

FAT AL GORE MENACES THE HOMELAND AND HOMELAND SECURITY EXPERTS DON'T CARE

Six days ago, Fat Al Gore (my shorthand for climate change) attacked the Philippines, killing as many 10,000 and leaving 250,000 homeless.

It was Fat Al Gore's most successful attack thus far.

With Fat Al Gore's growing success in mind, consider these data points.

Senate Homeland Security Committee doesn't recognize Fat Al Gore as a threat

The Senate Homeland Security Committee is holding a hearing on "Threats to the Homeland." It is focused almost entirely on what witnesses describe a dispersed Al Qaeda threat (which doesn't have the ability to attack in the US), self-radicalized extremists who don't have the ability to conduct large-scale attacks, and cybersecurity (though Carl Levin did bring up corporate anonymity as a threat, and Republicans brought up Benghazi, which isn't the "Homeland" at all; also, Ron Johnson leaked that Secret Service officers have proven unable to keep their dick in their pants in 17 countries).

None of the three witnesses even mentioned climate change in their testimony.

Obama's Chief of Staff threatened to "kill" Steven Chu for admitting islands would disappear because of climate change

Meanwhile, the lead anecdote of this mostly interesting (but in parts obviously bullshit) profile of how Obama disempowered his cabinet ministers tells how Rahm went ballistic because Steven Chu (whose energy initiative created a bunch of jobs) publicly admitted that some

islands will disappear because of climate change.

In April 2009, Chu joined Obama's entourage for one of the administration's first overseas trips, to Trinidad and Tobago for a Summit of the Americas focused on economic development. Chu was not scheduled to address the media, but reporters kept bugging Josh Earnest, a young staffer, who sheepishly approached his boss, White House press secretary Robert Gibbs, with the ask. "No way," Gibbs told him.

"Come on," Earnest said. "The guy came all the way down here. Why don't we just have him talk about all the stuff he's doing?"

Gibbs reluctantly assented. Then Chu took the podium to tell the tiny island nation that it might soon, sorry to say, be underwater—which not only insulted the good people of Trinidad and Tobago but also raised the climate issue at a time when the White House wanted the economy, and the economy only, on the front burner. "I think the Caribbean countries face rising oceans, and they face increase in the severity of hurricanes," Chu said. "This is something that is very, very scary to all of us. ... The island states ... some of them will disappear."

Earnest slunk backstage. "OK, we'll never do that again," he said as Gibbs glared. A phone rang. It was White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel calling Messina to snarl, "If you don't kill [Chu], I'm going to."

Much later the story notes that Heather Zichal is on her way out too.

Even blue-chip West Wingers such as economic adviser Gene Sperling and climate czar Heather Zichal are heading for the exits.

Washington insiders applaud fracking while ignoring climate change

Meanwhile, also as part of its big new magazine spread, Politico has two related pieces on DC insiders views.

There's this "Real Game Changers" piece capturing the "big forces they see shaking up U.S. politics." David Petraeus talks about "the ongoing energy revolution in the U.S." Jeb Bush promises, "With natural gas as an exponentially growing source, we can re-industrialize." And while several thinkers describe the problem of economic inequality, only Al Gore talks about Fat Al Gore.

Carbon pollution from burning fossil fuels is changing our climate and transforming our world. From more destructive and more frequent climate-related extreme weather events, floods and droughts, melting ice and rising sea levels, to climate refugees, crop failure, higher asthma rates and water scarcity, the consequences are profound. As citizens, we're already paying the high costs. Billions of dollars to clean up after extreme weather events. Rising insurance bills. Lives lost.

Meanwhile, former respectable energy historian turned shill Daniel Yergin congratulates America on being almost energy independent.

Here's his only mention of the word "climate."

In a major climate speech this past June, he declared, "We should strengthen our position as the top natural gas producer because, in the medium term at least, it not only can provide safe,

cheap power, but it can also help reduce our carbon emissions.”

Yes, we’re going to fight climate change by burning carbon (gas) instead of carbon (coal).

To be fair to the DC elite, the reason we’re embracing fracking is to give ourselves space to ditch the terrorist funding Saudis. So there is a real national security purpose to it.

But of course, it’s a purpose that addresses a far less urgent threat than that terrorist Fat Al Gore, who just killed 10,000 people.

THE OPPORTUNITY COST OF THE GLOBAL DRAGNET

Back in 2006-7, I wrote a series of posts in which I considered the opportunity cost of the Iraq War at a time when our hegemonic position was already clearly in decline. In the years leading up to the Iraq War, I believe Dick Cheney assessed the current energy regime on which our global power was based, and chose to reinvest in that already-crumbling basis of power: oil, reserve currency, global policeman by invading Iraq. What could have happened if we invested the trillion dollars we spent on losing a war in Iraq and instead invested in alternative energy? (An earlier, lost to history version of the post also considered fostering new leadership to deal with climate change.)

As the elites slowly realize we failed on a similarly catastrophic scale in our 5-year bailout of banks, we might expand the earlier question and ask what could have happened if we had invested those trillions, too, rather than propping up the banks that cement our global

financial hegemony.

The debate over international privacy rights still ignores domestic privacy rights

It's from that perspective that I read with interest the debate between David Cole, Orin Kerr, Kenneth Roth, and Ben Wittes over whether we ought to extend the privacy protections Americans enjoy to the rest of the world (or, at least, to citizens of allied countries). (See Cole, Kerr, Cole, Kerr, Roth, Wittes)

As a threshold matter, I think all are missing a key point. I believe the dragnet surveillance we conduct overseas right now clearly violates the Constitution. The NSA is knowingly collecting vast amounts of US person data (that it refuses to count even the domestically acquired dragnet collection hints at how much it's collecting). And once they collect that vast, uncounted quantity of US person data, the NSA and FBI do not even require RAS before accessing the content of Americans' communications.

In short, because the government didn't make the same adjustments for increasingly globalized technology internationally they made in 2008 for domestic collection (the FISA Amendments Act permitted foreign collection domestically, but didn't deal with the increasing amounts of domestic collection internationally it was doing), the NSA has basically eliminated all privacy protections for any of the significant amounts of US person communications that transit outside of the country.

So their debate should not just consider whether we ought to extend privacy protections to the French in France, but whether Americans retain their constitutional protections as their communications transit France.

The squandered opportunity of American Internet hegemony

But I also think the terms of debate International law (Cole and Roth) versus domestic sovereignty (Kerr) miss an equally

important point. What obligations and best practices should the US have adopted as the world's Internet hegemon?

Kerr sums up the International/domestic split this way:

I suspect that our differences reflect our priors, which in turn are based on two different conceptions of government. I tend to see governments as having legitimacy because of the consent of the governed, which triggers rights and obligations to and from its citizens and those in its territorial borders. As I understand David, he has more of a global view of government, by which governments are accountable to all humans worldwide. I suspect that difference leads us to talk past each other a bit. Consider David's question: "Would we be satisfied to give the French authority to pick up all of our communications simply on a showing that we were not French and not living in France?" Under my conception of government, the question doesn't make sense. Because we don't have any rights vis-a-vis the French government, we can't "give the French authority" to do anything or have any valid claim to satisfy.

While I'm sympathetic to both perspectives, to a point, I actually think they miss something. The US is not just any country. It has been, for the last 20 years, the world's sole hegemon. And being the hegemon – as opposed to the coercive world empire, which is a much more expensive proposition – requires a similar kind of consent as that of your garden variety nation-state.

This is the point laid out in Henry Farrell and Martha Finnemore's brilliant essay on American hypocrisy.

Of course, the United States is far from

the only hypocrite in international politics. But the United States' hypocrisy matters more than that of other countries. That's because most of the world today lives within an order that the United States built, one that is both underwritten by U.S. power and legitimated by liberal ideas. American commitments to the rule of law, democracy, and free trade are embedded in the multilateral institutions that the country helped establish after World War II, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, and later the World Trade Organization. Despite recent challenges to U.S. preeminence, from the Iraq war to the financial crisis, the international order remains an American one.

This system needs the lubricating oil of hypocrisy to keep its gears turning. To ensure that the world order continues to be seen as legitimate, U.S. officials must regularly promote and claim fealty to its core liberal principles; the United States cannot impose its hegemony through force alone. But as the recent leaks have shown, Washington is also unable to consistently abide by the values that it trumpets. This disconnect creates the risk that other states might decide that the U.S.-led order is fundamentally illegitimate.

While there may be no explicit legal basis for it (as there is for Kerr's model of consent) the world has tolerated us as global hegemon because it maintained the illusion that it had consensual legitimacy. But now that American hypocrisy has been exposed – in part, but only in part, with disclosures that we've been conducting mass spying around the world – countries are opportunistically using the moment to try to demand more from us in exchange for

that position.

Farrell and Finnemore suggest the US faces a choice between embracing our true actions openly or actually living up to our promises.

The easiest course for the U.S. government to take would be to forgo hypocritical rhetoric altogether and acknowledge the narrowly self-interested goals of many of its actions. Leaks would be much less embarrassing – and less damaging – if they only confirmed what Washington had already stated its policies to be. Indeed, the United States could take a page out of China's and Russia's playbooks: instead of framing their behavior in terms of the common good, those countries decry anything that they see as infringing on their national sovereignty and assert their prerogative to pursue their interests at will. Washington could do the same, while continuing to punish leakers with harsh prison sentences and threatening countries that might give them refuge.

The problem with this course, however, is that U.S. national interests are inextricably bound up with a global system of multilateral ties and relative openness. Washington has already undermined its commitment to liberalism by suggesting that it will retaliate economically against countries that offer safe haven to leakers. If the United States abandoned the rhetoric of mutual good, it would signal to the world that it was no longer committed to the order it leads. As other countries followed its example and retreated to the defense of naked self-interest, the bonds of trade and cooperation that Washington has spent decades building could unravel. The United States would not prosper in a world where everyone

thought about international cooperation in the way that Putin does.

A better alternative would be for Washington to pivot in the opposite direction, acting in ways more compatible with its rhetoric. This approach would also be costly and imperfect, for in international politics, ideals and interests will often clash. But the U.S. government can certainly afford to roll back some of its hypocritical behavior without compromising national security.

I would suggest we don't actually have this choice.

US hegemony rests on a lot of things: the dollar exchange, our superlative military, our ideological lip service to democracy and human rights.

But for the moment, it also rests on the globalized communication system in which we have a huge competitive advantage. That is, one reason we are the world's hegemon is because the rest of the world communicates through us – literally, in terms of telecommunications infrastructure, linguistically, in English, and in terms of telecommunications governance.

Aggressively hacking the rest of the world endangers that, both because of what it does to our ideological claims, but just as importantly, because it provides rivals with the concrete incentive to dismantle that global infrastructure.

The liberal project has always been, for better and worse, about a managed claim to free exchange. In goods (though we wrote the rules to limit the terms of exchange, which until recently guaranteed that the US got the most benefit of it). And in information (again, we wrote the rules and laid the wires, protecting our advantage).

But we won't have any advantage if the vehicle of exchange, the Internet, gets balkanized in response to our abuse of our own power on it. And that's the risk we face now. That's the reality that is already happening. That's the price we may pay for hacking the rest of the world because we could.

US hegemonic control is likely irretrievable. And if we tried to retrieve it, the things we would have to do would hasten the melting of the earth. Given that reality, perhaps it's time to use our diminishing power to seed something better, both on the Internet and in real life.

BADLY BROKEN: WE ARE WALTER WHITE

I'll bet tonight's blog traffic will drop sharply, and explode on Twitter – and at 9:00 p.m. EDT exactly. That's when the last episode of AMC's Breaking Bad will air, following a

61-hour marathon of all preceding episodes from the last five years.

A friend expressed concern and astonishment at the public's investment in this cable TV program, versus the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Fifth Assessment Report published Friday, expressing heightened confidence in anthropogenic climate change:



"The report increases the degree of certainty that human activities are driving the warming the world has experienced, from "very likely" or 90% confidence in 2007, to "extremely likely" or 95% confidence now." [source]

He's right; we'll be utterly absorbed by the conclusion of former high school chemistry teacher and cancer patient Walter White's tale. We'll have spent a fraction of intellectual energy on our own existential threat, in comparison to the mental wattage we'll expend on a fictional character's programming mortality.

But perhaps Breaking Bad's very nature offers clues to our state of mind. Viewers are addicted to a program that upends perspectives and forces greater examination.

– The entire story of Walter White, a middle class white guy with a good education whose cancer threatens his life and his family's long-term financial well-being, would not be viable were it not for the dismal state of health care in America. There are no Walter Whites in Canada, for example; the U.S. has become little better than a third world narco-state, our health and shelter dependent on ugly choices like crime because our system of governance cannot respond appropriately under pressure for corporate profitability.

We cling to White, though he has become the very thing we pay our law enforcement to battle, because he is us – morally conflicted, trying to safeguard our lives and our families in a deeply corrupt system. At the end of each Breaking Bad episode the distortion of our values is evident in viewers' failure to reject a criminal character depicting a drug lord manufacturing and selling a controlled substance, while guilty of conspiracy, murder, and racketeering in the process.

In the background as we watch this program, we permit corporate-owned congresspersons to shut

down our government in a fit of pique over the illusion of better health care for all.

– Like White, the existential threats we face are ignored once we reach a degree of stasis. White gets treatment for cancer, which goes into remission. But he has become hooked on the money, the power, the rush that comes with this new dark world he has entered. No day is the same, unlike that of the meek, mild-mannered chemistry teacher's world he once inhabited. With this addiction comes new existential threats that in turn increase the likelihood the original cancer will return. The meth White began to cook to resolve his cancer has become a new cancer in itself.

We are in similar straits: though we've been informed for decades that our consumption and incumbent pollution is problematic, we have become addicted to newer, better, faster anything, adopting a culture of disposability, if we can just have our next new fix whether it's a car, a computer, a cellphone, pick it, it's all ultimately petroleum and rare minerals assembled using the sweat and blood of the poor. We'll keep consuming in spite of the fact that our consumption is threatening our way of life.

We are become Death, the destroyer of worlds.

Well, this one in particular. We toy with the notion of expanding our empire to the moon and Mars.

– White does this for his family, he says all along. So do we; we stay in our narrow grooves, consuming as we travel forward, telling ourselves we are making jobs, increasing productivity, improving standards of living for ourselves and our loved ones. Yet the truth is quite the opposite. What we are doing within our well-worn track in the rat race is as destructive as it is clueless. We are not happier; we are sicker; we are less well-off.

Because family, we say. And better living through chemistry.

Ultimately, as we peer into our own black monolithic mirrors tonight, watching Walter White or tweeting about him, we see our addicted selves, our troubled families, our malignant government, our sickened world. Art imitates life – it's a very ugly piece of work reflected in Breaking Bad, were we to see past the superficial bread and circuses to the truth within.

[Pssst...Netflix prepared a Spoiler Foiler tool to filter Breaking Bad spoilers out your Twitter timeline.]

THE OOGA BOOGA* CONTINUES TO WEAR OFF

Two and a half years ago, I noted how TSA head John Pistole pointed to a plot the FBI created while he was still its Deputy Director to justify the use of VIPR teams to stop people on non-aviation public transportation.

A couple of weeks back, I pointed to John Pistole's testimony that directly justified the expansion of VIPR checkpoints to mass transport locations by pointing to a recent FBI-entrapment facilitated arrest.

Another recent case highlights the importance of mass transit security. On October 27, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrested a Pakistan-born naturalized U.S. citizen for attempting to assist others whom he believed to be members of al Qaida in planning multiple bombings at Metrorail stations in the Washington, D.C., area.

During a sting operation, Farooque Ahmed allegedly conducted surveillance of the Arlington National Cemetery, Courthouse, and Pentagon City Metro stations, indicated that he would travel overseas for jihad, and agreed to donate \$10,000 to terrorist causes. A federal grand jury in Alexandria, Virginia, returned a three-count indictment against Ahmed, charging him with attempting to provide material support to a designated terrorist organization, collecting information to assist in planning a terrorist attack on a transit facility, and attempting to provide material support to help carry out multiple bombings to cause mass casualties at D.C.-area Metrorail stations.

While the public was never in danger, **Ahmed's intentions provide a reminder of the terrorist attacks on other mass transit systems: Madrid in March 2004, London in July 2005, and Moscow earlier this year.** Our ability to protect mass transit and other surface transportation venues from evolving threats of terrorism requires us to explore ways to improve the partnerships between TSA and state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement, and other mass transit stakeholders. These partnerships include measures such as **Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response (VIPR) teams** we have put in place with the support of the Congress. [my emphasis]

Now to be clear, as with Mohamed Mohamud's alleged plot, Ahmed's plot *never existed* except as it was performed by FBI undercover employees. In fact, at the time the FBI invented this plot, now TSA-head Pistole was the Deputy Director of FBI, so in some ways, Ahmed's plot is Pistole's plot. Nevertheless, Pistole had no problem pointing to a plot invented by his then-subordinates at the FBI to justify increased VIPR surveillance on "mass transit and other surface transportation venues." As if the fake FBI plot represented a real threat.

Today, a NYT piece raises questions about VIPR's efficacy (without, however, noting how TSA has pointed to FBI-generated plots to justify it).

T.S.A. and local law enforcement officials say the teams are a critical component of the nation's counterterrorism efforts, but some members of Congress, auditors at the Department of Homeland Security and civil liberties groups are sounding alarms. The teams are also raising hackles among passengers who call them unnecessary and intrusive.

"Our mandate is to provide security and counterterrorism operations for all high-risk transportation targets, not just airports and aviation," said John S. Pistole, the administrator of the agency. "The VIPR teams are a big part of that."

Some in Congress, however, say the T.S.A. has not demonstrated that the teams are effective. Auditors at the Department of Homeland Security are asking questions about whether the teams are properly trained and deployed based on actual security threats.

It'd really be nice if NYT had named the "some" in Congress who had raised concerns. Particularly given its focus on TSA's expanding budget, which Congress has the ability to cut.

The program now has a \$100 million annual budget and is growing rapidly, increasing to several hundred people and 37 teams last year, up from 10 teams in 2008. T.S.A. records show that the teams ran more than 8,800 unannounced checkpoints and search operations with local law enforcement outside of airports last year, including those at the Indianapolis 500 and the Democratic and Republican national political conventions.

But I'm most fascinated by TSA's second (again, unnamed) defense of the program.

T.S.A. officials would not say if the VIPR teams had ever foiled a terrorist plot or thwarted any major threat to public safety, saying the information is classified. But they argue that the random searches and presence of armed officers serve as a deterrent that bolsters the public confidence.

As with the telephone metadata dragnet, they won't say whether they've actually thwarted a plot. Instead, they effectively say security theater "bolsters the public confidence."

Let's hope those "some in Congress" the NYT won't identify do act to defund this.

Foreign Policy's Editor-at-Large David Rothkopf expresses optimism that we have finally begun to wake up from the spell the decade of fearmongering has put us under.

We have come to what could be seen as the end of an ignominious period in U.S. national security history, one that might be called the Decade of Fear. And

though it was the 9/11 attacks that ushered this period in, our response in the months and years afterward defined it far more than those blows ever could. At a moment when the United States could have seen the terrorist threat as being as limited and peripheral, we over-reacted – grotesquely.

We didn't react to the moment. We didn't seize it. We succumbed to it.

Instead, we allowed our fear to drive the creation of a massive government security apparatus, huge expenditures, and reckless global programs. Compared to the number of people, groups, or weapons systems threatening us, our investment in our response to said threats redefines "disproportionate" in the annals of a government where excess has been a hallmark of our military-industrial complex. And that's saying something.

Gradually, this excess came to haunt us. War spending with its \$2-3 trillion price tag exacerbated our national financial burdens at a time of great economic crisis. Our wars of over-reach and ideological hysteria damaged our international standing and incited political backlash at home. Recently, some of the secret initiatives launched to contain the perceived (but amorphous and largely illusory) were revealed to have risked not only American personal freedoms but also international relationships in ways that no terrorist could ever hope to achieve.

This in turn has finally created a reaction, a retrenchment, and, thankfully, a movement back to a more rational national security.

Certainly the polling on the balance between

security and liberty after the Boston Marathon attack reflects this. As does polling on whether Edward Snowden is a whistleblower or villain. So, too, does the widespread skepticism about the latest Yemen scare.

Rothkopf endorses something I and others suggested after Janet Napolitano announced her departure: either give Department of Homeland Security a mandate that includes real urgent threats to the “homeland,” such as resilience in the face of climate change related disasters and possibly even mitigation approaches, or shut it down.

If Rothkopf is right that the spell is beginning to wear off (it may be wearing off in flyover country, but members of Congress and their lobbyist funders still seem to buy it), then we really need to take several big picture steps back to discuss what the real risks to the country are. Before we waste more trillions on security theater and pointless wars.

*Note, the term Ooga booga clearly has racist roots. I use it here to convey, in part, that the fearmongering relies in part on racially-coded fears.

SUPERHEROES AND MONSTERS: THE TRUTH IN TODAY'S BLOCKBUSTERS

For a change of pace, let's talk about superheroes.

Like Superman. Batman. Iron Man. The Avengers. Spider-man.

We've been inundated with superheroes at the box office for the last several years. We eat them up, based on box office ticket sales. But why?

Filmmaker Peter Webber tweeted,

Glut of superhero movies is because of 2 things

1. We sense impending eco-catastrophe
2. We seem unable to alter course to save ourselves

There's something to this if we look at the history of the oldest superheroes recently reprised. Superman was "born" in 1933 and Batman in 1939, during the Great Depression. The public latched onto the escapist fantasy that some incredibly powerful force would rescue them when most needed.

Perhaps there's something to the nature of these two superheroes in terms of timing: Superman originated earlier in the Depression, when any outside force with supreme powers for good might be welcomed eagerly. Batman originated later in the Depression; his alter ego, Bruce Wayne, heir to wealthy industrialists, was willing to wield his fortune to save Gotham as both collective identity and individuals. By the late Depression with recovery underway and a new world war looming, the public may have wanted a more realistic, human hero rather than an outsider, though both Superman and Batman remained popular figures.

Today we see the reverse order, Batman reprised first by Christopher Nolan in his Dark Knight trilogy of increasingly crypto-fascist persuasion, and Superman renewed most recently as Man of Steel after Batman has "died." In the last Batman movie The Dark Knight Rises, collectivism for the common good is completely upended and perverted so that its leader, Bane, is the villain. The public can blame the ills befalling their municipality on the masked man with the strange voice, "the other" who makes himself out to be the defender of the people:

“...We take Gotham from the corrupt! The rich! The oppressors of generations who have kept you down with myths of opportunity, and we give it back to you... the people. Gotham is yours. ...”

How is this not a corruption of the Occupy Wall Street movement's mission?

Superman's latest iteration as Man of Steel redeems the iconic common man, though, with a serious departure from the original canon Clark Kent-as-journalist. In the most recent version, Kent is presented first to the audience not a college educated smartie in a suit but an itinerant worker of midwestern farm roots, willing to brave what appear to be mortal threats to save others. We've come back around from the rich industrialist's hobbyist rescuer to the alien-man from the former Dust Bowl – now drought-blighted Kansas – as savior.

Because right now, we can't rely on the rich guy, or the distorted collectivist. Our ills are so great, we're so very desperate we need a "super man" to save us.

In this respect, Peter Webber is spot on; we don't appear to be able to change our course and are now betting on outside forces as salvation.

Where one might take issue with Peter's premise is eco-catastrophe. It's huge, of that there is no doubt. The problem of climate change is so very massive and ugly that the American public has been unwilling to wrap their heads around it, too eager to lap up the propaganda offered by petrochemical companies like Koch Industries and Exxon Mobil.

In this is the real problem, the reason why we cannot effectively tackle the eco-catastrophe we can see looming behind us in the rear view mirror. It is the ongoing assault on our sensibilities by corporate forces, demanding we continue our rampant consumerism, that keeps us from saving ourselves. We remain addicted to petrochemicals in spite of what they do to our

environment and to our world in terms of the political price we must pay to maintain our supply, tethered mortally to our corporatist dealers and pimps.

We know the scale of the problem, even if we are unable to come to grips yet with its true roots. We see the scope reflected in the other genre of films recently emerging – the monsters.

Witness Warm Bodies' and World War Z's zombies; Prometheus' xenomorph; Beasts of the Southern Wild's aurochs; Pacific Rim's kaiju, as well as the impending Godzilla kaiju variant (release date 14-MAY-2014).

The threats posed by these creatures are so large either in their spread or physical presence they require responses at national and global scale, and/or ultimate sacrifices on the part of individuals to save the planet. We're eating up movies about these epic monsters because they temporarily appear to dwarf real life threats – like our flagging economy and long-term unemployment, failed democracy and its corporatist overlords, and the massive menace that is our reliance on carbon fuels and climate change.

In each case, the monstrous threat is eventually thwarted by knowledge and will, individual and collective in nature. Beasts of the Southern Wild pointedly attributes the rise of aurochs to climate change, with the tiny protagonist staring the monsters into submission once she has acquired awareness.

Pacific Rim mentions climate change as a form of terraforming that prepared earth for alien kaiju invasion. A religious group within the movie attributes the rise of the kaiju threat as a sign that the gods are unhappy with humans' treatment of earth. Only a globally-funded, militarized collaborative effort supporting extremely diverse teams required to literally work together as one mind will resolve the kaiju threat.

Zombies and xenomorphs present similar

challenges, though they may arise from different sources. The ultimate questions posed regardless of monster are existential: are we aware of the threat, and are we willing to work individually and together to save ourselves and our planet?

One might say that the film industry is propagandizing through film. Having rubbed shoulders with authors, screenwriters, and filmmakers, I don't believe so, though they have personal perspectives and ideologies just as journalists do, just as other media do, just as we all do.

When so many of our fellow citizens here on earth present us with similar visions – problems so monstrous they beg for response bigger than any man can offer alone – we should snap out of our torpor.

When so many of us pay good money to watch these superheroes and monsters, we need to see this collective choice for what it is: we are beginning to recognize the monster, and we are looking for the superhero and the solutions in ourselves.

UNIVISION'S FOLLOW-UP QUESTION

Univision's Adriana Vargas just interviewed President Obama. After three questions about the immigration bill, she asked whether Obama would consider Ray Kelly to run Department of Homeland Security.

Obama, of course, was effusive about the idea of appointing Mr. Stop & Frisk to be in charge of the immigration system.

Vargas: Mr. President, New York Commissioner Ray Kelly has been floated for the next DHS Secretary. What is your

take on it?

Obama: Well, Ray Kelly has obviously done an extraordinary job in New York and the federal government partners a lot with New York. Because obviously our concerns about terrorism oftentimes are focused on big city targets. And I think Ray Kelly is one of the best there is. So he's been an outstanding leader in New York. We've had an outstanding leader in Janet Napolitano at the Department of Homeland Security. It's a tough job. It's one of the toughest jobs in Washington. She's done an extraordinary job. We're sorry to see her go. But you know, we're going to have a bunch of strong candidates. Mr. Kelly might be very happy where he is. But if he's not I'd want to know about it. 'Cause you know, obviously he'd be very well qualified for the job.

Janet Napolitano? Outstanding leader.

Ray Kelly? Outstanding leader, according to Obama.

So Vargas then asked about a core DHS failure: Hurricane Sandy Recovery, where just a quarter of families have gotten FEMA relief (about half of the relief funding remains unallocated).

Obama boasts about spending a quarter of the disaster relief funds, then shifts the subject to Shawn Donovan.

AV: I have one last question regarding our geographical area of course and it's regarding the efforts of recovery after Sandy. Only a quarter of the families have received FEMA resources. What would be your message to those families among them obviously a lot of Latino families?

PB0: Well, you know, we've distributed over \$4 billion dollars since Sandy happened. \$1.4 billion of that has been

directly to families through FEMA. And we are continuing to not only try to get resources out. But also I've got a team headed up by Shaun Donovan, our Secretary of Housing and Urban Development to try to design a rebuilding process that strengthens these communities post-Sandy, so that if there are tragedies in the future they're in a stronger position than they were. But, you know, individual families it's always tough. Some may qualify for some assistance, but don't feel like they've gotten everything that they need. You know, we're doing as much as we can with the resources that we've been given from Congress. And we're in close communication with Governor Christie and Governor Cuomo and all the local municipalities to do everything we can to help businesses and families get back on their feet. And we're not going to stop until we get it done.

Obama's "outstanding" head of Homeland Security, of course, is ultimately responsible for Sandy recovery.

And that's apparently what he sees in Ray Kelly, too.

APRIL SNOWS BRING MAY OUTRAGE: RECORD FLOODING AHEAD

In contrast to headline news today, the weather seems perfectly harmless – until one looks carefully at these maps.

Though increased soil moisture levels may be a big improvement over this past summer's drought,

a serious problem remains: there's been too much late snow and it's going to melt quickly.

Based on the 21-MAR-2013 hydrologic map above, conditions along the Red River basin were quite bad; changes of major flooding were already predicted at that time. Since that report, the State Climatology Office at University of Minnesota recorded 4 inches of water (which includes 13 inches of snow) at their Twin Cities campus. This same station, however, received between 6-15 inches less snow over the last month than Fargo, North Dakota, located on the Red River.

The data used for the Percent Chance of Flooding map below is dated 15-APR-2013, before the final snowfall tally after The Weather Channel-branded winter storm "Xerxes" on 16-APR-2013. The area between Bismarck and Fargo received at least two feet of snow.

I'm no meteorologist, climatologist, or hydrologist, but it sure looks to me like the chances of major flooding have increased from 80% to 100%. Just an uneducated guess on my part; I'll also speculate flooding will accelerate within the next week-10 days without doing any additional research into the subject. (Hint: It's called "spring.")

Fortunately some folks in Minn-Dak are watching this situation carefully; volunteers in Fargo have begun filling sandbags in preparation, for example.

The total number of bags to be filled by the end next Tuesday won't be adequate, though, against anticipated record water levels. A certain mess lies ahead.

While we have virtually nothing in the way of predictive tools to help us defend against disaffected youth intent on killing and maiming us, we do have tools to predict slow-moving challenges like annual flooding affecting millions of Americans.

Doesn't it seem like more of us would be aware

of the risks and dangers so that we as individuals, businesses, and government agencies can take truly effective measures more than a week or two in advance? Shouldn't the age of Big Data offer us better information for local/state/federal budgeting in response to weather volatility and incipient natural disasters?

Oh wait...that would require intelligent, rational actors in government instead of science-illiterate, reactionary anti-tax freaks in office who cannot countenance paying for baseline services from National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration and the National Weather Service – let alone adequately fund development and implementation of new and better predictive technologies for use by the same..

In the meantime you can anticipate the media will be shocked, SHOCKED! when they finally clue in.

It would be nice if a few more members of Congress would be equally shocked to the point that they clued in, too.

DICK CHENEY'S BIGGEST STRATEGIC FAILURE

Dick Cheney's biggest failures are surely moral. The hundreds of thousands of Iraqis killed, senselessly. The thousands of Americans killed, senselessly. The hundreds of thousands, perhaps over a million, on both sides, maimed and poisoned and scarred both physically and mentally.

Senselessly.

See Juan Cole and Tomas Young (who will shortly die from wounds suffered in the Iraq War) for an accounting of that cost.

But there has been far too little accounting of the cost of Dick Cheney's strategic choices.

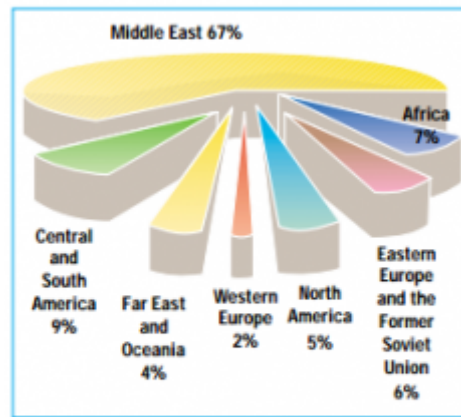
Dick Cheney spent the first several months of the Bush Administration assessing where the US would get its energy in future years and how that would sustain our hegemonic role in the world. In his autobiographical novel, published in 2011, he had this to say about his Energy Task Force.

The report is one I am very proud of. I commend it to anyone looking to understand America's energy challenges still today.

[snip]

The environmental groups that criticized the report are all too often, in my experience, opposed to any increase in the production of conventional sources of energy. They don't want to drill anyplace. They don't want to mine coal

Proven World Oil Reserves in January 2000



The world's proven crude oil reserves remain relatively concentrated. The Middle East holds 664 billion barrels, or roughly two-thirds of the world's conventional oil reserves, followed by the Western Hemisphere (14%) and Africa (7%).

anyplace. They seem to believe we can depend on alternative sources of energy, such as solar or wind. It's my view – and it's the view reflected in the report – that while we should develop alternative sources, in the final analysis, we can't effectively address our energy problems in the near term nor can we remain competitive in the global economy unless we also produce more energy from conventional, domestic sources.

Right now, none of the alternative sources of energy can compete economically with petroleum and coal and other conventional sources. **It's also the case that time and time again, we have found that developing alternative sources has undesirable, unanticipated consequences.** The push for ethanol fuel produced from corn, for example, resulted in driving the price of a bushel of corn up significantly. This had a huge impact on people who used corn for purposes other than fuel – purposes that weren't subsidized. Cattleman, for example, were suddenly faced with significantly higher feed prices. [my emphasis]

While Cheney's report did have a chapter on "Nature's Power," (which is not, interestingly, one of the two he accused critics of having not read), just one paragraph on any alternative source of power but hydropower shows up on the chapter on "Energy for a New Century."

Hydropower is, to date, the most successful form of renewable energy. However, some forms of renewable energy generation—wind, geothermal, and biomass— have the potential to make more significant contributions in coming years, and the cost of most forms of renewable energy has declined sharply in recent years. The most important barrier

to increased renewable energy production remains economic; nonhydropower renewable energy generation costs are greater than other traditional energy sources. The following chapter discusses renewable and alternative energy in greater detail

Never mind that Cheney's understanding of the competitiveness of alternatives by 2011, particularly with coal, which the report boosted aggressively, was badly mistaken.

He argued in 2011 – 10 years after 9/11 and 7 years after the Iraq War had descended into a clusterfuck – that alternative energy has some nasty unintended consequences (he might have a point if he talked about how Ethanol contributed to increase food insecurity for actual human beings, which contributes to political instability, but apparently he sees feeding Americans cheap grain fed beef to be a higher priority).

And of course, the nasty unintended consequence that is climate change did not show up in this discussion in the least.

On May 16, 2001, Dick Cheney released a report declaring (based partly on a shortage in CA artificially caused by Enron) an energy crisis, and proposing recommendations to bring more fossil fuels online quickly, as well as nuclear power.

America in the year 2001 faces the most serious energy shortage since the oil embargoes of the 1970s.

[snip]

This imbalance, if allowed to continue, will inevitably undermine our economy, our standard of living, and our national security.

[snip]

Present trends are not encouraging, but

they are not immutable. They are among today's most urgent challenges, and well within our power to overcome. Our country has met many great tests. Some have imposed extreme hardship and sacrifice. Others have demanded only resolve, ingenuity, and clarity of purpose. Such is the case with energy today.

We submit these recommendations with optimism. We believe that the tasks ahead, while great, are achievable. The energy crisis is a call to put to good use the resources around us, and the talents within us. It summons the best of America, and offers the best of rewards – in new jobs, a healthier environment, a stronger economy, and a brighter future for our people.

Four months later, 19 Arabs, 15 of whom were Saudis, destroyed the World Trade Center and damaged the Pentagon. All of them were motivated, in part, by America's increasing presence in the Middle East.

The Bush Administration would suppress a good deal of evidence showing that not just those 15 Saudi hijackers but some highly placed members of the Saudi elite had ties to the attack. And while occasionally Bush Administration figures would suggest the Iraq War would enable Iraq to serve as a counterpoint to the Saudis and their ties to terror, the real reason was oil.

We went to war in Iraq because long before Bush won office, Cheney and his friends decided the US needed to put Iraqi production in hands more amenable to American wishes. And that unexamined decision prevented Cheney from seeing just how short-sighted such a policy would be.

In the decade since Dick Cheney decided to go to war in Iraq because renewable resources were too expensive and had some nasty unintended consequences, the US has spent \$2 trillion on

that war. Along the way, we have created an entire generation of new enemies, partly because of the incompetence and arrogance with which the war was waged.

We remain as reliant on our Saudi allies as we were at the start of the Iraq War.

By the end of November the US had already imported more than 450m barrels of crude from Saudi Arabia, more than it imported from Riyadh in the whole of 2009, 2010 or 2011, according to figures from the US energy department. For the first time since 2003, Saudi imports accounted for more than 15 per cent of total US oil imports. The Gulf as a whole accounted for more than 25 per cent, a nine-year high.

That's true, in part, because our foreign policy continues to be dominated by dangerous plans – this time, some way to put Iranian oil resources in friendlier hands – to get more oil.

And throughout the 12 years since Cheney's energy report, throughout the 10 years since he decided to go to war against Iraq rather than invest all that treasure into more effective solutions, we have been inching closer and closer to the tipping point at which climate change will spiral out of control.

Cheney was absolutely right to reevaluate where and how the US gets its energy in 2001. But he came to all the wrong conclusions from that reevaluation, and he pursued the worst possible strategy to deal with it.

He bears utmost responsibility for all the lives wasted. But he also needs to be held responsible for the opportunities wasted as well.

JAMES CLAPPER SNEAKS CLIMATE CHANGE — BUT NOT BANKSTER SPECULATION — INTO HIS THREAT ASSESSMENT

You wouldn't know it by looking at his written statement, which lists Cyber, Terrorism and Transnational Crime, Counterintelligence, and Counterspace before it lists Natural Resource Insecurity, but water and food insecurity was actually the first threat Director of National Intelligence James Clapper described in today's Worldwide Threat Hearing.

That said, in his spoken statement, he didn't utter the words "climate change."

Though those words do appear in the written statement, as a subcategory of resource scarcity, as follows:

Food security has been aggravated partly because the world's land masses are being affected by weather conditions outside of historical norms, including more frequent and extreme floods, droughts, wildfires, tornadoes, coastal high water, and heat waves. Rising temperature, for example, although enhanced in the Arctic, is not solely a high-latitude phenomenon. Recent scientific work shows that temperature anomalies during growing seasons and persistent droughts have hampered agricultural productivity and extended wildfire seasons. Persistent droughts during the past decade have also diminished flows in the Nile, Tigris-Euphrates, Niger, Amazon, and Mekong river basins.

Note: the head of our intelligence community seems to have missed that “persistent droughts” have not only diminished flows in the Nile, Tigris-Euphrates, Niger, Amazon, and Mekong river basins. Last year’s drought also diminished flows right here in the US, in the Missouri-Mississippi basin.

I guess somehow the US is exempt from climate change, intelligence folks?

I’m glad Clapper got climate change in his statement, I’m glad he put water and food scarcity at the front of his presentation (last year just water scarcity appeared in his written statement). But if we’re going to treat climate change merely as one underlying factor contributing to resource scarcity, perhaps we should also look at bankster speculation, which is increasingly recognized as a key driver of rising food costs. Food speculation, after all, is something we can do a great deal to fix, here in the US. But we have refused to do so, choosing instead to deal with the instability that results.

Ah well, baby steps, people. The Director of National Intelligence just implicitly said that climate change and resource scarcity is the most urgent problem facing us. I’ll take it.

THE COST OF BULLSHIT: CLIMATE CHANGE, NATIONAL SECURITY, AND INACTION

While we’re waiting for Congress and the White House to do something productive together for once, let’s recap:

- The Department of Defense said climate

change is a critical strategic concern with regard to its operations and its impact on defense efforts, based on its legislatively-mandated Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) published two-plus years ago in 2010;

- The State Department also said climate change is a serious threat to our national security, noted in its inaugural Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR)*, also published two-plus years ago in 2010;
- A who's who of defense and diplomacy expressed their concerns about climate change and the need for urgent action, as Marcy noted two days ago; apparently whatever action has been taken so far has not impressed these experts as responsive to the threat climate change poses.

Yet if asked, the average American likely could not point to a single action taken by the U.S. government to reduce the impact of climate change.

In other words, all the effort expended and resources spent on drafting the components of the QDR and QDDR* are wasted, the words published mere bullshit—more wasted government employees' time and taxpayer money.

How much has this wordy inaction cost us?

Here's a more specific opportunity to save taxpayer money:

...Of all military spending, energy accounts for a small proportion, roughly less than 2% of total military expenditures and 2% of total US energy usage—but is 93% of all US government energy consumption. In fact, the US military is the single biggest consumer of energy in the nation, at about 932 trillion BTU in 2009, resulting in 4% of all US carbon emissions.

Oil accounts for 78.5% of all US military energy usage (54% of that is

jet fuel); electricity is 11%, direct use of natural gas comes in a bit under electricity. Direct use of coal and other sources of energy are small fractions of total usage. ...

[source: TreeHugger.com, 05-MAY-2011]

The amount spent on energy surely hasn't declined since these numbers were published in 2009.

Yet Congress and the White House have been locking horns over the sequester for some time now, looking for places to cut costs. Doesn't it seem like any item should be ripe for examination and audit for cost-cutting if the government is the largest consumer?

Further:

...The United States is far and away the largest military spender on the planet—but you probably already knew that. How much more? In 2010 the US accounted for 42.8% of all military spending in the world (and has doubled military spending since 2001). The next nearest competitor, China, accounts for 7.3% of global military spending. The UK, France, and Russia each spend roughly 3.7%. Japan, Saudi Arabia, Germany and Italy round out the top ten. All other nations spending 25.3% combined.

In dollar terms, the grand total spent on military offense and defense in 2010 was \$1.6 trillion. So based on those calculations, done by a Swedish think tank, the US outspent China by 5.86 times. ...

[source: TreeHugger.com, 05-MAY-2011]

If the U.S. is the largest military spender, its energy expenditures must likewise be the largest globally. This means the U.S. military could

provide the largest impact globally on climate change by urgently and robustly changing its fossil fuel consumption.

Which begs the question: are we going to stop wasting time and money on reports like the QDR and the QDDR when we're clearly making no effort to follow the recommendations they contain by responding to climate change and its inherent national security risks?

Or are we going to save some serious money on downsizing our military's fossil fuel consumption AND make immediate, widespread impact on climate change and national security at the same time?

We really need an answer because this bullshit is costing us a fortune in taxes and lost societal opportunities. (Hurricane Sandy cost the federal government at least \$180 million dollars; it's not yet clear how much February's blizzard cost in tax dollars. Toronto CAN, however, spent CA\$4 million on cleanup and repairs, and it was not the municipality hardest hit by the storm.)

And with each drought and mega-storm, the lack of response is costing us even greater treasure in loss of personal opportunities, homes and lives.

(* edited from QQDR to QDDR/~Rayne)