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Signal of doom... or oil-funded hysteria?

Piers Corbyn on why a CIA adviser might be scaremongering on manmade climate change

The world is on a cusp of planetary emergency.” This is the rallying cry made by Thomas Homer-Dixon – an adviser to the CIA.

His vivid, racy, extensive catalogue of achievements and catastrophes of mankind from Ancient Rome to the present day warns of the “synchronous failure” of the world order as we know it and advocates that by adopting the approach of “the prospective mind” we can get through it.

This approach “aggressively engages with the new world of uncertainty” and with new knowledge and wisdom can guide us along a path of “a resilience imperative rather than a growth imperative” into a new future of surprises and opportunity.

Homer-Dixon lays out five “tectonic stresses” underneath our societies – population growth and megacities; energy and oil crises; environmental stress; climate stress due to mankind; and economic/ rich-poor divisions – and marvels and worries us through technologies and empires under these headings.

In response to this and most claims from the “catastrophism” genre I have to flippantly wonder if Caesar also faced what experts of his age saw as crises of population, megacities (compared with what had gone before), energy, climate change (of whatever cause); and rich/poor divisions.

When Watling Street (the A5) was completed was Caesar warned “road building has gone too far”?

Whatever actually were the causes of the decline of the Roman Empire (and Homer-Dixon suggest a new one – an energy crisis), he says that we have an advantage over the Romans because “we understand much better how the complex systems around us behave”.

Here then should follow analysis and testing of theories against facts concerning each of his five plates of problems to apply the new approach of “prospective minds”.

He discusses various problems, ranging from Roman drainage ditches in Gaul to modern terrorism, in an interesting and thoughtful way and, for example, points out that ethanol production from food crops as a petrol substitute is (at the time he wrote the book) likely to lead to rises in food prices.

Indeed the poorest in Mexico have recently made widespread protests against price-hikes of maize and tortilla because their staple food-crops are being exported at high prices, converted to fuel and burnt in American cars.

“Let them eat coal” is presumably Al Gore’s answer.



Global warning: 50 years ago meteorologists predicted that New Orleans would be destroyed unless the levees were improved... They were not.

Image credit: NOAA

However, on climate change the value of Homer-Dixon's book is undone. Originality is lost and he simply parrots standard hysteria.

While dwelling at length on Ancient Rome, he does not say that the world then was much warmer than present and had less carbon dioxide, a fact he must surely know. Indeed he makes a torrent of weather catastrophe claims which he and the CIA must know are false.

"Polar bears are under (unprecedented) threat," he says, when in fact the Arctic was notably milder and had much less ice than present from 10,000 years ago to 900 years ago (which is why the Vikings so named Greenland).

"Kilimanjaro is losing its snow because of global warming," he says; yet there has not been warming recorded in that region in the relevant period, and anyway world temperatures peaked in 1998.

Diabolically, he claims that Hurricane Katrina was "exactly the kind of catastrophe we're likely to see more frequently as a consequence of (man-made) global warming".

Presumably, therefore, a lot more cities are being built below sea level – like New Orleans. Fifty years ago meteorologists warned that sooner or later New Orleans would be destroyed by a hurricane unless adequate levees were built.

They were not built, and New Orleans was devastated. The only unknown was the name of the hurricane.

Despite world warming from around 1910 to 1998, the facts on hurricanes published by the USA's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are that the rate of landfalling hurricanes in USA per decade was about 30 per cent lower in the past 40 years or so than in the period 1900-1960.

In continuing to feed global warming myths to those who live by knee-jerk opposition to classic bogeys of our times, he predictably lists oil companies as an "entrenched interest" against climate change action.

In fact the oil companies are entrenched global interests for "climate change action" and stand to make trillions of dollars from the actions he promotes around carbon fixing and trading.

To that end they massively sponsor climate crisis research, conferences and events – of which the Guardian's one-day Climate Change Summit on June 11 is small fry – which urge these measures from which they will profit.

It would be surprising if an adviser to the CIA actually did write a popular book against the interests of Big Oil.

Piers Corbyn is an astrophysicist with Weather Action long-range forecasters, and a leading climate scientist who appeared in Channel 4's The Great Global Warming Swindle, broadcast in March.