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[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

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by JOHN DAVIS

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## “Weather Terrorism:” a National Emergency



Art by Nick Roney

As Trump projects his Imperial power in the direction of our southern border, demanding to reinforce its security by building a wall, the real threat to America’s safety – weather terrorism (Bruno Latour’s term for the biospheric backlash aimed at the vast hubris of humanity) – goes unheeded. Trump’s posturing with regard to establishing a national emergency to facilitate wall building, obscures a genuine emergency in just one more case of the Fake eclipsing the Real.

The president is supported in this passive, climate change denialism by the misdirection of the mainstream (and much of the alternative) press, which expends an immense amount of

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[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

journalistic energy impugning him. We know he's an intensely solipsistic president who uses political issues sociopathically – for their sole value in aggrandizing his sense of self-worth. Can we move on? That logorrheic energy might better be used in raising the issue of weather terrorism to a scare factor in excess of his bogus issue of illegal immigration. Ironically, south of the border emigration is itself a climate change phenomenon. Most of those making up the migrant caravans originate in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, countries whose lands are devastated by drought, giving their farming families little choice but to seek a life elsewhere.

Violent acts of extreme weather come and go with virtually no political will to prepare for them or mitigate their consequences. Existential crises, it seems, must be matched with the pre-existing Imperial-Fossil-Capital agenda to warrant a meaningful response. Rising sea levels, global warming exacerbated hurricanes, storm surges, floods, drought and wildfire are the real dangers at our borders, along 12,383 miles of coastline, in our cities, on our islands and farmlands, in our wilderness and hinterlands. Yet they elicit little in the way of a concerted public outrage at the failure of a supine federal government to make efforts to protect against them.

While the full impact of such future events is ultimately unknowable, there already exists a consensus menu of potentially viable responses which include a hardening of infrastructure, the building of sea walls, the raising of levees, the softening of shorelines, the relocation of threatened populations, conservation of our fresh water resources, bio-engineering of drought-resistant crops and the development of fire protection strategies, along with a drastic reduction in our energy usage such that renewable sources can entirely replace our reliance on fossil fuels. Such goals encompass short, medium and long term strategies, and some, indeed, are already being put in place by state, county and municipal authorities. But in the immediate term, the financial resources and legislative will to begin fully manifesting them can only be generated by the building of a media-infused groundswell of popular concern that can then be addressed by federal politicians fully confident of public support. That, at least, is how representative democracy is meant to work.

We may already be seeing the faint outline of such a process unfolding. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Corey Booker and others are spearheading the so-called 'Green New Deal', in an attempt to make the Democratic Party relevant to the climate crisis. Their platform encompasses higher taxes on the uber-wealthy, a massive program of investment in clean energy, jobs and infrastructure, federal job guarantees, a basic income program

and universal health coverage. Social initiatives to foster fairness and justice in the projected post-carbon economy are also being proposed. All that is missing is the demand that the president declare a national emergency (as authorized under the National Emergencies Act of 1976) that explicates the gravity of the situation and proposes the full marshaling of the country's resources (while we still have them at our command) to bear upon this civilizational crisis. Fat Chance.

If there are to be any winners in the climate apocalypse it will be in those areas of the planet that have assumed some forward positions of preparedness. We can choose between engineering a massive infrastructural response that may help mitigate the worst of the ongoing crisis, and, at the same time, radically reimagine how we cooperate in living on the planet – or face the certainty of a dour future with a devastated economy marked by drought, rising waters, mold, rot, disease, and hunger. This is both a social and an environmental crisis. That means not only attempting to curb greenhouse gas emissions but also undertaking rigorous planning for current and impending acts of weather terrorism and their consequences. Naomi Klein optimistically wrote, way back in 2014, in *This Changes Everything*, “There are ways of preventing this grim future....but the catch is these will involve changing everything....it involves changing how we live, how our economies function, even the stories we tell about our place on earth”.

Five years later, it is no longer a matter of preventing a grim future. The careless extension of what the American Sci-Fi writer Kim Stanley Robinson calls ‘The Dithering’ – those decades when we understood the atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> problem but totally failed to address it – guarantees its imminent arrival. The catch now is that the climate is changing everything for us. We have already liberated enough carbon in the atmosphere to put the weather on disaster auto-pilot for the next millennium. We can but batten down the hatches, stockpile provisions and close the fire-doors. The weather is the effective change-agent, not we nor our politicians. The pretense that humans are in charge has finally to be abandoned. We await our fate possessing only crude materials of resistance and, thus far, almost no political will to emplace them.

The most salient function of government is the protection of its people – our allegiance to the Republic depends on its successful manifestation. The present regime appears totally committed to the denial of our climate reality and its power to inflict terrifyingly real damage on our underfunded and aging infrastructure and to the people that that infrastructure supports. Hurricanes Katrina, Sandy, Maria, Harvey, Thomas, and Michael,

should each have been a wake-up call, a weather 9/11. Instead, they have proven to be opportunities for official prevarication, dissembling and hand-washing. From George Bush's, "Brownie, you're doing a heck of a job", to Trump's notorious paper towel toss (in post-Maria Puerto Rico) there is a through-line that speaks of the government's dismissal of the seriousness of these amplified weather events and their wider implications. The validity of the updated death toll in Puerto Rico of almost 3,000 was, predictably, denied by the president – while estimates of the toll continue to rise. A Harvard study now puts the number of Maria-related fatalities at over 4,500, as of year's end. The climate has far exceeded the lethality of 9/11. Its death toll, in fire, flood, drought and wind is ever rising, as each season's disasters inexorably add bodies to the statistical burial mound.

Alongside old-school disaster preparedness must come a radical pivot from the traditional national security state that protected out-of-country natural resources, including oil, secured global transportation routes and reacted to perceived threats from other national and imperial actors on the presumption that our individual safety, as members of a democratic society, ultimately depends on the state's ability to project lethal force. It will turn out that stockpiling sand-bags is of more strategic value than stockpiling vast arsenals of lethality pointed at others on the planet who share our exact predicament. There is no acknowledgement yet, from AOC and her cohort that the defense budget needs to be re-imagined, although Trump's notion that the military can be charged with building his border wall perhaps opens the door to such thinking.

It is the Army Corps of Engineers who already shoulder a great deal of the responsibility for flood control across the land, yet they do so with an allocation of discretionary funds that is less than half of one percent of the defense budget. A review of the U.S. Department of Defense Budget Request for 2019 shows no understanding of the threats that are emerging from a drastically altered biosphere. Instead, its rationale is the need to "Respond to growing political, economic, military and information competitions" itemized as "Revisionist powers such as China and Russia; Regional dictators such as Iran and North Korea; Transnational threats, including jihadist terrorists and transnational criminal organizations". Domestically, its goals are to protect our vital national interests listed as "Protect the American people, homeland, and way of life; Promote American prosperity; Preserve peace through strength"; and "Advance American Influence". The full extent of the country's infrastructure, food security, and the health of its people, is threatened by

global warming – amply demonstrated in recent enhanced weather events, of which apparently, the military has no awareness and to which it is, therefore, offering no response.

The Russians, Chinese, Iranians and North Koreans represent entirely chimerical threats – used to prop-up a military establishment fueled by testosterone, medieval strategic thinking and technological fetishes. Trump’s southern hordes, threatening the gates along the Mexican border, are equally chimerical, created to bolster his own and his supporters’ nativism, machismo and illusory sense of worth.

There is no shortage of disaster journalism. Fire, flood and storms are avidly covered, and mined for their most mawkish ‘human interest’ stories. What is missing is the overt linkage to global warming and the understanding that, beyond being ‘the new normal’, we are fated to endure escalating levels of terror within our forever-changed biosphere. Are we prepared for the psychological traumas that the weather will inflict – for the loss of islands, coastlines and cities to the rising waters, storm surges and flood; to the loss of prairies, chaparral and forests to wildfire; to the loss of entire mountain and valley towns to the flames; and to the loss of essential services, clean water and viable sewage systems? Are we ready for food shortages? For the re-emergence of cholera, sundry diarrheal illnesses, typhoid and leptospirosis and yet other diseases spread through contaminated water, soil and food?

In this imminent national emergency, where can we put our faith, if not in the best efforts of our government