

Our Survival Requires a New Standard of Living

In his 2006 book, The One Percent Doctrine, Ron Suskind cites Vice-President Dick Cheney's November 2001 announcement that if there was "a one percent chance" that a threat was real, "we have to treat it as a certainty in terms of our response." Cheney added, "It's not about our analysis, or finding a preponderance of evidence."

Speaking in the wake of the 9/11 events, the threat Cheney had in mind was terrorism. Cheney's doctrine became the justification for going to the "dark side," escalating the war on terrorism, not only invading and occupying Afghanistan and Iraq but engaging in unwarranted detention, torture, extraordinary rendition, extrajudicial assassination, and all manner of civil and human rights violations.

Virtually all of the Republican party, and most of the American public, went along. Even a mere one percent threat, perceived or alleged, was judged to be intolerable. America and the world had to be made safe.

So what is happening now with the Republican party, and the American public, in the face of a perceived threat that, according to the best intelligence, has a 95-99 percent chance of being real? I'm referring to global climate change, in particular global warming, and the emerging crises – including increased violence to control resources – that are already following in its wake. Why aren't we doing everything possible, moving heaven and earth, to mitigate if not avert this threat? The safety and security of all Americans and all inhabitants of the planet are at stake.

Renowned astrophysicist Stephen Hawking now gives us 100 years to find another inhabitable planet to colonize. He projects that by then our planet will have become uninhabitable. I have a three-year-old granddaughter who could possibly live to see that day, or die because that day approaches.

Hawking is optimistic in thinking that earthlings might be able to colonize another planet within 100 years. We're talking about finding some livable environment, similar to our planet, but at least several light years away. The trip alone could take decades. Even supposing he's right, just how many people might be able to make the trip? Not our current billions, not millions, nor even thousands. Not even the most elite one-tenth of one percent. If we, or most of our descendants, are to survive, we will have to do it here on Earth.

As a religious believer, I do not regard extinction as our preordained destiny. But neither do I believe that if we persist in fouling our nest and destroying our habitat, God will intervene to save us from our stupidity, greed, and vaingloriousness. It is amply clear that global warming is a threat we have brought on ourselves. We may once have been unwitting in our failures to be good stewards of our Earth, but the time for excuses is long past.

At least three things are required if we are to survive: 1) an end to modern warfare [our greatest single source of environmental defilement and degradation]; 2) a drastic reduction if not end to

fossil fuel consumption; 3) new technologies and practices that not only reduce but reverse the accumulation of greenhouse gases (methane, carbon dioxide, etc.).

None of this can happen without radical alteration in our standard of living. We need a much higher standard of living, one not measured by how much we consume, but how little – compared to what we produce for, and contribute to, the health of the planet and the common good of our global neighbors. The threat of terrorism, however real, hardly compares to the threat of turning Earth into a wasteland.

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