

VIEWPOINTS

A tale of two climates

By Tom Giovanetti

Long ago in a verdant valley, there lived several families who farmed on fertile land and hunted game up on the slopes of a nearby mountain range. Mountain snow-melt fed a brook that ran through the valley and irrigated the families' fields.

But over time, they began to notice changes. In the winter, snows seemed heavier, and took much longer to thaw. Eventually, it was apparent to all the mountain snow wasn't melting anymore — even in the summer. The unsettling discovery of a dried-up brook from the slopes of the peaks proved that even in summer, the snow remained intact.

Ice slowly descended from the summit and began creeping down the valley, until the onslaught was inexorable. Field by field, home by home, families gave up and moved south, looking for new land.

Humans weren't the only ones affected. Entire species of plants and animals were wiped out by the ice. Of course, species better adapted to the cold and white gained a competitive advantage — at least, a temporary competitive advantage. Of course, there would come a day when the ice would recede, when the land would be freed from its prison and would again bloom and flourish.

It was a global catastrophe when the glaciers came down those valleys, driving people from their homes and burying millions of acres of productive farming land under a thick sheet of ice.

So why it is considered a global catastrophe now that the glaciers are receding, and the land is being freed?

Are we, like the people displaced by the glaciers, captive to the arrogance of the status quo? Do we assume that the conditions that exist during our lifetimes are the way things always have been, and the way things always should be?

Or is it possible that we, like they, simply happen to live during a climate tipping point, where the results of immutable climate cycles are simply becoming manifest?

Why do we assume that having massive amounts of the earth's surface covered in a thick sheet of ice is a good thing? We're accustomed to seeing glacier-filled valleys and snow-covered mountains, but is that necessarily the ideal state of the earth?

Is it better for Greenland to be green, or to be covered in an ice sheet? Is it better for Canada's northernmost territory to be useless, or productive? Why do we celebrate the delicacy of the tundra biotope? Is frozen soil good?

Did white critters like polar

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bears gain a temporary selective advantage due to their white coats, and is it possible that animals with darker coats are now due their turn? Is this crisis, or just change?

We have only computer models and theories to predict global warming horror, but computer models warned us only a few years ago of global cooling, and occasionally still do.

On the other hand, we know, absolutely, that areas currently under the ice were once green and productive. We know this from core samples, but as the ice melts, we're actually finding things. We're finding people buried in the ice, and tools, and crops. And we're going to find more.

Finding people and plants buried under the ice is concrete scientific evidence, and is more credible than the projections of computer models. We can't even reliably model what interest rates or the nation's GDP is going to be next year.

Further, we know that there was once a greater amount of carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere than there is now, and that this greater amount of CO2 was associated with more productive plant growth and more temperate climate around the globe, as opposed to the extremes that

We know that there was once a greater amount of carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere than there is now, and that this greater amount of CO2 was associated with more productive plant growth and more temperate climate around the globe, as opposed to the extremes that we observe today.

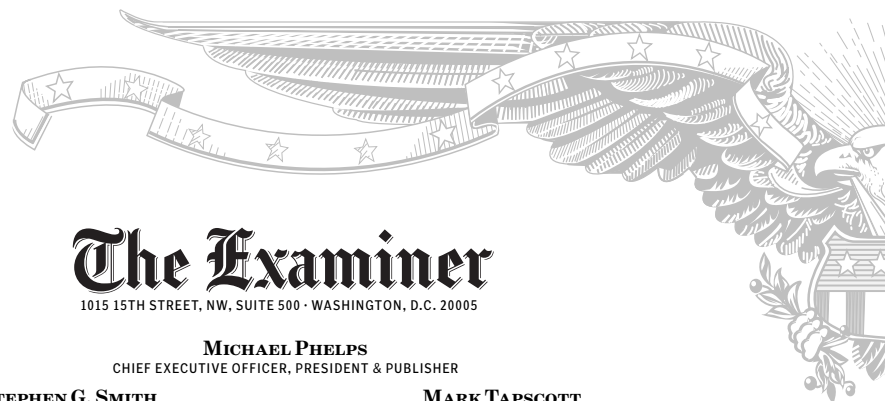
we observe today.

Yet such is the pessimism of global warming discussion that we hear only of the increased productivity of poison ivy as a result of increased CO2. We hear nothing of the increased productivity of corn, wheat, grasses and trees, which will themselves help process CO2 as they colonize soil once buried in ice.

Why do our discussions of global warming almost entirely avoid the undeniable fact that the ice wasn't always there? People were there before the ice, and people will occupy those valleys once again.

That is fact. Everything else is theory.

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VIEWPOINTS

Africa is the next stage of the war

By Olivier Guitta

On September 12, a U.S. plane flying food supplies to Malian troops was hit by gunfire coming from Tuareg rebels. This is just one of the latest examples of how the situation in Africa is volatile and dangerous.

Indeed, aside from the numerous, endless conflicts that are tearing apart the black continent (according to a recent UN report, between 1990 and 2006, 5 million people have been killed in Africa as a result of internal conflicts), the increasing presence of al Qaeda is making it all the more important for the U.S. to be present, one way or another in the region.

The U.S. is finally realizing how important the continent is, hence Africom, a new army command that will strictly deal with Africa. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African affairs, Teresa Whelan, stated on September 20 that "we will have no bases ... and we will not be deploying U.S. forces on the African continent."

This decision was likely made after months of vocal opposition from African countries to host a U.S. military base. Among them none were more vocal than Algeria and Libya. In fact, on April 30 influential Libyan leader Abdessalam Triki said bluntly: "Tripoli and Algiers are categorically opposed to Washington's will to establish a military command for Africa."

Also, when Morocco was seen as being a potential candidate to host Africom, the uproar made Moroccan authorities quickly deny the rumor. This comes to show how almost no countries in Africa (in particular those that are Muslim) want to be associated with the U.S. for fear of being seen as a pawn of Washington.

But behind the scenes, some of these countries desperately need U.S. help whether financial or military.

While al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has been very active since the beginning of the year, with a series of bloody suicide bombings in both Algeria and Morocco (a failed attempt against the U.S. consulate in Casablanca took place in April), it does not mean that it is not present and expanding in other Af-



A group of Tuareg nomads, right, look at a Nigerien government soldier near an army base in the Sahara desert north of Agadez, Niger in this 1998 file photo. Conflicts between regional factions are making a U.S. presence important. — AP

rican nations.

Benefiting from the fact that some regimes do not control most of the region under their supervision, AQIM is expanding in the Sahel (a lawless, desert area totally left to the control of rogue groups).

First reason: This is the ideal place to install a terrorist base since the area is almost impossible to patrol for such poor nations. This area represents a great hiding location from U.S. satellites since it is very mountainous and full of caves.

AQIM has installed mobile bases in the Sahel. Still, terrorists need to move as often as possible. They use Toyota Land Cruisers, refueling thanks to gas stations buried in the ground that they locate with GPS equipment.

They have heavy weapons, mortars and ground-to-air missiles, plus sophisticated equipment allowing them to scramble their Thurya satellite telephone communications.

Second reason: AQIM gets easy access to weapons. In fact in 2005, the Economic Community of West African States estimated that around 10 million light weapons were circulating within the 15

member states.

Also, according to a report of the French DGSE (equivalent of the CIA), since 2004, Algerian salafists have been training foreign recruits, in particular Mauritians and Nigerians.

The Sahel is also most likely now a training ground for jihadists coming from Europe or elsewhere and a base for Islamists groups kicked out of Algeria. "Their presence is our major concern," said Ould Dah, Mauritania's top counterterrorism official.

In light of these new developments, Africa is becoming one of the most important theaters of our war against radical Islam. It is not only the classical Islamist hotbeds of Somalia and Yemen that are sources for concern.

In fact now the Maghreb and the Sahel countries are infiltrated by violent and dangerous radical Islamist groups. The U.S. should do everything in its power to help our African partners win this battle.

Olivier Guitta is a foreign affairs and counterterrorism consultant in Washington, D.C. and the founder of the newsletter *The Croissant*.