

The Climate Bomb: Failures to Confront the Unspeakable, and The Way Ahead

Part II

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Global Research, October 14, 2021
7 April 2013

Theme: [Environment](#)
In-depth Report: [Climate Change](#)

In the last 50 years there have been two major threats to life on our planet. The first, the nuclear arms race and its near disaster of 1962, was narrowly averted by President John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert Kennedy, who then set a course for peace. (See Part I of this essay)

The second, the ticking climate bomb on its short “business as usual” fuse, has no solution in sight.

In both cases unseen forces have blocked a survival response to incalculable danger. We will examine these forces and suggest a way forward, modeled partially on action taken by JFK to avert nuclear war.

Mind is the Master power that moulds and makes,
And Man is Mind, and evermore he takes
The tool of Thought, and, shaping what he wills,
Brings forth a thousand joys, a thousand ills: —
He thinks in secret, and it comes to pass:
Environment is but his looking-glass.

James Allen, 1902

The Looming Climate Emergency: Science Anyone Can Understand

The role of greenhouse gases, which absorb and hold the heat in earth’s atmosphere, and which acidify the oceans, has been simply and clearly illustrated by Dr. Eric Grimsrud in his slide-show, *Short Course: The Earth’s Climate*.^[29]

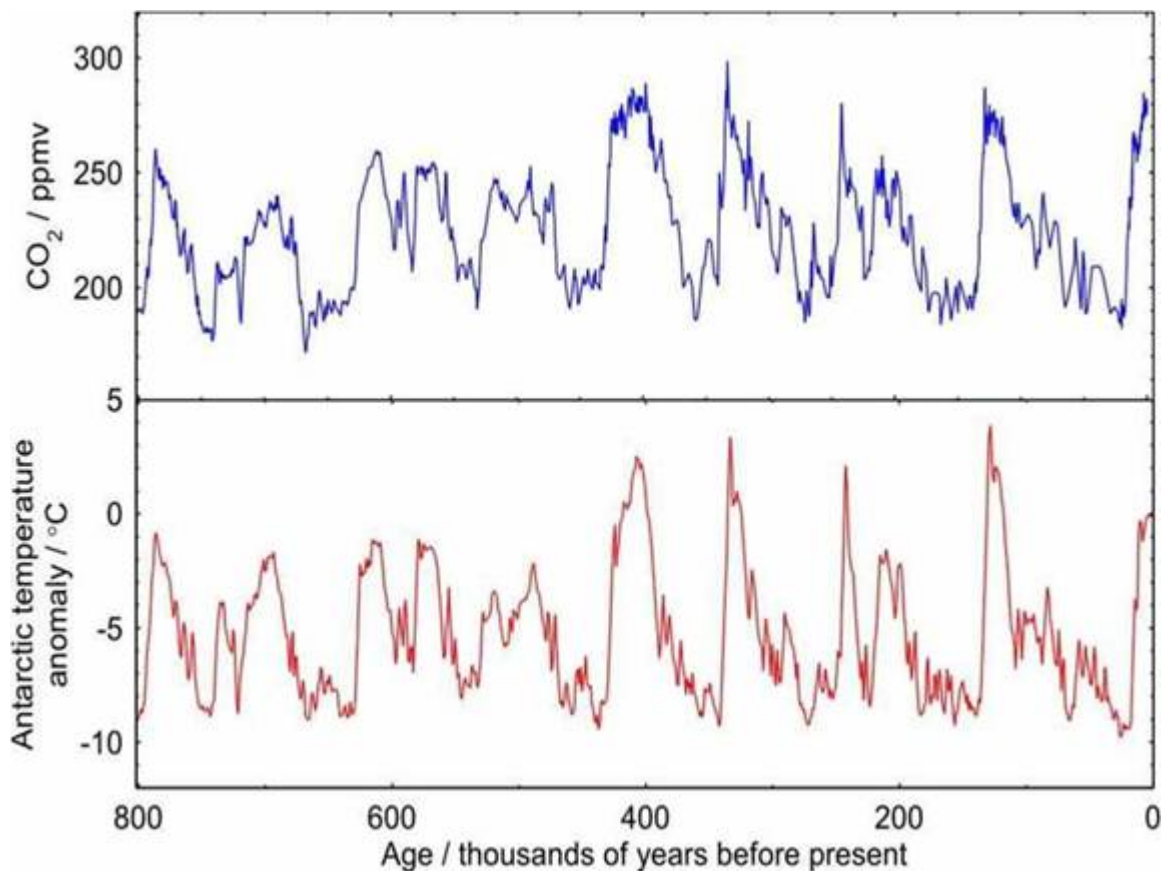
Overwhelmingly, scientists now believe it is “likely that the world will blow past the 2 degree C warming threshold that scientists and international negotiators agree is needed to avoid catastrophic consequences.”^[30]

On December 3, 2012, *The Global Carbon Project*, comprised of 35 climatologists from 10 countries, reported that under “business as usual,” “emissions are heading to a 4.0 to 6.1 degree C ‘likely’ increase in temperature.”^[31]

How do they know this?

Note on the graph below that 800,000 years of ice core data show a close correspondence

between atmospheric CO₂ and earth's average temperatures.[32] Also, the pre-industrial (1840's) CO₂ level was 278 parts per million, and had never been much higher during the 800,000 years.[33]



The increase in CO₂ levels between 2011 and 2012 was the second-biggest ever recorded, jumping 2.67 parts per million in that year alone, to reach 395 ppm.

The NOAA graph of Mauno Loa CO₂ data from 2009 to February 2013, showing a rise from 386 to 396.8 ppm, looks like a runaway train.[34]

This CO₂ persists in the atmosphere for thousands of years, accumulating faster than earth's oceans and forests can absorb it, with the result that the past 10 years have been hotter than more than 75% of the past 11,300 years.[35]

In January, 2013 the *New York Times* reported an effect of this rate of accumulation: "Temperature differences between years are usually measured in fractions of a degree, but last year's 55.3 degree average demolished the previous record, set in 1998, by a full degree Fahrenheit." [36]

Former skeptics finally believe we are facing a planetary emergency:

British climate change economist Lord Nicholas Stern said in January that "I got it wrong on climate change — it's far, far worse;" that he now believes we are "on track for something like four" degrees above the long-term global temperature average, and the "risks of a four- or five-degree rise." [37]

World Bank President Jim Kim spoke of "a real and present danger," referring to "an extreme heat wave in Russia [that] led to 55,000 deaths." In Thailand, the 2011 floods led to losses of "45 billion or about 13% of GDP." [38]

Christine Lagarde, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, said recently that “unless we take action on climate change, future generations will be roasted, toasted, fried and grilled.”[39]

“During the three decades from 1980 to 2011, the number of violent storms, floods, droughts, heat waves, wildfires, as tabulated by the reinsurance company Munich Re, has increased more than three-fold. They also estimate that the financial losses follow a trend line that has gone from \$40 billion to \$170 billion dollars per year.”[40]

It is clear to these economists, who do not hold science degrees, that once the tipping point is passed and earth is unable to regain its balance, our most desperate attempts will be unable to fend off catastrophe.

So why have governments been so slow to respond?

IV. Climate Reality: The Unspeakable Obstruction to Public Awareness and Action

An enormous gulf exists historically between scientific consensus on climate change and public awareness, with the media giving equal time to believers and deniers.

Grimsrud attributes this extraordinary negligence to “the humungous snow job that is being done to the intellect of the general public by the omnipotent fossil fuel dynasties that have dominated life on our planet for many decades.”[41]

For example, in 2009 former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev convened *The Climate Change Task Force*[42], a group of 20 scientists, economists, former heads of state, Nobel prize laureates and climate experts from developed and developing countries.

In June, 2012 the Task Force issued a 3-page “Appeal for Urgent Action on Climate Change”, calling on the UN Conference Rio+20, for “an urgent and profound international response to the increasing risks and threats of climate change,” and for “radical new solutions.” [43]

A Google News Archive search reveals that *this body has never once been covered in the Western mainstream news since its inception in 2009.*

Not surprising. From 2002-2010 a group of anonymous conservative billionaires channeled \$120 million “of dark money” to more than 100 think tanks, many near Washington DC, casting doubt on the science behind climate change.[44] “Those same groups are now mobilising against Obama’s efforts to act on climate change in his second term. A top recipient of the secret funds on Wednesday put out a point-by-point critique of the climate content in the president’s state of the union address.”[45]

The plan is in full swing, especially regarding the proposed \$7 billion, 1700-mile Keystone XL Pipeline.

The 2,000-page draft environmental impact statement was issued by the US State Department on March 1st.[46]

It has since come to light that this statement was actually written by the TransCanada Pipeline contractor.[47] “The statement estimates, and then dismisses, the pipeline’s massive carbon footprint and other environmental impacts, because, it asserts, the mining and burning of the tar sands is unstoppable.”

Why is it unstoppable? Because the public, deluged with media anti-science, still hopes its addiction to oil will somehow work out — and many believe that “cheap oil” is the only thing that keeps the economy from tanking.

But why is Obama, who knows the science and has two daughters who will live into the coming debacle, not taking the “transformative, radical action” urged by Gorbachev? Why does he not start by turning Keystone down, as the *New York Times* urged him to do?[48]

Obama has in fact tried to end the \$4 billion in subsidies to oil and gas companies. However the March 29, 2012 bill was defeated 51-47 by the Senate (60 votes are required).[49]

But the unseen hand is ever-present:

1. US Energy Secretary Dr. Steven Chu resigned February 1, 2013, after a four-year term. Long criticized by the oil industry for his clean energy programs, Chu said that “only one percent of the companies we funded went bankrupt. That one percent has gotten more attention than the 99 percent that have not.”[50]
1. The pro-Keystone XL Bill that passed March 16, 2013 in the US Senate was co-sponsored by 14 Senators, who together have received \$10 million in campaign contributions from the fossil fuel industry.[51]
1. Vancouver economist Robyn Allan writes of the Harper government’s pro-Keystone agenda: “If the goal was to strengthen Canada’s economy, bitumen would be upgraded at facilities in Alberta (creating jobs and adding value to the petroleum product), and then moved east where there is a domestic demand in Ontario and Quebec.”[52] Canadian unions know this and urgently oppose the pipeline.[53]

In short, the whole Keystone debate has nothing to do with jobs, investigative reporting, or an informed public — and everything to do with narrow industry profits, election campaign chests, and industry-backed media fog.

These mercenary interests posing as climate deniers are holding sway over the future of both countries, if not the world.

V. Confronting the Unspeakable

If JFK, MLK, and RFK were assassinated while promoting peace in a military economy, how far can Obama push for renewables in a military/oil economy?

In 2009, the Department of Defense, the largest consumer of energy in America, used over 93% of all US Government energy, and more than the whole country of Nigeria with a population of 140 million.[54]

The military produced 4% of the carbon emissions of the entire U.S. How can Obama slow down this gluttoned war machine? If he tries, will he face the same fate as JFK?

When White House Press journalist Sarah MacClendon asked President Bill Clinton why he wasn’t doing anything about UFO disclosure, Clinton replied, “*Sarah, there’s a government inside the government, and I don’t control it.*”[55]

CIA veteran Ray McGovern, who for years delivered the morning intelligence brief to Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush, referred in 2009 to “two CIA’s.” One was created by President Truman to “give him the straight scoop without any fear or favor. [And there is also a] covert action arm,” which acts without oversight by Congressional committees. “I think Panetta, and to a degree President Obama, are afraid — I never thought I’d hear myself saying this — I think they’re afraid of the CIA.”[56]

Indeed, former CIA Director Leon Panetta advised Obama, when he wanted to downsize troops in Afghanistan, that “no Democratic president can go against military advice, especially if he asked for it...So just do it. Do what they say.”[57]

Such warnings would also explain Obama’s granting of immunity to 98 of Bush’s 100 CIA torturers in 2012, after he had sworn to bring justice to the issue.[58]

It’s therefore not much of a stretch to see that when:

a) the military depends heavily on oil, and

b) there is hard evidence that a covert arm of the CIA has been complicit in state assassinations,

a President who has already backed off on troop reductions and CIA accountability might well fear running afoul of “the abyss” if he took decisive action against the oil-based economic steamroller.

And here we come to the Presidential crunch between the “deep state” and the public (democratic) state. The deep state is the embedded politics of the corporate evil that has become so pervasive in recent years. The guts of the U.S. economy is a morality blind to bank fraud, rampant pharmaceutical toxicity, a fats-and-sugar food industry driving epidemic obesity, and fossil-fuel control of the media.

How can we help Obama to save the public state, and indeed the world, from global warming? How can we regain control of our national democracies to secure the survival of life itself?

In the final analysis, Douglass concludes, the Unspeakable is not far way. It is not somewhere out there, fused with a government that has become alien to us. To the extent that we fail to confront it, the void of responsibility is also within ourselves.

We might now turn to the words of Robert F. Kennedy before a large Indianapolis crowd the day Martin Luther King was killed. With his own brother’s death clearly in mind he cited his favorite Greek poet, Aeschylus:

“In our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.”

Such pain has been known to all of us. It is the duality that deepens our compassion for humankind. Allowing it to live on in us marks the end of existential isolation and inertia.

VI. A Way Forward to Climate Sanity

It is clear from the foregoing that all people must rise to meet the crisis. To sustain life as

we know it, humanity must reduce atmospheric CO2 from 396 ppm to 350 ppm, and *soon*.

“Business as usual” will lead to disaster and is now out of the question. We are at war with our own behavior and it is time to gear up, impose discipline, and win the planet back.

We must first consider the over-arching nature of reality. Contrary to the prevailing view, the economy is a subset of our ecology — not the other way around.[59]

Ecology is what we live in. We are dependent on the land base and we need it to survive. Our society lives within the land base, and inside our society is the economy. The most basic necessity is not the economy, but the ecology, and this truth must be recognized in order to map our recovery.

The actions below, if taken, would return us to living in an ecological society:

1. Tame the U.S. Senate on Climate Matters

First, the will of the people, the Congress, and the President must take priority over the Senate.

In August 1963, JFK, up against nuclear “cold warriors” and the Senate, waged an all-out campaign to win Senate approval of the Atmospheric Test Ban Treaty. White House organizers led by Norman Cousins reached out through a Citizens Committee to business and religious leaders, scientists, scholars, universities, unions, newspapers, and NGO’s. This remarkable campaign succeeded within several weeks in mobilizing the anti-nuclear sentiment of the country, and the Senate approved JFK’s Treaty 80-19 in September.[60]

Obama faces a similar situation today: a) the planet is imperiled by fossil fuels; b) the Senate is under pressure from the oil industry; c) the public is becoming increasingly alarmed and could be mobilized to speak out; d) workable transition strategies for clean energy have already been developed.

2. Commit to Workable Principles for Transitioning to Clean Energy

Dr. Grimsrud has set out in his *Short Course* a simple, workable plan for transitioning to clean energy:[61]

1. Use only known reserves of gas and oil. They are the “cleanest” forms of fossil fuels. Halt exploration for new reserves.
2. Leave all other forms of fossil fuels in the ground, including coal, tar sands, and shale oil.
3. Pursue massive reforestation and biomass production to enable CO2 uptake.

3. Commit to Economic Incentives to Build Compliance

1. Immediately start taxing the full atmospheric cost of fossil fuel use to producers. Use this money to subsidize eligible clean energy businesses. Charge carbon import taxes on all products for which a carbon tax was not paid in the country of origin. (The Carbon Fee and Dividend Plan)
2. Transfer existing oil and gas subsidies to eligible clean energy businesses, including high-mileage cars and green buildings.
3. Create venture-capital programs for the clean-tech sector.

4. Create efficiency standards for household appliances and lighting.
5. Subsidize in-city public transport and bicycle use.
6. *Rationing*: Introduce rationing of oil and gas for automobiles, home heating (while subsidizing electricity and heat pumps), and non-essential flight travel.

World War II rationing in Great Britain worked well and was based on the following decisions:
[62]

- In 1939 and 1940 the government rejected proposals to rely upon increased taxation to cut consumption because the impact of tax rises would be slow and inequitable.
- The government introduced rationing instead, as it was the best way to cut consumption quickly and ensure that reduced supplies were shared out equitably.
- Policymakers rejected tradable rations, a feature of current carbon rationing proposals, fearing that it would undermine the moral basis of rationing, encourage coupon fraud and feed inflation, thereby negating the socially-progressive aspects of tradable rations.
- The public accepted that rationing was a temporary but necessary measure due to persuasive economic arguments, underlying trust in central government, and positive memories of rationing during the First World War.
- To introduce a successful carbon rationing scheme, the experience of the Second World War indicates that the government must convince the public that rationing levels are fair; that the system is administered transparently and fairly; and that evaders are few in number, likely to be detected and liable to stiff penalties if found guilty.

In this essay we have looked at the truth about climate, and what is needed to address it.

As Arundhati Roy has written, “The trouble is that once you see it, you can’t unsee it, and once you’ve seen it, keeping quiet, saying nothing, becomes as political an act as speaking out. There’s no innocence. Either way you’re accountable.”[63]

VII. Conclusion

It is critically important that we respond to the precipice in front of us: there is no time to be lulled by a sense of normalcy while the planet quietly and irreversibly succumbs to ruin. We must act now, before the weather becomes truly terrifying.

Let us honor our assassinated heroes by learning from them.

John Kennedy, in his American University address, was proclaiming a way out of the Cold War and into a new human possibility. We need to connect with JFK’s new possibility by meeting the unspeakable: first in ourselves, and then in the deep hidden places that we sense exist behind our democratic institutions.

So far, we have failed these men unforgivably by not looking *long and hard* where they pointed.[64]

The price of not going into the heart of truth has become unaffordable. Bob Dylan once asked, “How far *in* will you go?”

This question must mark the beginning of a new journey at every level of society.

Notes

[29] Eric P. Grimsrud, "Short Course. The Earth's Climate: Historic, Present, and Future," May, 2012 (http://ericgrimsrud.com/short-course_281.html). Grimsrud is a Professor Emeritus of Chemistry, Montana State University, who taught atmospheric science for 29 years, has written more than 100 published articles, and holds teaching and research awards. See also the 4-minute video "Climate 101," narrated by Bill Nye (<http://vimeo.com/28991442>); and the TED Talk, by David Roberts, "Climate Change is Simple" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7ktYbVwr90>).

[30] Glen P. Peters, et al., "The Challenge to Keep Global Warming Below 2°C, *Nature Climate Change*, December 2012 (<http://www.nature.com/nclimate/journal/v3/n1/full/nclimate1783.html>).

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[32] Eric P. Grimsrud, "Short Course. The Earth's Climate: Historic, Present, and Future," May, 2012 (http://ericgrimsrud.com/short-course_281.html), Section 4.

[33] See Grimsrud "Short Course," Section 4 (http://ericgrimsrud.com/short-course_281.html).

[34] U.S. National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, "Trends in Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide," <http://www.esrl.noaa.gov/gmd/ccgg/trends/>

[35] Shaun A. Marcott, et al., "A Reconstruction of Regional and Global Temperature for the Past 11,300 Years," *Science*, March 8, 2013 (<http://www.sciencemag.org/content/339/6124/1198.abstract>).

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[39] David Runnalls, "Roasted, Toasted, Fried and Grilled: Climate Talk from an Unlikely Source," *The Globe and Mail*, February 1, 2013

(<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/commentary/roasted-toasted-fried-and-grilled-climate-change-talk-from-an-unlikely-source/article8077946/>).

[40] “Letter from Secretary Steven Chu to Energy Department Employees Announcing His Decision Not to Serve a Second Term,” February 1, 2013 (Steven Chu resignation letter, <http://www.doe.gov/articles/letter-secretary-steven-chu-energy-department-employees-announcing-his-decision-not-serve>). Munich Re report at http://www.munichre.com/publications/302-07742_en.pdf.

[41] Eric Grimsrud, “Questions Concerning Short Course,” March 18, 2013 post, “Welcome to Freelandia” (<http://ericgrimsrud.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/welcome-to-feelandia/>).

[42] CCTF <http://www.climatechangetaskforce.org/task-force/view.php?id=1>. The full 27-page 2012 CCTF Statement, “Action to Face the Urgent Realities of Climate Change,” is at http://green-cross.se/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/CCTF_Statement_180612.pdf.

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[45] Ibid.

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[62] These points are copied directly from: Mark Roodhouse, "Rationing Returns: A Solution to Global Warming?" *History & Policy*, March, 2007 (<http://www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-54.html>). *History & Policy* is a collaboration between scholars at the Universities of Cambridge and London, England.

[63] Arundhati Roy, "Power Politics," South End Press, 2001, p. 7.

[64] Indeed President Eisenhower had explicitly warned against it in 1961: "The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist." Eisenhower's Farewell Address to the Nation, January 17, 1961" (<http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/ike.htm>).

I wish to thank Dr. Michael J. Harvey, biologist, for his assistance with this essay.

This essay is dedicated to Dr. James W. Douglass, from whose book *JFK and the Unspeakable* and workshop I learned deeply.

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