



Rocket's Red Glare, Bombs Bursting in Air Steal Global Climate Protests' Thunder [Pt. II]

Posted: 09/30/2014 8:23 am EDT | Updated: 11/30/2014 5:59 am EST



Part 1 focused on the People's Climate March, the UN Climate Summit, global climate negotiations, and the effects of the new Middle Eastern air war escalation on the media's desultory coverage of the global climate protest movement. Part 2 provides a brief critique of the Obama Administration's climate policies.

Climate activists see the President piously jaw-boning about the need for action to protect the climate for our children while his Administration is busily throwing millions of acres of public lands open to oil, gas and coal producers even as the State Department promotes fracking abroad, as if fracking were a solution to climate change and not a part of the problem.

We will one day come to regret brashly disseminating this harmful technology just as we should rue the post-World War II Federal program that spread nuclear power technology around the world in the name of commercializing nuclear reactors, only to multiply the risks of nuclear weapons proliferation -- much to our consternation today.

While the President has repeatedly called the nation's attention to the need for climate protection, his Administration has simultaneously protected its right flank politically against assault from the powerful fossil fuel lobby by wholeheartedly supporting the industry's drilling, mining, and fracking agenda, whether on Federal land or in the Gulf of Mexico and the Arctic.

It is not clear, however, how the Administration's efforts to dramatically increase U.S. fossil fuel production can be reconciled with his statements on the urgency of protecting the climate. Maximizing oil and gas and coal production is wholly inconsistent with climate protection, as is export of fossil fuels so others can burn it. But under the Obama Administration, the U.S. has become the world's largest producer of natural gas and the largest producer of oil and gas in the world.

President Obama did not make climate change a major priority in his first term, but in his second he did put forward a Climate Action Plan in 2013 and sought to address climate with initiatives on energy efficiency, renewable energy, restrictions on power plant emissions, and an emphasis on the need to adapt to a changing climate.

His UN address also included a roster of constructive new albeit mostly small-scale efforts. Notably, he announced he would instruct federal officials to consider climate change when providing international development aid.

Earlier this year, his Administration with some fanfare released its Third National Climate Assessment, which underscores the gravity of climate change impacts and prospects in the U.S. The President took to the airwaves to publicize and defend these findings.

But the Administration has dragged its feet on international climate negotiations since 2009. The nation deserves more ambitious, not to mention consistent, leadership from the President. His greenhouse gas reduction targets, for example -- 17 percent lower emissions in 2020 than 2005 -- are far less ambitious than the European Union's and its member states' goals.

The new Climate Assessment makes clear that even at the level of current global warming -- less than 1°C -- the impacts are already costly, dangerous and growing worse. Climate and weather disasters cost the U.S. some \$100 billion in 2012, and the frequency and intensity of drought, floods and wildfires have all increased. The West Antarctic Ice Sheet has already begun collapsing, which will eventually raise sea level by 2-4 feet, inundating major U.S. cities where millions of Americans and others now live.

Nonetheless, global climate negotiations are aimed at keeping the world's fever to 2°C, which international negotiators are treating as a global climate safety limit, and the Obama Administration appears to be publicly acquiescing in this travesty.

In my new book, *Climate Peril*, I demonstrate that 2°C is demonstrably unsafe. "It would be about two and a half times the warming that the Earth has already experienced since pre-industrial times. Rather than a safety limit, it is a nebulous transition zone between highly dangerous and extremely dangerous climate change."

In *Climate Peril*, I also explain how unlikely it is for us to keep the Earth from exceeding a rise of 2°C, given current emissions trends and the excess heat already stored in the ocean, which will ultimately drive the Earth's temperature up by at least 1-2°F, and possibly more.

Climate change is already a planetary crisis that, if unchecked, will undermine our health, our economy, our environment, and our food supplies. Now that people are beginning to go into the streets to express their outrage at inaction about it, perhaps politicians will catch on. Even if oblivious to the gathering climate emergency, they cannot long remain indifferent to constituents willing to vote them out of office for condoning climate science denial and the do-nothing climate policies it was crafted to foster.

Hopefully the emergence of an empowered citizens climate protection movement will hasten the achievement of an effective, enforceable global climate agreement and tough U.S. climate protection legislation.

--

*John J. Berger, PhD. (www.johnjberger.com) is an energy and environmental policy specialist who has produced ten books on climate, energy, and natural resource topics. He is the author of *Climate Peril: The Intelligent Reader's Guide to Understanding the Climate Crisis* and *Climate Myths: The Campaign Against Climate Science*.*

Follow John J. Berger on Twitter: www.twitter.com/johnjberger