

A Dying Planet and a Forsaken People

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was created in 1988 to provide policymakers with rigorous assessments of climate science. Its reports are cautious, negotiated documents: every word in the *Summary for Policymakers* must be approved not only by scientists but by governments - including those most invested in fossil fuel economies. That process has given the world knowledge, but also illusions: a sense that disaster is distant, uncertainty still great, and time still available.

The truth is otherwise. Impacts that the IPCC projected for the end of this century are already here. Humanity is not confronting a future threat but living through the very collapse it once imagined belonged to tomorrow.

And climate breakdown is not the only arena where this blindness is revealed. **Since late 2023, the ongoing destruction of Gaza has laid bare the same incapacity to confront reality: the same refusal to acknowledge crimes as they unfold, the same justifications offered for the indefensible, the same silence where conscience is required.** Just as with the climate, what is treated as inevitable is in fact a process - a process that could be halted, but is instead allowed to accelerate.

A dying planet and a forsaken people are not isolated tragedies. They are symptoms of a single civilizational disease: a willingness to sacrifice truth, justice, and life itself in order to preserve the illusion of control.

Where Reality Has Outrun Prediction

The record is clear: the IPCC has consistently underestimated the pace and severity of climate change. While its projections have generally pointed in the right direction, reality has outrun them, sometimes by decades.

Arctic Sea Ice

- **Prediction:** The IPCC's First Assessment Report (1990) suggested major declines in summer Arctic sea ice would occur toward the end of the 21st century.
- **Reality:** By 2020, summer sea ice extent had already fallen by about 40% compared with 1979. Near-ice-free summers are now expected within the next two decades. The Arctic is warming four times faster than the global average.
- **Reference:** National Snow and Ice Data Center; Notz & Stroeve (2016); IPCC AR6 (2021).

Global Temperatures

- **Prediction:** The Second Assessment Report (1995) projected warming at 0.1–0.2 °C per decade.

- **Reality:** Since 1980, global surface temperatures have risen at ~ 0.2 °C per decade. The last eight years have been the warmest on record.
- **Reference:** NASA; NOAA; World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

Heatwaves

- **Prediction:** The Third Assessment Report (2001) stated that more frequent and intense heatwaves were likely by the late 21st century.
- **Reality:** Europe's 2003 heatwave, Russia's 2010 heatwave, and the Pacific Northwest's 2021 heat dome were so extreme that attribution studies concluded they would have been virtually impossible without anthropogenic warming.
- **Reference:** Otto et al. (2021); Philip et al. (2021).

Sea-Level Rise

- **Prediction:** The Fourth Assessment Report (2007) projected 18–59 cm of sea-level rise by 2100, but explicitly excluded rapid ice-sheet dynamics.
- **Reality:** Observed rise is already outpacing midrange projections, and current estimates suggest ~ 1 meter of rise by 2100 is likely.
- **Reference:** IPCC AR6 (2021); DeConto et al. (2021).

Ice Sheets

- **Prediction:** Earlier reports implied that Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets would remain largely stable for centuries.
- **Reality:** Both are now losing mass rapidly. Greenland alone loses ~ 278 gigatons of ice annually, and West Antarctica shows accelerating retreat.
- **Reference:** IMBIE (2020); Shepherd et al. (2018).

Permafrost and Methane

- **Prediction:** Substantial releases from permafrost and methane clathrates were considered a distant, centuries-away possibility.
- **Reality:** Methane concentrations have been rising sharply since 2007 (~ 12 ppb/year). Bubbling methane lakes in Siberia and thawing permafrost in Alaska and Canada show that destabilization has already begun.
- **Reference:** NOAA; Walter Anthony et al. (2016).

Ocean Heat Content

- **Prediction:** Models projected steady increases, but with wide uncertainty.
- **Reality:** The oceans have absorbed more than 230 Zettajoules of heat since 1980, with recent years showing record-breaking increases, outpacing model averages.
- **Reference:** Cheng et al. (2023).

Extreme Rainfall

- **Prediction:** AR4 (2007) warned that heavy precipitation events would likely intensify later in the century.
- **Reality:** Catastrophic floods have already struck - Pakistan in 2010 and 2022, central Europe in 2021, and the U.S. Midwest repeatedly - with intensities far beyond historical baselines.
- **Reference:** IPCC AR6 (2021); Lau et al. (2022).

Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC)

- **Prediction:** AR4 suggested weakening might occur over centuries.
- **Reality:** Observations show the AMOC is now at its weakest in at least a millennium. Early-warning indicators point to possible collapse within decades.
- **Reference:** Caesar et al. (2021); Boers (2021).

Wildfires

- **Prediction:** Early IPCC reports mentioned fire risk only in passing.
- **Reality:** Australia's Black Summer (2019–20), California's megafires, and massive blazes in Siberia, Greece, and Canada reveal fire behavior far beyond 20th-century norms.
- **Reference:** Abatzoglou & Williams (2016).

Ecosystem Collapse

- **Prediction:** TAR (2001) projected species range shifts and biodiversity loss later in the century.
- **Reality:** Poleward and upslope migrations are already documented. Coral reefs, once expected to degrade gradually, have lost half their cover in just three decades.
- **Reference:** Parmesan & Yohe (2003); Hughes et al. (2018); IPCC AR6 (2021).

Glacial Retreat

- **Prediction:** FAR (1990) anticipated slow and steady retreat.
- **Reality:** Thousands of mountain glaciers have already disappeared, with many more projected to vanish entirely within decades.
- **Reference:** Zemp et al. (2019); IPCC SROCC (2019).

Ocean Acidification

- **Prediction:** AR4 (2007) noted acidification as a concern but without strong emphasis.
- **Reality:** Ocean pH is declining faster than expected, threatening shell-forming organisms, coral reefs, and fisheries.
- **Reference:** Doney et al. (2020).

Carbon Sinks

- **Prediction:** Models assumed that natural sinks (oceans and forests) would continue to absorb about half of anthropogenic CO₂ emissions through the century.

- **Reality:** Observations show weakening capacity. NASA's OCO-2 satellite revealed that 2023 had the weakest land sink in two decades. Parts of the Amazon are already net carbon sources.
- **Reference:** Gatti et al. (2021); NASA OCO-2.

Earth's Energy Imbalance

- **Prediction:** A gradual increase was expected.
- **Reality:** Satellite data show Earth's energy imbalance has doubled since 2005, reaching $\sim 1 \text{ W/m}^2$ in 2023 - twice the IPCC's "best estimate."
- **Reference:** Loeb et al. (2021).

The conclusion is unavoidable: the world is not moving *faster than science*, but *faster than the IPCC's cautious consensus*.

The Scientific Method and the Runway

The scientific method demands that when predictions fail, hypotheses must be adjusted. Yet in climate science, while the direction of change has been correct, the pace and severity have been consistently underestimated. Rather than recalibrating forcefully, IPCC reports hedge: "low confidence," "medium agreement," "very likely by 2100." This language serves political consensus but betrays scientific urgency.

The consequence is fatal. Policymakers and the public are reassured that there is still time, when in fact the safe stopping distance is gone.

Climate change is not unfolding on paper; it is a high-stakes landing.

- The **aircraft:** human civilization, heavy with fossil fuel inertia.
- The **runway:** the carbon budget - shortened by emissions, weakened sinks, underestimated feedbacks.
- The **brakes:** mitigation and adaptation, dulled by political delay.
- The **pilots:** elected leaders, who misread the instruments, overestimate the runway, and underestimate braking action.

In aviation accidents, illusions of margin lead to runway overruns. In climate, the same dynamic holds. Illusions of carbon budget and sink resilience have led us to the edge of overrun. We may already have passed the point of no return.

The crash may not mean extinction, but it will mean cascading failures in the systems that sustain us - food, water, health, safety, stability.

Climate, Hypocrisy, and the Vilification of Stewardship

The moral failure of climate denial and political violence are not separate. They intersect in ways that reveal the depth of humanity's hypocrisy. Western governments and media often vilify Muslims as a threat, branding them as "terrorists." Yet these same countries are destabilizing the Earth's climate, rendering vast swaths of the world - especially in Muslim-

majority regions across the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia - increasingly uninhabitable.

The irony is stark. Per capita greenhouse gas emissions in many Muslim countries are only a fraction of those in the West. Many communities in these regions live closer to sustainability than industrialized societies, whether by necessity or by design. And within Islam, *khalifa* - stewardship of creation - is a core value. It insists that humanity is entrusted with the care of the Earth, not licensed to plunder it. That ethic is utterly incompatible with a system that sacrifices forests, oceans, and the atmosphere for short-term profit.

When Western nations call those with smaller footprints “terrorists” while their own economies drive planetary breakdown, it is literally the pot calling the kettle black. Worse, it exposes a deeper anxiety: the values of stewardship and restraint stand as a threat to an extractive order built on denial, consumption, and domination. **History will judge who were the terrorists.**

Conclusion

The IPCC has given humanity invaluable knowledge, but in veiling its warnings behind cautious consensus it has given policymakers an illusion of time that no longer exists. We are passengers on an aircraft whose pilots have misjudged the instruments, overestimated the runway, and underestimated the slickness of the tarmac. A crash is now the most likely outcome.

But even this misses the deeper truth. The worth of humanity’s survival does not rest only on whether we can keep the climate stable. It rests also on whether we can keep our moral compass intact. **The destruction of Gaza, ongoing since late 2023, shows the same pathology as climate collapse: atrocities treated as inevitable, processes that could be stopped allowed to accelerate.** The same blindness that numbs our response to rising seas and burning forests also numbs our response to human suffering when it is politically inconvenient.

If we will not defend the vulnerable, if we will not refuse atrocity, then what exactly are we trying to preserve in the struggle against climate collapse? A civilization that congratulates itself while it betrays both the planet and its people does not earn the right to endure.

The climate crisis shows we cannot see the physical runway clearly. Gaza shows we cannot see the moral runway either. Together they testify that the overrun is not just imminent - it is already underway. Both are processes, both can still be halted, but only if humanity finds the courage it has so far refused.