

REPORT ON THE DANGERS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The document attached is a political satire. As such it stands in a noble tradition.

In 1729 Jonathan Swift published anonymously a 'Modest Proposal' for solving the problems of poverty in Ireland by having Irish children served up as food for the rich and genteel.

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A Modest Proposal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Modest_Proposal)>

The 'Report from the Iron Mountain' was published in 1967, supposedly written by a Special Study Group appointed by the US Government, one of whose members had decided – but with his identity concealed – to make it public. The report was concerned with the grave dangers to the US economy should the government ever decide to reduce the military establishment and devote itself to peace. There is some evidence that the true author may have been J K Galbraith.

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The Report from Iron Mountain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Report_from_Iron_Mountain)>

As with those illustrious predecessors, the aim of the present satire is to challenge the policies being pursued by the powerful, by expressing them in this extreme form, and to question whether public debates which appeal to reason and civility can prevail, if they do not also recognize and confront vested self-interest.

January 2010

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

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Executive Summary

1. The science of climate change is now overwhelming: the planet is warming up at an unprecedented rate and this is the result of human activity. This will have major consequences in terms of climate, extreme weather events, rising sea levels, food and water shortages, the extinction of many species, etc. It is quite possible that the so-called global conveyor system, whereby ocean currents circulate, will break down, with major consequences for weather patterns but also for sea life and inevitably also for the human food chain. All of the aforementioned changes have happened at various stages in the planet's history but never with such speed and never during the period of human existence. This is therefore an unprecedented and in many ways unpredictable development for mankind.
2. This report examines the options that face those social groups that have been able to accumulate wealth and influence during the period of capitalist development. Times will be challenging for them as for other social groups. Nevertheless, the resources of which they dispose, if used intelligently, should enable them to withstand many of the aforementioned challenges. Indeed in some respects they may emerge with their own position consolidated. This is, however, by no means certain, and it is urgent that appropriate actions be set in motion now.
3. Until recently it has been possible to fend off national and international initiatives designed to address climate change by pointing to disagreements in the scientific community as to the speed of climate change and its likely consequences. Groups within that community who have been skeptical of the science of climate change have been given covert financial support, and their views have been given visibility, by like-minded allies in the mass media. However, that strategy is no longer likely to be effective, as such skeptics lose any credibility they may once have had within the scientific community.
4. A further obstacle to international environmental efforts has been doubt about the prospects of global collective action. Particularly important has been the refusal of large developing countries to participate in an international framework and to commit to reductions in their own carbon emissions. As long as these highly populous and rapidly-industrializing nations refused to act, the legitimacy of any global agreement was in question, and it was clear that any mitigation efforts by wealthy countries would be swamped by emissions growth in poorer states. The governments of China, India, and Brazil seem now to accept that they too must contribute to global carbon-reduction efforts, lending greater moral authority to those pursuing international agreements. It is true that the Copenhagen Summit failed to produce any binding successor to the Kyoto Protocol, still less one which would bind these rapidly-industrializing countries. Yet the moral and strategic

context has clearly shifted, and it is time to be proactive in defense of those who have won wealth and influence, and no longer to rely on more passive forms of resistance.

5. The United States remains – and can remain – the heartland of personal wealth-accumulation. At the same time, it is important to see the challenge and the opportunity in global terms, and to be ready to make joint cause with counterparts in other countries around the world. Indeed, it will be essential to ensure that such groups see this heartland, rather than their own countries, as the focus of their personal loyalty. The United States was always a magnet for the enterprising, from wherever they might come and so it must remain.
6. Personal wealth-accumulation has long been seen as antithetical to state intervention. It is, however, likely that as the effects of climate change become ever more evident, public pressure will lead to large-scale and expensive interventions. To oppose these is unlikely to be effective; it is also unnecessary. As with the social welfare systems of the 19th and 20th Centuries, the public is likely to accept that the risks are widely shared and that the costs should be also: particularly if this message can be effectively communicated by allies in the mass media. We are likely to see new taxes or levies imposed across the population, many of them quite regressive in their incidence, to help finance state responses to climate change. Meanwhile, the government programs that are thus financed will provide major new opportunities for private enterprise and profit making. The parallels with the defense expenditures of the Cold War are obvious.
7. The science of climate change makes clear that whereas most carbon emissions have come from the long-industrialized countries, the major costs will now fall on the less-developed parts of the world. This is for two principal reasons. First, they tend to be in the tropical latitudes, where the worst effects of climate change will occur; second, they have few resources with which to adapt. This disjunction means that the victims of climate change will to a considerable degree be the same societies that have for many decades suffered from poverty and become the tragic objects of public sympathy in the West. Despite this, as is well known, aid and trade liberalization that might make a difference have been paltry. It is highly unlikely that their plight will call forth any more vigorous response from the rich world as the effects of climate change take effect.
8. Whatever ethical and emotional view is taken of this plight, there are good reasons to adopt a more rational and considered position. For a variety of reasons the peasant population of Africa is in decline. The natural resources of which Africa disposes are its primary contribution to the international economy; its people are an encumbrance. It is hardly surprising that over recent decades it has become commonplace for African elites to see their first priority as being the maintenance of public order sufficient to allow international investors to extract those natural resources, and to see the well-being of their own people as of little importance. To expect some reversal of this trend is wholly unrealistic. What is needed is a managed decline of the African population to numbers that are appropriate to economies that will be run largely by the employees of these international investors.
9. It is not just to Africa's oil and mineral wealth that this refers. It is also the land. True, the suitability of that land for peasant agriculture may well be compromised by the effects of climate change; nevertheless, with appropriate investment in high-tech equipment and the development of appropriate genetically modified hybrids, it can

become an important contributor to world food supplies. Africa's land is currently being leased on long-term contracts by Korea, China, Dubai and others anxious about their future food security; it is important for the United States to become similarly involved. Appropriate inducements to local elites will continue to be needed, but this can cement their loyalty to the heartland, particularly if those inducements can include homes and educational facilities for their offspring in the United States and similar countries.

10. The science makes clear that the destruction of tropical rain forests exacerbates the problems of climate change. This destruction arises from the activities of local farmers and loggers, seeking to make a living amidst the ruins of traditional peasant economies. The managed decline of local populations – again, relying on local well-disposed elites to achieve this – must be used to mitigate this problem, even if in the short run this produces reductions in wellbeing that provoke concern among the public in Western nations.
11. More generally, the next hundred years are likely to see conflict over increasingly scarce basic resources. Properly managed however, this can have the benefit of leading to a marked reduction in world population, likely to peak at nine billion by mid-century. The ambition should be to use the emerging climate crisis as a means of reducing this to nearer one billion by the end of the century.
12. It is not only Africa that has the resources that will be critical for future wellbeing. The United States must be ready to use its full weight to secure essential resources, wherever they are located. Western Canada is one key such region: for its sand oils but also because of its likely role as a major granary, as warming transforms its agricultural prospects. The elites of these provinces are well aware that theirs is an increasingly one-sided relationship with the rest of Canada, and they may well be induced to reconsider that relationship.
13. The effects of climate change will undoubtedly have a negative impact on many individuals and communities within the United States and other countries of the advanced West. Again, however, it is necessary to avoid undue emotion and to consolidate loyalty around the wealthy within the heartland, rather than to the citizenry of these countries more generally. It is after all the wealthy whose enterprise will be crucial in taking us through the difficult times that lie ahead.
14. It is important that those with high personal wealth not moderate their life styles or their carbon emissions. First, it is precisely these lifestyles that drive the endless game of “catch-up” that less well-off groups pursue and by reference to which they limit their dissatisfaction with the prevailing social order. Second, it is by intensifying this game of “catch-up” that it will be possible to concentrate the minds of the local elites who, as seen above, will play such a key part in managing the process of change.
15. In all of this, it is important not to misjudge the low level of strategic intelligence demonstrated by the mass of the population, even in the richest of countries, and the ease with which the mass media, suitably steered, can influence them. One example was the ease with which the British public was distracted from the irresponsibility of the banks, in the recent financial crisis, by the scandal over the comparatively miniscule misdemeanors of their members of parliament. There is of course always the danger that a popular political leader may arise who threatens to mount a real challenge to established wealth. Nevertheless, as the difficulties in

reform of the US health system amply demonstrate, such leadership can be readily frustrated by appropriate inducements to members of Congress.

16. Many of the lobbies and interest groups that are speaking out on climate change rely on heart-warming appeals to a common humanity. This is likely to mobilize the general populations of the wealthier countries in tokens of charity, but to deflect them from any more radical questioning of the direction of change. The management of change will then be left where it should, with the entrepreneurial and successful in our society to whom this report is addressed.
17. This report ends on a note of warning. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has recently ruled that carbon dioxide emissions endanger public health. Within the United States this may become a major point of leverage for domestic pressure groups seeking to curb such emissions. This leverage may extend to pressure groups internationally and to countries such as the small island states that are likely to face the challenges of climate change with particular severity.
18. Other challenges may also be mounted. It is hardly fanciful to wonder whether carbon dioxide emissions might not at some stage be designated internationally as weapons of mass destruction, with trade and other sanctions being threatened against the United States. Given the precarious trading and financial position of the United States, this might prove extremely damaging. It will therefore be necessary to manage with some care the international debate on climate change and to ensure that such tokens of support that the United States offers to international agreements are used to diffuse international disquiet.