actually increase the planet’s carbon footprint. Also, carbon trading, which arbitrarily favors some industries at others’ expense, is nothing more than a system of Socialist rationing under the pietistic guise of “Saving The Planet.” Carbon emissions trading is a recipe for corruption on a very large scale indeed. Both parties to any emissions-trading transaction, and the regulators, all have direct incentives to magnify the true size of the transaction at the expense of the ordinary citizen: it is a vehicle for dishonestly transferring wealth from the many that are poor to the few who are rich. In this sense, it is surprising that Leftist regimes are usually more enthusiastic for it than governments of the center. See the SPPI paper¹ on cap-‘n’-trade for further details of this monstrous boondoggle.

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“Windmills will Save The Planet”: They will do no such thing. The only windmills that pay their way are those that are heavily subsidized by bureaucratic-centralist regimes. The cost of erecting the windmills largely cancels what little benefit they might theoretically provide. They typically run at only one-sixth of their rated capacity, because the rest of the time the wind either does not blow at all or blows too hard for safe operation. Because of the unpredictability of the wind, mainstream fossil-fueled generating capacity has to be kept in steam in a wasteful and inefficient standby mode all the time, so that the net saving in carbon emissions is in practice nil. Windmills are fashionable, but useless: and they are so damaging to large birds of prey, which their fast-rotating blades kill in very large numbers, that Spain’s largest wind farm has just had to be closed down on environmental grounds.

“Solar panels will Save The Planet”: They will do no such thing. Most of the world’s electricity consumption is in the temperate northern hemisphere, where the sun shines too little for efficient solar electricity generation. Transmission losses guarantee that solar plants to supply the temperate regions of northern hemisphere cannot be located efficiently in the sunnier climates of the sub-tropics. As for solar cells, the carbon dioxide emitted in their manufacture is greater than the emissions they will save during their quite short service life of less than 15 years.

“Biofuels will Save The Planet”: They will do no such thing. The UN had originally favored biofuels as an alternative to fossil fuels: however, catastrophe has followed the widespread introduction of biofuels, as the loss of agricultural land has driven up world food prices. Now the UN’s “Right-To-Food Rapporteur” says biofuels are “a crime against humanity”. One-third of the entire agricultural

¹ http://scienceandpublicpolicy.org/monckton/cost_and_futility_of_trading_hot_air.html

land area of the United States has been switched from growing food for people to growing fuel for automobiles in the past two years, entirely because of the climate scare. The World Bank says three-quarters of the doubling of world food prices over the past two years is directly attributable to the biofuel scam. There have been food riots in poor countries throughout the world, because people can no longer afford even the most basic food, and they are starving. That mass starvation is almost entirely attributable not to “global warming” but to the false and scientifically-baseless climate scare whipped up by Establishment figures like the president of the Brookings Institution. How many more poor people must die before the president of the Brookings Institution wakes up to the reality of his murderous policies?

“Carbon capture will Save The Planet”: It will do no such thing. The technology for burying carbon dioxide in underground rock strata is untested, and is bound to be disproportionately expensive. It will enrich those who build and maintain the storage facilities, but – in the unlikely event that it will work at all – it will make not the slightest difference to the climate. It is an exercise in elaborate futility. All measures of this kind are orders of magnitude more expensive and less effective than simply adapting to warmer weather as – and *if* – it occurs in the future.

“It’s all America’s fault, or George Bush’s fault”: It is no such thing. In the US, as in most advanced countries, clean-burn technology such as fluidized-bed coal-burning in power plants emits less carbon dioxide per unit of electricity generated than coal-fired plants anywhere else in the world. The US has nothing to be ashamed of, and George Bush has rightly stood aside from the lunatic recommendations of the lavishly-funded environmental extremists who now hold sway over less competent and less thinking governments and bureaucracies worldwide. Closing down 50% or 60% or 80% of the US economy, as the likes of the Brookings Institute now recommend, would merely transfer our workers’ jobs, our industries, our skills, and our profits to China and India, increasing the world’s carbon emissions rather than reducing them. What conceivable benefit to the climate could ever flow from such an absurd policy? **End of scare.**

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Get *Apocalypse?* NO!, the fast-paced, fact-packed, feature-length movie that puts the entire climate scare in perspective, at: <http://scienceandpublicpolicy.org/apocalypseno-dvd.html>