

## Climate Change Alert

Patrick Doherty spent a decade in the field of international conflict resolution, working in the Middle East, Africa, Southeastern Europe and the Caucasus.

**First Paul O'Neill**, now Andrew Marshall. Marshall has just blown the lid off another Bush administration can of worms—namely, its unwillingness to acknowledge and address the massive threat posed by global climate change.

Marshall is the founding director of the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment, a quiet but powerful think tank within the Pentagon. In 2001, Marshall was tapped by George W. Bush to lead the Pentagon's military review that largely defined the scope of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's "transformation" agenda. Marshall, whose ONA has served every president since Nixon, introduced the term "revolution in military affairs."

In an article published Jan. 26 in *Fortune* magazine, Marshall released the findings of an unclassified report—written by Peter Schwartz and Doug Randall of the Global Business Network—entitled "An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and Its Implications for United States National Security."

### Global Warming Happens

Until now, the debate over climate change in the United States has focused on whether global warming exists and if so, whether it can be attributed to human activity. In their report, Schwartz and Randall close that debate and raise the stakes. They write that "the IPCC [International Panel on Climate Change] documents the threat of gradual climate change," deftly allowing Marshall to implicitly acknowledge that the IPCC findings have sufficiently established what the report calls "the scientifically proven link between CO2 and climate change" as well as the international consensus around climate change itself. But, while fully recognizing the reality of global warming, the report argues that the gradualist view "may be a dangerous act of self-deception." The real threat to national security is from global warming triggering an "abrupt climate change event."

Abrupt climate change is an increasingly probable and, the authors show, a historically unprecedented event in which global atmospheric warming triggers a rapid modification in global oceanic patterns. The report focuses on the threat receiving the most concern from researchers, which occurs when atmospheric warming releases enough fresh water into the North Atlantic to shut down the "thermohaline conveyor"—currents including the Gulf Stream—that move warm water north from the tropics. That, in turn would send much of the Northern Hemisphere into a deep freeze, disrupting energy, agriculture and fresh water supplies around the world.

This is no abstract hypothetical scenario. The *Fortune* article cites a presentation made by Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute director Robert Gagosian who, at last year's World Economic Forum at Davos, "urged policymakers to consider the implications of possible abrupt climate change within two decades."

Thankfully, Marshall did just that. The ONA-commissioned report, using the well-established scenario-planning techniques developed at Shell's planning unit, generated a plausible future



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scenario in which the thermohaline conveyor collapses in 2010. What follows that oceanic shut-down sounds apocalyptic and yet the authors contend, is quite plausible.

By 2020, average rainfall in Europe drops 30 percent; "megadroughts" affect Southern China and Northern Europe; massive boatlifts of people from the Caribbean attempt to enter the United States and Mexico; China is unable to feed its population due to the combination of droughts and violent monsoons and flooding; Eastern European countries invade a weakened Russia to seek minerals and energy; nuclear India, Pakistan, and China go to war over water, land, and refugees. In all 400 million people could be forced to migrate from uninhabitable regions. In the United States, the East Coast population areas experience severe shortages of freshwater; flooding creates an inland sea in California's Central Valley and disrupts freshwater supplies for Southern California; and energy disruptions are commonplace due to storms, ice and conflict. The authors make the point clear: this is not a prediction, this is a plausible scenario given what we know now.

## Overcoming Resistance

While the content of this release raises the alarm, Marshall is sending multiple messages. The timing of the *Fortune* article, for instance. For a man of Marshall's long legacy of discretion to directly challenge the current administration's line on global warming at the beginning of a presidential election year speaks volumes. That he chose to do so by releasing a report by respected business consultants in *Fortune* magazine seems to say he wants the business world, Bush's most important constituency, to understand clearly that the status quo is untenable.

This extraordinary act by a senior Defense Department official implies high-level recognition that the Bush administration's resistance to the near global consensus on climate change—a consensus that includes the vast majority of the scientific community, many corporations including General Motors, Alcoa, IBM, DuPont, Johnson & Johnson, and all the remaining governments of the OECD—is a threat to national security itself. Indeed, last month in the journal *Science*, the United Kingdom's Chief Scientific Advisor declared that "climate change is the most severe problem that we are facing today—more serious even than the threat of terrorism." Perhaps inoculating itself from future criticism the report states, "Many scientists would regard this scenario as extreme. . . But history tells us that sometimes the extreme cases do occur, there is evidence that it might be [occurring] and it is DOD's job to consider such scenarios."

And that resistance has been staunch. In the battle over climate change, according to a report from the group Environment2004, the Bush administration has both misrepresented the science and misled the public. According to *The New York Times*, the Bush administration acted to distort and omit EPA findings on global warming. The group notes that the administration has dismissed the findings of the International Panel on Climate Change set up by the first President Bush and the findings of a panel of the National Academy of Sciences that Bush himself requested. They document how administration has tried to mislead the public by substituting the absolute indicator of total emissions with emissions per unit of GDP, which can go down while total U.S. emissions continue to rise—and then asking emitters (unsuccessfully) to voluntarily commit to reducing emission intensity. And they highlight how the administration has stalled the debate by calling for a research agenda which *The New York Times* described as a "redundant examination of issues that had largely been settled, bereft of vision, executable goals and timetables—in short, little more than a cover-up for inaction."

## It's The Emissions, Stupid

Ultimately, "Abrupt Climate Change" is a report for the Department of Defense. But not entirely. While DoD is primarily concerned with predicting the arrival of and managing the security nightmare caused by abrupt climate change, the report also calls for prevention measures which can only happen through a transformation of the U.S. economy.

"It's important to understand human impacts on the environment—both what's done to accelerate

and decelerate (or perhaps even reverse) the tendency toward climate change. Alternative fuels, greenhouse gas emission controls and conservation efforts are worthwhile endeavors."

Only a month ago, Democrats' best chances in the 2004 general elections relied heavily on the undesirable combination of continued failure in Iraq and sustained economic underperformance. That began to change two weeks ago, when the Institute for America's Future brought together coalition of labor and environmental groups called the Apollo Alliance and issued a report describing the core of a new economic engine based on shifting America from suburban sprawl and fossil fuels towards smart growth and renewable energy. (See [Democrats' Moon Shot](#) )

Democrats now have a powerful opportunity to reframe the 2004 elections and focus their agenda around an integrated agenda of triage and transformation. Terrorism is still a real threat and Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine and HIV/AIDS must be stabilized and resolved. The larger threat of abrupt climate change, however, means we must comprehensively transform our emissions-ridden economy. Apollo is a good start, but now Marshall's warnings make it clear that America has no time to waste on low emissions reduction targets and wasteful subsidies, much less Bush's stalling and deception. Global emissions markets are the best answer. Research has shown that emissions trading is the leading pathway to eliminating emissions, energy independence and reducing agricultural subsidies that impoverish the developing world—all of which will reduce conditions that fuel terrorism and the medium-term threat of abrupt climate change while building a booming new economic engine for America and the world.

Marshall's sense of patriotic responsibility may just save the lives of hundreds of millions of people around the world and usher in a new era of prosperity, sustainability and peace—but only if Democrats reframe the 2004 elections starting now.

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