

# **THE SECURE AND THE DISPOSSESSED**

**How the Military and Corporations are  
Shaping a Climate-Changed World**

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# THE CATASTROPHIC CONVERGENCE: MILITARISM, NEOLIBERALISM AND CLIMATE CHANGE

*Christian Parenti*

Water flows or blood.

*Slogan of the banned Pakistani political party Jamaat-u-Dawa*

## *Introduction*

Climate change arrives in a world primed for crisis.<sup>1</sup> And the political responses to climate change increasingly take the form of ethnic, religious, or class violence in the form of banditry, rebellion, warfare, state repression and general militarisation. This is because the current and impending dislocations of climate change intersect with the already existing crises of poverty and inequality left by thirty years of neoliberalism, and the violence and tattered social fabric left by Cold War-era military conflicts. I call this collision of political, economic and environmental disasters the ‘catastrophic convergence’. By catastrophic convergence, I do not merely mean that several disasters happen simultaneously, one problem atop another. Rather, I am arguing that problems compound and amplify each other, one expressing itself through another.

Societies, like people, deal with new challenges in ways that are conditioned by the traumas of their past. Thus damaged societies, like damaged people, often respond to new crises in ways that are irrational, short-sighted and self-destructive. In the case of climate change, the past traumas that set the stage for bad adaptation – a destructive social response – are Cold War-era militarism and the economic pathologies of neoliberal capitalism. Over the last forty years, both these forces have distorted the state’s relationship to society – removing and undermining the state’s collectivist, regulatory and redistributive functions – while overdeveloping its repressive and military capacities. And this, I contend, seriously challenges society’s ability to avoid violent dislocations as climate change kicks in.

## *Climate crisis*

The scientific consensus about climate takes institutional form in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The IPCC does not conduct independent research but is instead a government- and UN-supported international clearinghouse. It collects and summarises all published scientific literature on climatology and related issues in biology, hydrology and glaciology to facilitate governments' response to climate issues based on fully vetted research.

The IPCC has been attacked by climate denialists as alarmist and wrong, due to several minor errors in its 2007 Fourth Assessment Report. But correcting these minor errors did not change the report's overall conclusions. In fact, because the IPCC operates on the basis of consensus, its conclusions are quite conservative and its reports lag years behind the latest scientific developments. The IPCC represents the lowest-common-denominator, fully accepted conclusions of the scientific mainstream.

The IPCC has concluded that our civilisation's dependence on burning fossil fuels has boosted atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide from around 280 parts per million (ppm) before the Industrial Revolution to 400 ppm today. Analyses of ancient ice cores show 400 ppm to be the highest that atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> has been for 10,000 years.

Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> functions like the glass in a greenhouse, allowing the sun's heat in but preventing much of it from radiating back out to space. We need atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> – without it, the earth would be an ice-cold lifeless rock. However, over the last 150 years, we have been loading the sky with far too much CO<sub>2</sub>, and the planet is heating up.

As the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions explains, 'The Earth's average surface temperature has increased by 1.4°F (0.8°C) since the early years of the 20th century. The 10 warmest years on record (since 1850) have all occurred since 1998, and all but one have happened since 2000.'<sup>2</sup>

Less than 1 degree Celsius warmer over a hundred years? That may not sound like much, but scientists believe it is enough to begin disrupting the climate system's equilibrium. The negative feedback loops that keep the earth's climate stable are increasingly giving way to destabilising positive feedback loops, in which departures from the norm build on themselves instead of diminishing over time. As a result, climate change is happening faster than initially predicted and its impacts are already upon us in the form of more extreme weather events, desertification, ocean acidification, melting glaciers and incrementally rising sea levels. The scientists who construct the computer models that analyse climate data agree that even if we stop dumping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, CO<sub>2</sub> levels are already so high that we are locked into a significant increase in global temperatures. Disruptive climate change is a certainty even if we make the economic shift away from fossil fuels.

Incipient climate change is already starting to express itself in the realm of politics. Extreme weather events and off-kilter weather patterns are causing more humanitarian crises. The UN estimates that 70 per cent of humanitarian disasters are climate related, up from 50 per cent two decades ago. Already climate change adversely affects 300 million

people a year, killing 300,000 of them. By 2030 – as floods, drought, forest fires and new diseases grow worse – as many as 500,000 people a year could be killed by climate change, and the economic cost of these disruptions could reach \$600 billion annually.<sup>3</sup>

This dangerous mix of extreme weather and water scarcity could inflame and escalate already existing social conflicts. Columbia University Earth Institute's Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) and the International Crisis Group combined databases on civil wars and water availability, and found that 'When rainfall is significantly below normal, the risk of a low-level conflict escalating to a full-scale civil war approximately doubles the following year.'<sup>4</sup> The project cites the example of Nepal, where the Maoist insurgency was most severe after droughts and almost nonexistent in areas that had normal rainfall. In some cases, when the rains were late or light, or came all at once, or at the wrong time, 'semi-retired' armed groups often re-emerged to start fighting again.

Between the Tropic of Capricorn and the Tropic of Cancer lies what I have called the 'Tropic of Chaos', a belt of economically and politically battered post-colonial states girding the planet's equatorial latitudes. In this band around the tropics, climate change is beginning to hit hardest. The societies in this belt are heavily dependent on agriculture and fishing, thus very vulnerable to shifts in weather patterns. According to a Swedish government study, 'There are 46 countries – home to 2.7 billion people – in which the effects of climate change interacting with economic, social and political problems will create a high risk of violent conflict'.<sup>5</sup> Their list covers that same terrain. These latitudes are now being most affected by the onset of anthropocentric climate change.

In my book, *Tropic of Chaos*, I described numerous conflicts that are being exacerbated by climate change, beginning with the escalation of violence among East African pastoralists, most specifically the Turkana. Moving farther eastward, Afghanistan is facing the worst drought conditions in a hundred years. On to India, where a map of Naxalite guerrilla activity correlates almost perfectly with the most drought-affected districts. More recently, other climate conflicts have become well known: Syria's civil war in 2011, for example, was precipitated in part by a horrific drought from 2006 to 2009.

Rising sea levels provide another major challenge for our capacity to adapt. In 2007, the IPCC projected sea levels could rise by an average of 7–23 inches this century. These numbers were soon amended and scientists now believe that sea levels could rise by an average of five feet over the next ninety years. Such sea-level rises will lead to massive dislocations. One 2014 study from Columbia's CIESIN projects that 700 million 'climate refugees' will be on the move by 2050, although most of these will not cross borders and will move within their country of birth (see Chapter 5).<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the modern era's first 'climate refugees' were the 500,000 Bangladeshis left homeless when half of Bhola Island flooded in 2005. In Bangladesh, 22 million people could be forced from their homes by 2050 because of climate change. India is already building a militarised border fence along its 2,500-mile frontier with Bangladesh.<sup>7</sup>

And the student activists of India's Hindu Right are pushing vigorously for the mass deportation of (Muslim) Bangladeshi immigrants.

Meanwhile, 22 Pacific island nations, home to 7 million people, are planning for relocation as rising seas threaten them with national annihilation. What will happen when China's cities begin to flood? When the eastern seaboard of the US starts to flood, how will people and institutions respond?

### *Military legacy of the Cold War*

The vulnerability of the Global South to climate change cannot be fully understood without noting that this region was also the frontline of the Cold War's hot proxy battles and the laboratory for neoliberal, violent economic restructuring. The main pre-existing crisis of the catastrophic convergence is the legacy of Cold War militarism. In the Global South, the Cold War was hot. Revolution and counter-insurgency were its methods. Conventional warfare in which the military and infrastructures are targeted is, despite all its horrors, often associated with increased social solidarity, as witnessed in Britain during the Second World War, where Nazi bombardment was met with evacuation, rationing, conscription and an unprecedented levelling of class differences. Asymmetrical socio-military conflicts, such as those waged across the Global South at the height of the Cold War were quite different, eroding and destroying the social fabric.

For the most part, the rebellion in the Global South was a home-grown affair, and the reaction from the US was – in the eyes of US planners – defensive. As a doctrine, counter-insurgency is the theory of internal warfare; it is the strategy of suppressing rebellions and revolution. Counter-insurgency mimics revolution: Its object is *civilian society* as a whole, and the social fabric of everyday life. Whereas traditional aerial bombing (which is notoriously ineffective) targets bridges, factories and command centres, counter-insurgency targets – *pace* Foucault – the 'capillary' level of social relations. It ruptures and tears (but rarely re-makes) the intimate social relations among people, the ability to cooperate, the lived texture of solidarity – in other words, the bonds that are society's sinews.

Conventional warfare seeks to control territory and destroy the opposing military, but counter-insurgency seeks to control society. In an insurgency, the military force – the state or the occupying power – already has (at least nominal) control of the battle space, but it lacks control of the population. Guerrillas, irregular forces, even small unpopular terrorist groups all rely on the populace, or parts of it, for recruits, food, shelter, medical care, intelligence and, if nothing else, simple cover. Mao Zedong summed it up: 'The guerrilla must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea.' Thus, the counter-insurgent's task is to isolate and destroy the guerrillas by gaining control of the population through violence as well as psychological and ideological control. Society is the target, and as such, society is damaged.

Irregular, proxy conflicts – insurgency and counter-insurgency in the Third World – defined the American and Soviet methods during the Cold War. Those methods primed

many areas of the world for serious instability. The UN documented around 150 armed conflicts in the Third World between 1945 and 1990. In these 'small wars', 20 million people died, 60 million were injured, and 15 million were deracinated as refugees by 1991. Derek Summerfield, a psychiatrist and academic who specialises in the mental-health effects of modern war, described the situation as follows:

Five percent of all casualties in the First World War were civilians; the figure for the Second World War was 50 percent, and that for the Vietnam War was over 80 percent. In current armed conflicts over 90 percent of all casualties are civilians, usually from poor rural families. This is the result of deliberate and systematic violence deployed to terrorize whole populations ... Population, not territory, is the target, and through terror the aim is to penetrate into homes, families, and the entire fabric of grassroots social relations, producing demoralization and paralysis. To this end terror is sown not just randomly, but also through targeted assaults on health workers, teachers and co-operative leaders, those whose work symbolizes shared values and aspirations. Torture, mutilation, and summary execution in front of family members have become routine.<sup>8</sup>

Nowhere saw a more devastating counter insurgency than Guatemala. Beginning in 1981, the military government of General Rios Mont combined a genocidal scorched-earth campaign against civilians with a classic 'secure and hold' development strategy. The strategy was called '*frijoles y fusiles*' (kidney beans and guns). After destroying Indian villages and massacring many of their inhabitants, the military would gather the surviving civilians and concentrate them in 'model villages'. Male survivors were forced to participate in civil patrols, lightly armed vigilante forces that were the eyes and ears of the military – and often their human shield. An estimated 100,000 civilians were murdered during the Guatemalan civil war, the vast majority of them by government forces.

I had an opportunity to see this war first-hand, in 1988, when I hiked across the Ixill Triangle in the highlands war zone. The trails were littered with government and guerrilla propaganda – small handbills exhorting the people to join one side or the other. The area was still at war but the guerrillas were in retreat. Everywhere we saw the methods of counter-insurgency: trails cleared of trees on all sides, air patrols, civilian militia checkpoints, burnt villages, and newly constructed ones under strict government control. Later, in 1991, I travelled with and reported on the *Resistencia Nacional*, part of the FMLN, in the hills of Cabañas, El Salvador; similar physical and social scars were evident.

Today, the Guatemalan highlands and the small towns of El Salvador are still violent, but instead of guerrilla operations and counter-insurgency, crime is the plague. The global average homicide rate is less than eight per 100,000. But the 2012 UN Office on Drugs and Crime report on Central America cites the rates that murder increased between 2000 and 2011: from 51 to 92 per 100,000 in Honduras; from 60 to 69 per 100,000 in El Salvador; and from 26 to 39 per 100,000 in Guatemala, with a spike to 46 per 100,000 in 2008 and 2009.<sup>9</sup>

All three of those countries were sites of intense counter-insurgency from the late 1970s to early 1990s, and the legacy of that is a society weakened, social fabric frayed: gun culture; large populations of unemployed men trained and habituated to violence, discipline, secrecy, pack loyalty, brutality, and the arts of smuggling, extortion, robbery and assassination. The political class is also steeped in violence, and much of it sees society as warfare: enemies must be destroyed, social problems eliminated by force. Walls and armed guards define the landscape. The police are steeped in traditions of torture, disappearance and drug running.<sup>10</sup>

Relative deprivation defines the psychological terrain: these societies are more unequal than ever, but the revolutionaries and progressive social movements, in raising class-consciousness, have made the masses aware of the inherent unfairness of the situation.<sup>11</sup> The spectacle of modern media, in advertising riches and fame, make them aware of what they lack – all of which now feed criminogenic relative depravation.

### *Post-Cold War*

Famously, the US defeat in Vietnam turned the US military away from the study of counter-insurgency, though the methods of irregular warfare were still part of the instruction for US proxy forces in El Salvador, the Philippines, Colombia and elsewhere. Counter-insurgency doctrine began to make a return after US Army Rangers got into trouble in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1993, during a botched raid on the compound of Somali warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid. A Black Hawk helicopter was shot down in the city and a seat-of-the pants rescue mission eventually shot its way in and then back out of the city, but not without considerable loss of life – particularly for the Somali militiamen, 800–1,300 of whom were killed – and a spectacular humiliation for the US Army.<sup>12</sup>

After that, the Pentagon began to think more seriously about how to fight irregulars in cities and failed states. Soon the RAND corporation put out a study called *The Urbanization of Insurgency*, and a December 1997, National Defense Panel review

... castigated the Army as unprepared for protracted combat in the near impassable, maze-like streets of the poverty-stricken cities of the Third World. As a result, the four armed services, coordinated by the Joint Staff Urban Working Group, launched crash programs to master street-fighting under realistic third-world conditions.<sup>13</sup>

Greg Grandin's *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the rise of the new imperialism* made clear the links between counter-insurgency in Iraq and its antecedents in Central America. Grandin quotes an American counter-insurgency expert, who described the ferocity of US-funded and trained forces in Central America as 'going primitive'.

As Grandin explains:

With the United States failing to defeat the rebels [in Iraq] on its own, the Pentagon came to debate the ‘Salvadorian option’, that is the use of local paramilitary forces otherwise known as death squads, to do the kind of dirty work that it was either unwilling or unable to do. It turned to men like James Steele, who in the 1980s led the Special Forces mission in El Salvador and worked with Oliver North to run weapons and supplies to the Nicaraguan Contras ...<sup>14</sup>

The Shiite death squads of Iraq’s Maliki government were the result. They were also a disturbing harbinger of a world wracked by climate insecurity, as we will explore later.

In the meantime, let us now turn to the other great crisis: the rise of neoliberalism.

### *The political economy of neoliberalism*

From the 1930s until the 1980s, many developing economies in the Global South followed a model of state-directed import-substitution industrialisation, or ISI. This form of capitalist development involved an uneasy compact between business and labour, brokered by an interventionist state. The rise of Communism in the USSR, the spread of radical left movements, and the collapse of markets for traditional exports during the Great Depression, all encouraged an embrace of the model. In exchange for discipline on the shop floor, the state created social security programmes and allowed rising wages for the aristocracy of labour. Investment and finance were regulated, and banks were often state owned. Examples of this mix are found from Brazil to Mexico to Morocco to South Africa to India. Overall – and contrary to the assertions of today’s economic orthodoxy – labour productivity, living standards and the economy as a whole increased under ISI.<sup>15</sup>

By the mid-1960s, however, signs of trouble emerged. There started to be too much stuff and not enough demand.<sup>16</sup> By 1970, 99 per cent of American homes had refrigerators, electric irons and radios. More than 90 per cent had washing machines, vacuum cleaners and toasters. As one economist put it:

Saturation in one market led to saturation in others as producers looked abroad when the possibilities for domestic expansion were exhausted. The results were simultaneous export drives by companies in all advanced countries, with similar, technologically sophisticated products going into one another’s markets ... Increasing exports ... from developing countries such as Taiwan, Korea, Mexico and Brazil further increased the congestion of mass markets in the advanced economies.<sup>17</sup>

By the early 1970s, capitalism was suffocating from industrial success.<sup>18</sup> In 1973, the other shoe dropped: Arab defeat in the Yom Kippur War led to an oil boycott by many key exporters. The price of oil quadrupled in less than a year. That hit countries like Brazil hard. Though it is now a major oil producer, it was then importing 80 per cent of

its petroleum. Before prices could subside, the Shah of Iran fell to a revolution and there was a second oil shock in 1979. Prices nearly doubled again.

These petrodollars flooded the world financial markets and were lent out to anyone who would borrow at very low, but variable interest rates. In Latin America, this translated into mounting debt. Overcapacity and a collapse in the rate of return on investment prompted Paul Volker, the chairman of the US Federal Reserve, to begin a dramatic rise in interest rates from 7.9 per cent in 1979, to 16.4 per cent in 1981. This had the effect of cutting borrowing throughout the economy; with that, investment and consumer spending also ratcheted down abruptly. Unemployment in the US reached 10.8 per cent by December 1982.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, both Reagan and Thatcher launched offensives against the power of organised labour, cut social spending and slashed taxes on the wealthy.

In Latin America, the new monetary policy also meant that interest payments on existing debt soared. Thus began the Latin American debt crisis. From 1978 to the end of 1982, total Latin American debt more than doubled, from \$159 billion to \$327 billion. Debt servicing – that is, paying the interest – grew even faster: The average Latin American country was using more than 30 per cent of its export earnings just to service its debts – Brazil paid nearly 60 per cent.<sup>20</sup>

### *... Austerity*

The solution to the debt crisis came in the form of IMF- and World Bank-enforced austerity. Though the pattern played out differently in each affected country, I will focus on the paradigmatic examples of Brazil and Mexico.

In 1983, Brazil had the largest foreign debt of the developing world – \$83.8 billion. Just to service its debts, it had to borrow more and more in a downward spiral. In early 1983, Brazil went to the IMF for \$6 billion, which was then the single largest loan in the Fund's history. But in return, Brazil agreed to a brutal austerity program: To cut inflation, growth was strangled, public spending was cut, the currency devalued, imports restricted, public assets privatised, exports boosted.<sup>21</sup> In São Paulo, workers were soon rioting.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, Brazil's export drive took place amidst falling commodity prices. Two factors contributed to this. The Bretton Woods institutions were simultaneously pressuring other Third World debtors to export more; meanwhile, deep recessions and high interest rates in the richer countries held down consumption. Increased supply plus reduced demand meant plummeting prices. Sugar, copper, aluminium and other raw materials all hit deep lows.

The IMF's structural adjustment programme resulted in higher unemployment, rising poverty and growing urbanisation – as the rural poor went to cities in search of work. From 1980 to 1990, Rio's overall population growth rate was 8 per cent, but the *favela* (slum) population surged by 41 per cent. As economist and Latin America expert Mark Weisbrod explained, 'From 1960 to 1980, income per person – the most basic measure

that economists have of economic progress – in Brazil grew by about 123 per cent. From 1980 to 2000, it grew by less than 4 per cent.’ Weisbrot estimates that had Brazil not embraced neoliberalism, ‘the country would have European living standards today. Instead of about 50 million poor people as there are today, there would be very few. And almost everyone would today enjoy vastly higher living standards, educational levels, and better health care.<sup>23</sup>

In Mexico, the debt crisis played a similar role, but was exacerbated by trade policies. Mexico’s crisis broke on 12 August 1982, when Mexico announced that it could not pay its bills and took the first steps towards default, declaring a 90-day moratorium on repayment. The peso was devalued 30 per cent and before the year’s end would drop another 53 per cent.<sup>24</sup> The crisis was prompted a year earlier though, when the effect of Volker’s monetarist squeeze went international: oil prices began to slide and Mexico faced badly diminished revenues and the world’s largest foreign debt: \$70 billion. Mexican economists had projected the country would have oil revenues of \$20 billion in 1981 and \$27 billion in 1982, but in 1981 oil brought in a mere \$14 billion and the next year was also below target.<sup>25</sup> The cost of debt servicing now consumed most of Mexico’s projected petroleum sales, and thus most of its foreign earnings. By the summer of 1982, Mexico owed almost \$81 billion to foreign banks, and that sum was rising. To avoid default, the peso was devalued and the government imposed limited capital controls. It was the second devaluation of the year. Rich individuals and private firms began to panic and shift their wealth out of the country, prompting a default and the fear that it would clearly spread to the US banking system and worldwide.

### *Bailout ’82*

A deal between the US Federal Reserve, the IMF and most of the eight hundred banks to which Mexico owed money led that country to be granted \$12 billion in credit, in exchange for a programme of economic liberalisation and imposed austerity. Out went Keynes; in came Hayek. The government sold 106 state-owned companies and agencies. These included sugar mills, shipyards, textile plants and power plants, as well as the parastatal processing plants and the export-marketing firms.<sup>26</sup>

Privatisation brought new owners, who broke unions, fired workers and drove down wages. By decade’s end, Mexico’s 1,155 state businesses had shrunk to only 400. The government earned less than \$2 billion from these privatisations, which went to service debts.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, food subsidies were slashed; those for eggs, milk, cooking oil, sugar, beans and rice were eliminated completely. The retail price of gasoline and natural gas doubled.<sup>28</sup> By 1986, the purchasing power of the average Mexican was about half of what it had been in 1982.<sup>29</sup>

Mexico’s trial by debt began the long march to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that came into effect on 1 January 1994. At the same time, in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, the Zapatista National Liberation Army – a group of

mostly indigenous peasants – rose up against the government, calling NAFTA a death sentence for Indians.<sup>30</sup>

What did ‘free trade’ really do for Mexico? An almost quizzical article published in the *New York Times* in 2009 answered this as follows:

In some cases, NAFTA produced results that were exactly the opposite of what was promised. For instance, domestic industries were dismantled as multinationals imported parts from their own suppliers. Local farmers were priced out of the market by food imported tariff-free. Many Mexican farmers simply abandoned their land and headed north.<sup>31</sup>

The piece went on to note that although the value of Mexico’s exports had quintupled in 15 years, almost half a million people each year were migrating in search of work, a disproportionate number of them from the countryside. With only one-quarter of Mexico’s total population, the countryside accounts for 44 per cent of all Mexican immigrants moving to the United States.<sup>32</sup>

Under NAFTA, the government dismantled most of the agencies that offered assistance and administered subsidies to small farmers: ‘Lending by both government and private-sector rural credit programs declined 75 per cent after 1994, when NAFTA took effect, while rural bankruptcies increased six-fold.’<sup>33</sup> The reformed Article 27 now allows the sale of *ejido* (common) lands, which has increased landlessness.<sup>34</sup> According to a 2010 report by Oxfam, Mexico has spent \$80 billion on food imports and now has a deficit in food trade of \$435 million.<sup>35</sup> Mexican agricultural production has turned away from food for people and internal markets toward animal feed for export.<sup>36</sup> Markets for corn, the staple food, protected by government policy until NAFTA, have been completely opened.<sup>37</sup> Peasant organisations have demanded a renegotiation of the treaty.<sup>38</sup>

Since 1994, Mexico’s economic growth has slowed. It now averages only about 3 per cent. From 1921 to 1967, annual growth averaged 5.2 per cent, and for much of that period it was over 6 per cent.<sup>39</sup> According to World Bank figures, ‘in 2004, 28 per cent of rural dwellers were extremely poor and 57 per cent moderately poor’.<sup>40</sup>

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the neoliberal model imposed on Brazil and Mexico was enforced all over the planet. Sometimes it was associated with a high rate of growth, as in India, sometimes with stagnation, as in Latin America, but it always created increased inequality.

The suffering and social polarisation produced by neoliberalism has fostered corruption and exacerbated relative deprivation. This is the stage, pre-set, onto which now enters the issue of climate change to converge with the economic crises and the legacy of political repression. In combination, all of these factors help drive migration to the United States and to northern Mexico, where the chaotic drug war now eats away at society.

## *Militarised adaptation*

The anticipation of increased conflict in a world remade by climate change has led the militaries of the Global North toward an embrace of militarised adaptation.

Military planning is conceived of as a response to events, but it also shapes events. Planning too diligently for war can preclude peace. The US's overdeveloped military capacity – its military-industrial complex – has created powerful interests that are dependent on war and therefore promote it. Today, the old military-industrial complex – companies such as General Electric, Lockheed and Raytheon, with their fabulously expensive weapons systems – are joined by a swarm of smaller security firms offering hybrid services. Blackwater, DynCorp and Global come to mind, but private prison companies such as Corrections Corporation of America, Management and Training Corporation and the Geo Group are also involved. This new security-industrial complex offers an array of services for home and abroad: surveillance, intelligence, border security, detention, facility and base construction, anti-terrorism consulting, military and police logistics, analysis, planning, training and, of course, personal security.

Their operations are found wherever the US projects power: in Afghanistan, running supply convoys, serving food and providing translators; in Colombia, spraying coca fields and training the military; in the Philippines, training the police; in Mexico, guarding businesspeople; and all along the US-Mexico border, processing immigrant detainees. This new economy of repression helps promulgate a xenophobic and bellicose ideology. For example, private prison companies lobbied hard for passage of SB1070, Arizona's tough anti-immigration law, in 2010.<sup>41</sup>

As a politics of climate change begins to develop, this matrix of parasitic interests has begun to shape adaptation to the militarised management of civilization's violent disintegration. Returning to the brutal legacy of the Cold War, they also have revived US commitment to strategies of counterinsurgency.

## *The apocalypse on paper*

One of the first government investigations on the security impacts of climate change to make news was a 2004 Pentagon-commissioned study titled *An abrupt climate change scenario and its implications for United States national security*.<sup>42</sup> It was authored by Peter Schwartz, a CIA consultant and former head of planning at Royal Dutch Shell, and Doug Randall of the California-based Global Business Network. Schwartz and Randall forecast a new Dark Ages:

Nations with the resources to do so may build virtual fortresses around their countries, preserving resources for themselves ... As famine, disease, and weather-related disasters strike due to the abrupt climate change, many countries' needs will exceed their carrying capacity. This will create a sense of desperation, which is likely to lead to offensive aggression in order to reclaim balance ... Europe will be struggling

internally, large numbers of refugees washing up on its shores and Asia in serious crisis over food and water. Disruption and conflict will be endemic features of life. Once again, warfare would define human life.<sup>43</sup>

A 2007 report by the Pentagon-connected think tank CNA Corporation envisioned permanent counter-insurgency on a global scale. Here is a salient excerpt:

Climate change acts as a threat multiplier for instability in some of the most volatile regions of the world. Many governments in Asia, Africa and the Middle East are already on edge in terms of their ability to provide basic needs: food, water, shelter and stability. Projected climate change will exacerbate the problems in these regions and add to the problems of effective governance. Unlike most conventional security threats that involve a single entity acting in specific ways at different points in time, climate change has the potential to result in multiple chronic conditions, occurring globally within the same time frame. Economic and environmental conditions in these already fragile areas will further erode as food production declines, diseases increase, clean water becomes increasingly scarce and populations migrate in search of resources. Weakened and failing governments, with an already thin margin for survival, foster the conditions for internal conflict, extremism and movement toward increased authoritarianism and radical ideologies. The US may be drawn more frequently into these situations to help to provide relief, rescue and logistics, or to stabilize conditions before conflicts arise.<sup>44</sup>

Other developed states have conducted similar studies, most of them classified. The European Council's report in 2008 noted, in familiar language, that 'climate change threatens to overburden states and regions which are already fragile and conflict prone.' And this leads to 'political and security risks that directly affect European interests'.<sup>45</sup> It also noted the likelihood of conflict over resources due to reduction of arable land and water shortages; economic damage to coastal cities and critical infrastructure, particularly Third World megacities; environmentally induced migration; religious and political radicalisation, and tension over energy supply.<sup>46</sup>

Western military planners, and growing numbers of political leaders, are speaking out about the dangers in the convergence of political disorder and climate change. Instead of worrying about conventional wars over food and water, they see an emerging geography of climatologically driven civil war, migration, pogroms and social breakdown. In response, they envision a project of open-ended counter-insurgency on a global scale.<sup>47</sup>

### *Mitigation and adaptation*

The watchwords of the climate discussion are *mitigation* and *adaptation*. We must mitigate the causes of climate change, while adapting to its effects. *Mitigation* means drastically cutting our production of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases – such

as methane and chlorofluorocarbons – that prevent the sun’s heat from radiating back out to space. Mitigation means moving towards clean energy sources such as wind, solar power, geothermal and tidal kinetics. It means closing coal-fired power plants, weaning our economy off oil and building a smart electrical grid.

*Adaptation*, on the other hand, means preparing to live with the effects of climatological changes, some of which are already underway, and some of which are inevitable, that is, ‘in the pipeline’. Adaptation is both a technical and a political challenge.

*Technical adaptation* means transforming our relationship to nature as nature transforms: learning to live with the damage we have wrought by building seawalls around vulnerable coastal cities, giving land back to mangroves and everglades so they may act to break tidal surges during giant storms, opening wildlife migration corridors so species can move north as the climate warms and developing sustainable forms of agriculture that can function on an industrial scale, even as weather patterns gyrate wildly.

*Political adaptation*, on the other hand, means transforming humanity’s relationship to itself, transforming social relations among people. Successful political adaptation to climate change will mean developing new ways of containing, avoiding and de-escalating the violence that climate change fuels. That will require economic redistribution and development. It will also require a new diplomacy of peace building.

But the military-led strategy for dealing with climate change suggests another type of political adaptation is already under way, which might be called the ‘politics of the armed lifeboat’: responding to climate change by arming, excluding, forgetting, repressing, policing and killing. One can imagine a green authoritarianism emerging in rich countries, while the climate crisis pushes the Third World into chaos. Already, as climate change fuels violence in the form of crime, repression, civil unrest, war and even state collapse in the Global South, the North is responding with a new authoritarianism. The Pentagon and its European allies are actively planning a militarised adaptation, which emphasises the long-term, open-ended containment of failed or failing states – counter-insurgency forever.

This sort of ‘climate fascism’ – a politics based on exclusion, segregation and repression – is horrific and bound to fail. The struggling states of the Global South cannot collapse without eventually taking down wealthy economies with them. If climate change is allowed to destroy whole economies and nations, no amount of walls, guns, barbed wire, armed aerial drones and permanently deployed mercenaries can save elites from a planet in collapse.

## Conclusion

The catastrophic convergence offers a way to think about climate change that can help reveal its more obscured political impacts. The catastrophic convergence also has implications for how we should adapt and mitigate. If climate change acts through and by exacerbating pre-existing crises, then it is imperative that climate adaptation

and mitigation act upon those same crises. Proper adaptation requires addressing the pre-existing crises – militarism and neoliberalism – through planning and socially necessary investment.

Societies suffering from continued neoliberal austerity measures, and a new round of counter-insurgency now delivered under the framework of the war on terror, cannot be expected to address the implications of climate change. Real mitigation likewise requires moving away from an unbridled free market economic orthodoxy that is only hindering our attempts to cope with climate change.

## Notes

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