

# End Of The World Scenario

*Every few years,  
TIE's favorite  
disasterologist  
lays out his latest  
forecast of doom.  
Today's message:  
Forget Osama bin  
Laden. Mother  
Nature is the big  
time threat.*

BY MICHAEL A. LEDEEN

**C**atastrophists and disasterologists the world over have devoted so much energy and attention to terrorism of late that the professionals risk losing focus. Ever since Jeremiah, we've been taught to keep our eye on the big picture, and to keep the little events in their proper context. Ignore the petty assassin, the great alchemists chanted, watch the erupting volcanoes, the quaking earth, and the sliding land. Remain constantly alert to the infectious diseases, our modern prophets intone, remember that Nature is more violent than Man, and that Nature often uses Man to do her murderous bidding...thereby increasing the risk from our ancient burdens: pestilence, war and famine. Even as we are preoccupied with Osama and Omar, our attention is deflected from killer spores and microbes, from shifting ocean currents and simmering volcanoes.

Here, then, is a call to return to fundamentals:

## PESTILENCE

We must begin, as we so often have in these reflections on our collective mortality, with disease. And we refer the avid reader and the medical scholar to the writings of Rockefeller University's distinguished emeritus president, Doctor Joshua Lederberg, who for many years has been telling us that the microbes have taken our best shot, and are now waging a massive counteroffensive against antibiotics and the

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other “wonder drugs” that, not so long ago, were believed to have accomplished the final solution to the microbe problem. Bit by bit they advance, rolling back our firewalls: tuberculosis that beats our best medicine, AIDS that finds ways to overcome the miraculous “cocktails” that gave extra decades of life to HIV victims, and now some of the African plagues have reached our shores: Ebola, West Nile, and no doubt others whose names we do not know today.

These, far more than the most lethal components of al Qaida’s tool box, are the true weapons of mass destruction. We might catch the terrorists, and in short order we will destroy the Terror Masters—the evil regimes in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Saudi Arabia—that have empowered the terror network for the past decade, after the Soviet Empire was imploded by Ronald Reagan. The microbes are more patient than Saddam or the mullahs in Tehran, and their weapons are more fearsome than even his biologicals. We probably know what he and his minions are able to use, while Mother Nature is always concocting new bugs.

The key to mass murder by any disease is the delivery system. For the most part, it’s rather difficult to contract HIV; it requires activity on the part of the victim, whether it be sexual or use of infected needles. Unless you’re terribly unlucky, so long as you avoid the dangerous behavior you’ll be safe from the retrovirus. A more efficient disease moves through the air, spread either by insects or by “aerosol” (sneezing, coughing, or heavy breathing). West Nile’s got a chance, because it uses mosquitoes, long one of Mother Nature’s favorite delivery systems. To be sure, it used to be even better, when mosquitoes had free reign and spread the likes of yellow fever a mile a minute in the Canal Zone and thence to the U.S. proper, as mosquitoes carry malaria all over sub-Saharan Africa nowadays. We then counterattacked with DDT, as miraculous a weapon as any ever used, only to convince ourselves that the cure was as bad as the disease, and thus disarmed unilaterally by throwing away our flit guns. The malaria microbes have been particularly grateful for this reprieve, and have now evolved into varieties that we cannot kill before they kill us. Chris



*TV talk meister* **Chris Matthews** and malaria: *He should be grateful that he only got the old-fashioned version, and even so he had a real struggle to overcome it.*

the mosquitoes carry many germs, and this is one of those cases where it pays big dividends to kill the messenger.

#### **FAMINE**

For the most part, politics are the cause of famine. Populations are starved to death by their enemies, who alas are most typically their very own rulers. Ask the Zimbabweans, whose beautiful and fertile lands were until quite recently renowned as the bread basket of the heart of Africa. Today, many Zimbabweans face starvation because their farms have been shut down on the pretext of a radical redistribution of wealth from the traditional white farmers to new blacks. Only a paranoid megalomaniac who has lost favor with the majority of his people would have taken such a step, and Robert Mugabe is such a man. Indeed, he goes further, refusing so-called genetically altered food aid, preferring political correctness to the survival of his people.

Similarly deranged rulers have created misery and famine in Iran, another country once legendary for its agricultural bounty that is now in the grips of a national crisis of enormous proportions. As in Zimbabwe, the governmentally caused famine goes hand-in-hand with governmentally-caused impoverishment. Textile workers have been without their salaries for more than a year, and oil workers are months behind. Latest reports in August documented repeated assaults on

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*Microbes are now waging a massive counteroffensive against antibiotics and the other “wonder drugs.”*

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food warehouses in working-class neighborhoods south of Tehran and in the northeast.

There is a superabundance of food in the world (the European Union, like many countries, subsidizes the production of surplus agricultural products as a payoff to farmers. Much of it is simply destroyed, the rest—things that can be preserved in freezers, like butter—stored for future sales or for aid programs). There is no “natural” reason for people to die of hunger. So

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*The microbes are more  
patient than Saddam.*

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when you see famine, think politics.

The social consequences of famine are the awful symptoms of mass degradation: beggars and prostitutes on the one hand, graft and corruption on the other. Were either people free to choose their leaders, the current murderers would be voted out in a heartbeat, but they are not free.

The best long-term remedy for famine is not the usual program of international assistance and the armies of aid workers and givers, any more than the long-term remedy for AIDS is a flood of medicine to the infected poor people of Africa and Asia. Not that we should be indifferent to their plight, but if we were serious about really “fixing” the catastrophes we would address the root social and political causes. The cure for famine is political freedom, on the quite obvious assumption that no people would freely choose to starve themselves to death. A free Zimbabwe and a free Iran would prosper and feed both their own peoples and their neighbors, just as in times past.

But the combination of murderous rulers and the West’s conscience balm of “non-interference in others’ internal affairs” condemns these peoples to death and degradation.

**WAR**

Chances for war abound, from our own war against the Terror Masters, to the oft-stated intention by the hierarchs in the People’s Republic of China to annex Taiwan, to the long-simmering conflict between India and Pakistan, to the tribal massacres in black Africa.

The first two are classic examples of man’s ability to convince himself that things are other than what they are, thereby precipitating cataclysm. In each case, one of the contending parties (the terror states in the first instance, the Beijing regime in the second) boasts of military capabilities that it does not really possess. Osama bin Laden, for example, said repeatedly

that the West has fatal weaknesses that smaller armies can exploit, a theme that is often found in official Chinese military literature, along with fanciful references to super weapons called “assassin’s mace weapons,” á la James Bond.

Even if the terrorists were to get their hands on weapons of mass destruction, they could not destroy the United States; at most they could kill a lot of people. But China may soon constitute a major strategic threat, and if they actually came to believe in their magic weapons, they might be emboldened to challenge us directly, as over Taiwan. One should never rely on reality to shape the plans of one’s enemies; their perceptions of reality are far more important.

India and Pakistan thus far have settled for short, largely symbolic exchanges of conventional bullets and artillery shells; nuclear deterrence has worked as in the past. Of all the potential major wars, this one is probably the least likely.

Africa, on the other hand, is the mother of catastrophe. Not only are African wars likely, so are new diseases and new natural disasters.

One impending “natural” event needs to be noted before ending this End of the World overview. Despite the environmentalists’ frenzy over global warming and atmospheric pollution’s role in it, most climate change is determined by events in the oceans: indeed, ninety percent of climate is due to the oceans, only ten percent to atmosphere. And major change is underway in the North Atlantic. Forty percent of the Arctic ice cap has melted in the past four decades, dramatically changing the salinity of the North Atlantic Ocean by dumping the equivalent of twenty feet of fresh water into the sea. Oceanographers believe that quite soon, the ocean will become sufficiently “fresh” to change the course of the Gulf Stream, thereby bringing a rapid (5-10 years) drop in temperature to Northern Europe, North America and Canada. The order of magnitude has historically been around 10 degrees Fahrenheit. This does not seem to be due to human activity like pollution; it has happened at fairly regular intervals for thousands of years.

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*Africa is the mother of catastrophe.*

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A drop in temperature would produce colder winters—thus requiring more energy for heat—and cooler summers, reducing the agricultural yields in northern areas. It is not a true catastrophe, but it would be a major event, requiring considerable adaptation from us.

And unlike the other possible disasters, this one is as close to a sure thing as I can imagine.

Good luck to us all. ◆