

# Veneration Of Power Leading To Climate Catastrophe

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In a recent [media alert](#), we presented a few rules that journalists must follow if they are to be regarded as a safe pair of hands by editors and corporate media owners. One of these rules is that 'we' in the West are assumed to be 'the good guys'. This seriously damaging narrative, flying in the face of historical evidence and endlessly crushing state policies, ensures that the public is kept ignorant and pacified. The consequences have been deadly for millions of the West's victims around the world, and now mean climate catastrophe that could end human civilisation.

First, take the recent devout coverage following the death of George Herbert Walker Bush, US President from 1989-1993, and Vice-President under Ronald Reagan from 1981-1989. When a (former) Western leader dies, the raw propaganda is often at its most fawning and servile. On Bush's death, 'mainstream' media outlets broadcast and published eulogies and fanciful words of praise, divorced from reality. For example, BBC News [channelled](#) former President Barack Obama:

'George HW Bush's life is a testament to the notion that public service is a noble, joyous calling. And he did tremendous good along the journey.'

The Clintons - like the Bush dynasty, part of the US ruling class - added their own [gushing propaganda](#) tribute:

'Few Americans have been - or will ever be - able to match President Bush's record of service to the United States and the joy he took every day from it.'

Referring to the massive US attack following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in the 1990-1991 Gulf War, 'impartial' BBC News launched into full-blown Orwellian newspeak:

'The subsequent battle proved to be a triumph for American military expertise and a major boost for the nation's morale.'

Likewise, the *Guardian's* [obituary](#) described Bush Senior's devastation of Iraq as 'triumphant'; 'the president did not put a foot wrong'; 'his most impressive achievement'; 'Bush's masterly management of the first Iraq war'; and so on, in an elite-friendly script that was essentially a press release from the very centre of US power.

The cruel reality of Bush's 'most impressive achievement', as we noted in a [2002 media alert](#), was that Iraq's entire civilian infrastructure was targeted and largely destroyed under the rain of bombs. All of Iraq's eleven major electrical power plants, as well as 119 substations, were destroyed. 90 per cent of electricity generation was out of service within hours; within days, all power generation in the country had ceased. Eight multi-purpose dams were repeatedly hit and destroyed, wrecking flood control, municipal and industrial water storage, irrigation and hydroelectric power. Four of Iraq's seven major water pumping stations were destroyed. According to Eric Hoskins, a Canadian doctor and coordinator of a Harvard study team on Iraq, the allied bombardment:

'effectively terminated everything vital to human survival in Iraq - electricity, water, sewage systems, agriculture, industry and health care'. (Quoted Mark Curtis, 'The Ambiguities of Power', Zed Books, 1995)

Under the 88,500 tons of bombs - the equivalent of seven Hiroshimas - that followed the launch of the air campaign on January 17, 1991, and the ground attack that followed, 150,000 Iraqi troops and 50,000 civilians were killed. The *Guardian's* glowing obituary omitted all of these brutal facts. The *Observer*, the *Guardian's* Sunday sister paper, sang from the same hymn sheet, describing the former head of the CIA and US president as:

'an American patriot with a deep sense of duty'.

The guff piece was written by serial propagandist Simon Tisdall who has variously been a foreign leader writer, foreign editor and US editor for the *Guardian*. Tisdall waxed that:

'Bush set great store by civility in public life. As Republican candidate in 1988 he called for a "kinder, gentler nation". He was, quintessentially, a decent man, with a taste for the lifestyle of an English country gentleman.'

Bush's 'most admirable quality', opined the *Guardian* man, was 'his deep sense of public duty and service.' That word 'service' again, repeated over and over like a mantra. But who was really being served by Bush's violence?

The *Guardian* devoted a section of its website to Bush Sr, featuring headlines such as:

'"A different command". How Bush's war shaped his work for peace'

'a man of the highest character'

'The "dear dad" dedicated to faith, family and country'

'Steady hand during collapse of communism'

'"Dear Bill." Clinton heralds letter from Bush as source of lasting friendship'

When Official Enemies portray their Glorious Leaders in this way, western commentators routinely

sneer with derision. Al Abunimah, editor of *Electronic Intifada*, highlighted the above litany of nonsense in a [single tweet](#), and rightly scorned the *Guardian* as 'a bastion of regime propaganda and sycophancy to powerful elites.'

Meanwhile, BBC News, like the rest of the corporate media, virtually canonised Bush as a saintly agent of Western benevolence. Even his 'service dog' Sully paid a [touching last tribute](#), sleeping beside the late President's casket. We were to understand that Sully was heart-broken after long years spent devotedly serving his 'master'. In fact, he had been assigned to assist Bush in the summer of 2018, just a few months ago.

By glaring contrast, a *Morning Star* [editorial](#) gave an honest assessment of Bush Sr's contribution to the world, summed up as:

'A lifetime in the service of imperialism.'

Nathan Robinson, editor of *Current Affairs*, [listed](#) numerous appalling crimes and abuses of human rights carried out by Bush, almost entirely buried by sycophantic journalists on his death, and concluded:

'Coverage of George H.W. Bush's death proves that Noam Chomsky's media theory is completely true'.

'Mainstream' media professionals do not know, or do not care, what Bush actually did in his life. Perhaps they also assume that the public do not know or care either. Obedient journalists have simply buried the destruction and mass death wreaked on Iraq in the Gulf War. In his Bush [obituary](#), Nick Bryant, the New York-based BBC News correspondent, brushed all this away and stuck to the standard deception of 'mistakes were made' in Iraq. By 'mistakes', Bryant meant that the US encouraged the Kurds and Shia-dominated south to revolt against Saddam Hussein, but then failed to offer sufficient backing. Under BBC 'journalism', Bush's 'mistakes' do not include mass killing and destruction. That is simply unthinkable.

The truth is that the corporate media, the BBC very much included, do not care about the deadly effect of mass sanctions and infrastructure destruction on Iraq through the 1990s, up to the 2003 Iraq War. Unicef, the United Nations Children's Fund, [reported](#) that [4,000](#) more children under five were dying every month in Iraq than would have died before Western sanctions were imposed. A total of [half a million children under five died](#), amongst a total death toll of over [one million Iraqis](#). There is clearly no need or desire for western corporate media to dwell on Bush Sr's role in such horrors.

Nor do corporate journalists care about his [service](#) to death, torture, secret assassinations, and propping up of dictators in his role as head of the CIA. They do not care that, as Vice-President, Bush refused to apologise for the [shooting down](#) of Iran Air flight 655 over the Persian Gulf by the US warship *Vincennes* on July 3, 1988. All 290 people on board the plane were killed, including 66 children. Instead, he [said](#) callously:

'I will never apologize for the United States — I don't care what the facts are. ... I'm not an apologize-for America kind of guy.'

Clearly, most corporate journalists do not care that Bush shares responsibility for the [multiple bloodbaths](#) that soaked Latin America in the 1980s. They do not care that Bush was, as historian Greg Grandin [notes](#), an 'icon' of 'brutal US oppression in the Third World'. They do not care that Bush [invaded Panama](#) in 1989, in the biggest deployment of US force since the Vietnam War, ostensibly to capture former US ally Manuel Noriega on charges of drug trafficking. US planes heavily bombed populated areas, resulting in the [estimated deaths of 3,000 Panamanians](#). Grandin [says](#) that the 'lasting impact of the Panama invasion' is the US wars that followed in subsequent decades. On Bush's death, the corporate media did their job of whitewashing his blood-soaked

legacy; just as they covered for his crimes when he was in power.

## 'Climate Catastrophe Now Inevitable'

All this matters because the media's veneration of Bush, and western leaders generally, is a glaring symptom of a deep truth about the corporate media: their primary function is to project a severely distorted view of world events, one that embodies state and corporate priorities rooted in power and short-term profit at any cost.

The public is perennially starved of rational facts about the real state of the planet, and the greed-driven policies that hold sway over electorates and even over global ecosystems. The appalling consequence is that we are now certainly headed for climate catastrophe. Even a few within the corporate media have started to admit as much. Science writer Robin McKie [noted](#) in the *Guardian* that:

'Climate catastrophe is now looking inevitable.'

McKie added that the US has produced around one third of the carbon dioxide responsible for global warming:

'Yet it has essentially done nothing to check its annual rises in output. Lobbying by the fossil fuel industry has proved highly effective at blocking political change – a point most recently demonstrated by groups such as the Competitive Enterprise Institute and the Heartland Institute, which helped persuade President Trump to pull out of the Paris agreement, thus dashing the planet's last hope of ecological salvation.'

He cited environmentalist Bill McKibben:

'The coalition [fossil fuel lobby] used its power to slow us down precisely at the moment when we needed to speed up. As a result, the particular politics of one country for one half-century will have changed the geological history of the Earth.'

Global carbon emissions reached a [new high](#) in 2018. In other words, nothing of real significance has been achieved in thirty years of supposedly trying to cut emissions - other than making the problem very much worse – and we now only have a decade *to completely turn things around*. The blocking effects by powerful industry lobbies and corporate-captured political 'leaders', hugely underreported by the corporate media, are a disaster for the human race. Stefan Rahmstorf, a senior scientist at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany, highlighted a new [analysis of carbon emissions](#) by the [Carbon Research Project](#) and [said](#):

'See how easily we could have solved the climate crisis if we had started in 2000! Only 4% reduction per year. Now we need 18% per year. You can thank climate deniers, lobby groups and cowardly politicians for this delay.'

Kevin Anderson of the UK's Tyndall Centre for Climate Research [concurred](#):

'Spot on by [Rahmstorf]. The academic community also take some responsibility for all too often remaining quiet about completely irresponsible decisions. Just listen to the roar of complicit silence over the UK's shale gas plans, the new oil platform, airport & road expansion'.

Renowned climate scientist Michael Mann [declared](#):

'We've got a LOT of work to do folks. After flat-lining for 3 years, CO2 emissions have

now ticked up two years straight. This is no time for climate change denying/delaying politicians. We must vote them out & elect in their place politicians who will LEAD on climate.'

He [added](#):

'It is no longer enough for politicians to just say the right things about climate change. They must demonstrate a commitment to meaningful actions & specific policies aimed at rapid reductions in carbon emissions. We are now officially starting to run out of time...'

Julia Steinberger, Associate Professor of Ecological Economics at the University of Leeds, [put](#) the scale of the challenge succinctly:

'If people had ANY idea of the harm and loss that is coming our way with #ClimateBreakdown, they would stop driving, flying, eating meat, overheating and overconsuming pretty much instantly, and work tirelessly to build new low carbon societies.'

Instead, powerful industry [lobbies](#) are working tirelessly to [block](#) the radical action that is required.

A new Met Office study shows that the UK summer heatwave this year was made thirty times more likely by the human impact on climate. Met Office scientist Peter Stott issued a [deadly warning](#):

'Humanity just won't be able to cope with the world we are heading for.'

Last year, [Arctic News](#) editor Sam Carana [pointed out](#) the dangers of methane, a highly potent global warming gas:

'As the temperature of the Arctic Ocean keeps rising, it seems inevitable that more and more methane will rise from its seafloor and enter the atmosphere, at first strongly warming up the atmosphere over the Arctic Ocean itself – thus causing further methane eruptions – and eventually warming up the atmosphere across the globe.'

A giant 'burp' of methane gas could happen suddenly and increase global temperatures rapidly. If this sounds like a scare story, Harold Wanless, Professor of Geology and a specialist in sea level rise at the University of Miami, [puts it](#) in perspective:

'Scientists tend to be pretty conservative. We don't like to scare people, and we don't like to step out of our little predictable boxes. But I suspect the situation is going to spin out of hand pretty quickly. If you look at the history of warming periods, things can move pretty fast, and when that happens that's when you get extinction events.'

'I would not discount the possibility that it could happen in the next ten years.'

In summary, scientists are calling for immediate large cuts in carbon emissions. Given the normally conservative pronouncements by overly cautious experts, such warnings should stop us all in our tracks. Climate scientists are virtually screaming at those running our political and economic systems to make drastic changes *now*.

However, at the start of a new UN climate conference in Poland, the follow-up to the [2015 Paris summit](#), a BBC News article [observed](#) starkly:

'the gap between what countries say they are doing and what needs to be done has never been wider.'

In other words, the dangers of rapid and cataclysmic global warming are now so glaring that some

degree of urgency is being communicated occasionally, *very occasionally*, from within the corporate media. It would hurt establishment media credibility too much in the eyes of the public were that otherwise.

Safe 'national treasure' David Attenborough has become more outspoken of late. He [addressed](#) the UN conference:

'We're facing a man-made disaster of global scale. Our greatest threat in thousands of years. Climate change. If we don't take action, the collapse of our civilisations and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon.'

He [told](#) the BBC:

'All over the world there are people who are suffering as a consequence [of climate change] whose voices have not been heard.'

Last week, the *Daily Mirror* went as far as putting Attenborough's [warning](#) on its front page:

'Time Is Running Out To Save Planet'

But the daily diet of 'news' pumped out by the major news media is still a massive distraction from the huge widespread changes in society, politics and the economy that are needed *immediately*. Why is the climate crisis not a vital component, perhaps even the primary component, of news reporting on the economy, business, commerce, politics, and Parliament? Why is it usually restricted to science and environment 'stories'? For instance, how often does the BBC's business editor, [Simon Jack](#), address the climate crisis in his reports? Never, if our occasional sampling is indicative. Nor does he ever respond to our polite [challenges](#) to do so. The same applied to the recently departed BBC economics editor, [Kamal Ahmed](#). This is a gross dereliction of duty by the BBC to the public who pays for it.

Are we supposed to obsess over slight changes in interest rates, currency exchange rates, the FTSE 100 index, and the size of the UK economy, even while the planet's natural resources are plundered, ecosystems collapse, and the mass loss of species accelerates? Why are these much latter, more crucial numbers and facts about the state of the planet not routinely cited in corporate media reporting on the state of business and the economy? Perhaps we are supposed to regard the number of rivets on the Titanic a reliable measure of the ship's robustness, even as it plummets beneath the waves.

Just consider the US news media reporting on the appalling forest wildfires in California last month. Although scientists have stated clearly that climate change is a significant factor in these catastrophic wildfires, national US television networks made the link with climate in [less than four per cent](#) of their reports on the calamity. We are not aware of any similar study of UK television coverage. But it was certainly apparent that BBC News at Ten made very little mention of the links between global warming and the Californian wildfires, just as climate was glaringly absent from its [coverage](#) of this summer's drought in the UK.

It is true that the burgeoning grassroots movement [Extinction Rebellion](#), and the remarkable 15-year-old Swedish climate campaigner [Greta Thunberg](#), are not *entirely* absent from news coverage. But, given the stakes, their activism and their urgent messages to society as a whole would be making headlines every day in a sane media system. Extinction Rebellion are calling for peaceful mass civil disobedience to [demand](#):

'an immediate reversal of climate-toxic policies, net-zero emissions by 2025 and the establishment of a citizen's assembly to oversee the radical changes necessary to halt global warming.'

During one recent climate protest that blocked five major bridges in central London, one protester

[said](#):

'We have tried marching, and lobbying, and signing petitions. Nothing has brought about the change that is needed.'

Extinction Rebellion issued a [stark warning](#):

'Our aims may be ambitious. But we are striving for nothing less than the fate of our planet.'

The [inspiring clip](#) that goes along with these words depicts suffragettes, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and many others pushing for positive changes in the world. Thunberg has [explained](#) in very simple and powerful terms how and why she became so motivated to do something about climate change. It happened in school at the age of nine:

'They [teachers] were always talking about how we should turn off lights, save water, not throw out food. I asked why and they explained about climate change. And I thought this was very strange. If humans could really change the climate, everyone would be talking about it and people wouldn't be talking about anything else. But this wasn't happening.'

Now, at 15, her commitment to go on school strike to devote herself to climate activism is an inspiration to many around the world, including the Extinction Rebellion movement. She has a succinct [riposte](#) to those who accuse her of neglecting her education:

'Some say I should be in school. But why should any young person be made to study for a future when no one is doing enough to save that future? What is the point of learning facts when the most important facts given by the finest scientists are ignored by our politicians?'

The time has passed for the public to rely on political leaders taking the right steps to tackle the climate crisis. As Thunberg [said](#) in her speech to the UN climate conference:

'So we have not come here to beg the world leaders to care for our future. They have ignored us in the past and they will ignore us again. We have come here to let them know that change is coming whether they like it or not.'

As ever, it is up to each one of us to ensure that this change happens.

DC & DE

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