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JUNE 7, 2024

Where's the Water?

BY ROBERT HUNZIKER



Image by Brandon DesJarlais.

“Whiskey’s for drinking and water’s for fighting,” a popular adage from the chronicles of the American West that’s starting to come back into vogue.

The world’s megacities are on a knife’s edge of water stress.

Climate change is clobbering water resources and testing the nerves of the world, especially megacities, e.g., Mexico City (pop. 22 million) could run dry this summer. Nearly 90% of greater Mexico City is in severe drought. The country has been in widespread drought since 2021-22. Subsidence is causing the city to sink 20 inches per year because of rapid groundwater extraction supplanting low reservoirs. The Metro is sinking unevenly. The rails are wobbly. The massive city could go dry this year.

Bogotá, a city of 8 million located in a humid patch of the northern Andes Mountains surrounded by cloud forests, has instituted water rationing as of April 15, 2024. The Chingaza Reservoir System is 15% full, and if rains do not return soon, it will run out of water in two months. The mayor recommended eliminating daily personal showers and made several other suggestions.

Human-caused climate change is enemy number one, and it all starts at the Arctic, influencing the entire Northern Hemisphere, too hot for too long melting reflective ice upsetting an age-old interchange with jet streams at 30,000 feet that drive weather patterns. Like a drunken sailor, the jet streams don’t know which way to go and neither do weather systems. Result, rains for Mexico City reservoirs are horribly weak, if at all, following years of unprecedented drought.

The United Nations General Assembly, NY was briefed last year by leading scientists: “Conflict, Climate and Cooperation.” It’s been 4,500 years since an actual war has broken out over water rights. It took place between two Mesopotamian city-states in what is now called Iraq.

Like 4,500 years ago, tensions over water are on the rise and climate change is largely to blame as fossil fuels lurk in the background. Major cities of the world are at risk of drying out and climate change is the problem, too hot for too long with drought on a rampage, festering big time trouble of Day Zero, as taps go dry, leading candidates: Mexico City, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Jakarta, São Paulo, Beijing, Cairo, Bangalore, Tokyo, London, Bogotá, Moscow, Istanbul (Sources: Euronews and World Resources Institute Aqueduct)

Global warming is impacting a very sensitive touch-and-go relationship between major cities and diminishing water resources. Extreme heat shrinks reservoirs combined with decades of neglect as water infrastructure crumbles and climate change shifts precipitation patterns making once wet regions drier than ever.

The 2024 World Water Development Report claims that nearly one-half of the world’s population experiences “at least temporary severe water scarcity.” Meanwhile, tensions over water are exacerbating conflicts worldwide, Press Release: Water Crises Threaten World Peace, UNESCO, March 2024. More to the point, 2.2 billion people don’t have access to “safely managed drinking water.” This is a guaranteed formula for trouble as desperate people take desperate measures... to survive.

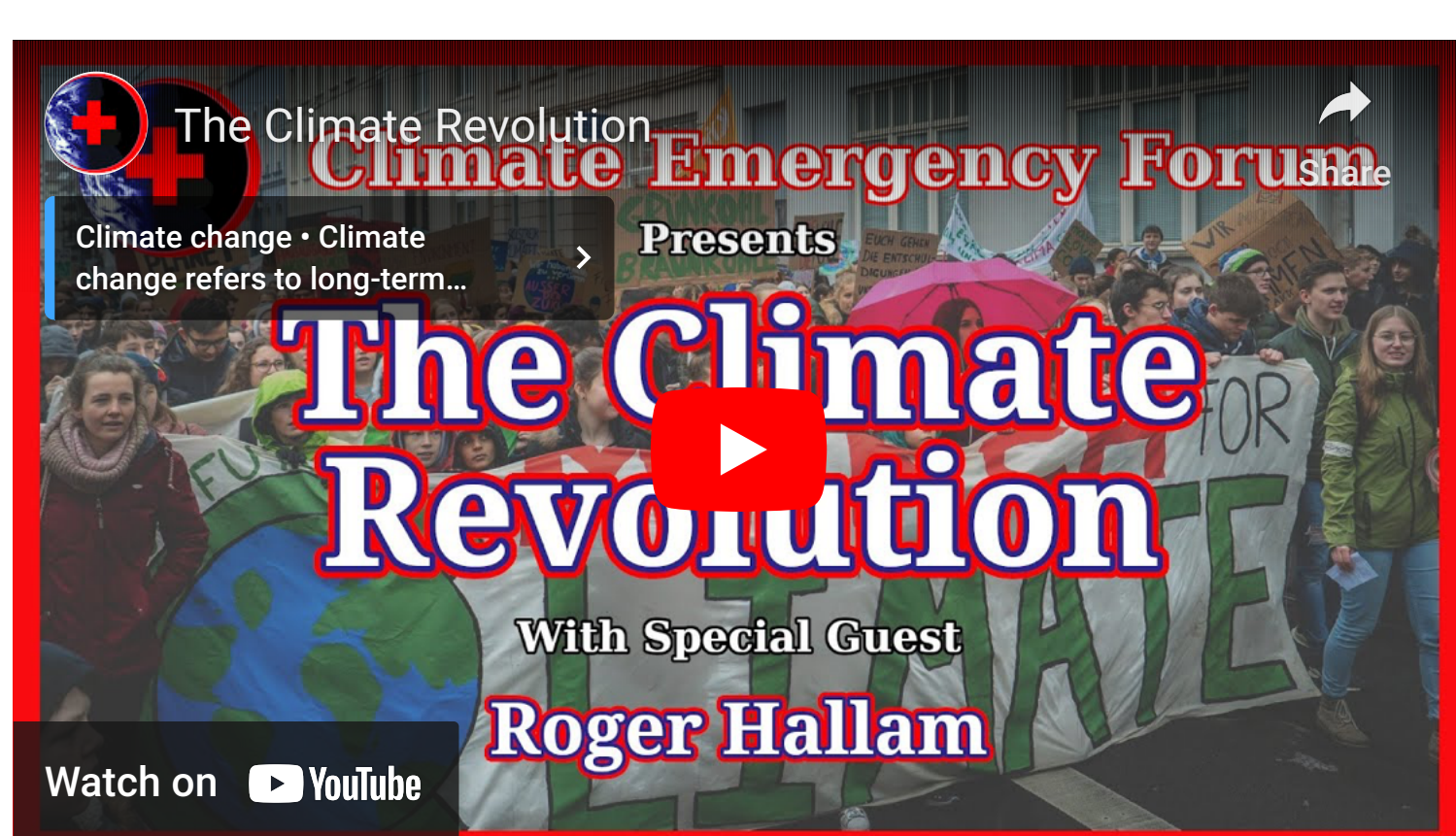
Recent water wars have spilled bloodshed in India, Kenya, and Yemen. And on the Iran-Afghanistan border, conflict rages over water from the Helmand River.

Based upon studies by the Pacific Institute, over the past 18 months there have been 344 instances of water-related conflicts in the world. According to Peter Gleick of Pacific Institute: “We also see a worrying increase in violence associate with water security worsened by drought – climate disruptions, growing populations, and competition for water.” (Source: Water Increasingly at the Center of Conflicts from Ukraine to the Middle East, LA Times, Dec. 28, 2023)

Climate change is creating a war path, forcing major urban centers to change lifestyles, living with less, and butting heads with a worldwide neoliberal capitalistic economic system that promotes endless growth at any and all costs.

By ignoring the dreadful influence of fossil fuels spewing CO2 whilst powering endless growth that rips apart predictable climate systems of the ages, which has now turned viciously unpredictable, the end may be in sight.

The ineptitude of world leadership to properly judge and deal with human-generated global warming, despite decades of warnings by top-notch scientists, and their blatant kowtowing to the fossil fuel interests, is leading down a very difficult pathway. As a result, there are rumblings about how to change direction, for example, The Climate Revolution broadcast on the Climate Emergency Forum featuring Roger Hallam, co-founder of Extinction Rebellion, who suggests a changing of the guard.



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