



WAR

★ **WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?** ★

WWII ECONOMIC MOBILISATION
AN ANALOGY FOR CLIMATE ACTION



CLIMATE VICTORY PLAN

AN ECONOMIC MOBILISATION

For many years, a small number of scientists, scholars and activists have called for a WWII-scale mobilisation to save civilisation from climate catastrophe — an all-out effort far beyond anything proposed in today's polite debates. This year, the idea has started to build serious momentum, with new advocates like Bill McKibben and Bernie Sanders, and the adoption by the Democratic Party in the U.S. of the call for an emergency climate mobilisation.

As the concept of a climate mobilisation starts to break into the mainstream, it is imperative that we discuss the specifics of this effort. In 2009, I co-authored, with Professor Jorgen Randers, the "One Degree War Plan". The Plan showed that we can realistically slash global greenhouse gas emissions to net zero in 20 years and then restore a safe climate through a carbon dioxide drawdown effort.

While it's very positive that people are now signing on to the mobilisation concept, it is critical that such a response be based on what our ethics and the science demands. The hard truth is the climate has deteriorated significantly since 2009 and this appears to be now accelerating.

There is no time left for multi-decade transition scenarios. At this late hour targets based around 2050, or calls for only zero emissions (without drawdown and cooling), are clearly not sufficient. They risk an unthinkable defeat by putting off the very concrete steps we need today.

It's important to understand what this means. WWII-scale climate mobilisation is not just "a big effort." It is not a major project or a key policy initiative like the Apollo Program or even the New Deal. It is a comprehensive, economy-wide approach that, if done correctly, represents the only realistic way we can overcome the climate emergency.

A mobilisation should be powerful and sweeping enough to provide effective protection in the face of civilisation-threatening climate disruption. It must be based in the most advanced climate science, and offer extensive policies necessary to be implemented in every sector.

**BREAK
THROUGH**

Written by Paul Gilding
Published by Breakthrough - National Centre for Climate Restoration
Melbourne, Australia | September 2016
breakthroughonline.org.au

When I published the "One Degree War Plan" in 2009, the very notion of action on this scale and in this style was dismissed. It was considered an interesting — almost entertaining — thought experiment. In the years since, people are slowly coming around to the idea. Whether motivated by the European refugee crisis, extreme weather events, global temperature records being smashed or just the mounting total weight of the evidence, they are coming to accept that not only is such a response necessary, it is also now conceivable.

Nevertheless, while you're reading this paper many thoughts will occur to you, as your mind tries to reconcile the huge gap between what is needed and what is today's political reality. You will consider how "unrealistic" a climate mobilisation on this scale is to achieve. You "can't imagine" political leaders acting in this way or how the incumbent business community will ever accept this level of economic transformation. Before that process begins, I'd like to establish one idea very clearly in your thinking:

Anyone who looks at the evidence objectively would conclude that a mobilisation on this scale is the only rational response to the level of economic, security and social risks posed by climate change. Historians will look back and wonder why it took us so long to accept it. So be clear — a mobilisation on this scale is simply inevitable, with the only question being when we get started.

Hard to imagine? Yes, it is.

But before you go there, you have to imagine the alternative. Without this response, we will see a descent through cascading climate change-induced crises with military conflict, accelerating costs, massive refugee flows, nations collapsing and global food crises as the world spirals down into economic and social collapse. This would inevitably require heavy government intervention and quite probably authoritarian rule to manage.

With that prospect unfolding, do you really think we will stand by and do nothing but observe and talk about the difficulty of acting? Now that is "unrealistic" and that I really "can't imagine."

As people come to accept this is the binary choice we face, we are getting closer to mobilisation each day. I've seen the climate change response evolve steadily since the late 1980's — first from the vantage point of Executive Director of Greenpeace International and, since then, travelling the world in my advocacy work. The response has never evolved faster than in the past few years.

**A mobilisation
on this scale is
the only rational
response to the
level of economic,
security and social
risks posed by
climate change.**

Recent developments illustrate the growing momentum:

In late July, the Democratic Party voted overwhelmingly to adopt mobilisation language in its official platform. The platform declares a “global climate emergency,” and commits to “a national mobilisation, and to leading a global effort to mobilise nations to address this threat on a scale not seen since World War II.” This is an important moment — not because this guarantees that the next Democratic President will launch such a mobilisation — but because it brings the idea into the mainstream debate and creates a foundation for future advocacy of the approach.

Then Bill McKibben, the leading voice of the American climate movement, published a full-throated call for WWII-scale climate mobilisation, in which he states: “We’re under attack from climate change—and our only hope is to mobilise like we did in WWII.”

The US based Climate Mobilization group has written a Victory Plan that demonstrates how the U.S. could eliminate net greenhouse gas emissions by 2025, contribute to a global effort to restore a safe climate, and reverse ecological overshoot through a massive WWII-scale mobilisation. It may not have every measure right, and it will further evolve as society researches and develops the plan, but it provides a clear and practical sense of what such an approach would really look and feel like. It shows us how we can win the war to save civilisation (see link to full report pg.).

Here in Australia, after nearly a decade since the publication of Climate Code Red, Breakthrough has been establishing a climate mobilisation platform reflecting its own local cultural currency. The platform has been bringing together the work of thought leaders and advocates who are actively working on emergency speed and scale responses to climate change. Community campaigning on the climate emergency has also been emerging within the grassroots movement.

With the mobilisation concept gaining acceptance, many ask: What will be the trigger for action? Some believe we must wait for a “Climate Pearl Harbour” moment to initiate a WWII-scale mobilisation. My study of history challenges this.

The lessons of issues like civil rights, emancipation of women and the end of slavery remind us that shifts of this scale don’t happen overnight. They evolve, unsteadily — pushed forward by a growing movement of dedicated supporters — before they achieve a symbolic moment that creates change. But those moments — like the bombing of Pearl Harbour or the march in Selma, Alabama — are just that, symbolic events creating political moments that allow society to shift. They are not the cause of the response but rather a spike in an ongoing and evolving process.

It is always on the edges of the mainstream that such big ideas begin. While people like me write papers and books putting ideas into society, it takes an active movement to bring ideas to reality. Of course we still have a huge amount to accomplish before we really get to work, and the broader climate emergency movement can build the support necessary to make this mobilisation a reality. But those deeply concerned about climate risk should naturally be supportive of such an approach.

After all, if you believe, as I do, that climate change poses an existential threat to civilisation, then the potential for a climate mobilisation comes as a great relief. We can still fix this! We just need a very effective roadmap for how.

However, there is a different reason to support the approach, and a different audience for the argument. And this is the key idea I want to leave you with.

A full-scale economic transformation driven by the urgency of climate change is very different from WWII in a profound way — one that means we can build allies for this cause in new and important places.

If you believe that climate change poses an existential threat to civilisation, then the potential for a climate mobilisation comes as a great relief.



The WWII mobilisation was launched in the face of tragedy and required enormous sacrifices in human life, economic cost and quality of life to respond. It was a deliberate but necessary tragedy to avoid a far worse tragedy.

A climate mobilisation, by contrast, could result in enormous reductions in the loss of life, huge economic benefits including innovation, technology and massive job creation and all while leaving us with a much better quality of life. And it will do so with exciting new technologies like electric cars and batteries that engage and enthuse people. It will leave our energy costs lower and supplies more secure, our cities cleaner, more people employed, our health improved and our world more united by common purpose.

Common purpose is key. People who lived through WWII on the home front — so weren't at the front line facing the human tragedy — speak almost fondly of the time. The sense of unifying purpose — the community working together to face down and overcome a frightening external threat, the shift in culture from self-focus and consumerism to collective focus and purpose — left them feeling their lives were better, happier and more worthwhile.

This crucial difference can significantly impact the arguments used — and the potential allies for — a full-scale climate mobilisation.

The global economy is in deep and serious trouble. Growth in the current model is grinding to a halt. Inequality and the lack of progress of the Western middle class has laid the foundation for political extremism, xenophobia and isolationism. It has thus brought us phenomena like Trump, Brexit and other political movements that further threaten the global economy. Policies to address this sluggish growth have led to both increased financial system risks and an enormous debt load — one there is no realistic way to pay back, just because growth is so sluggish. The resulting instability forms the shaky foundation on which the impacts of uncontrolled climate change will land — creating an economic and social crisis that will likely tip the system over the edge.

The elites and policy makers are wringing their hands in despair. They broadly agree on the problems but have no serious solutions to propose, except more of the same failed trickle-down economics. In this context, a climate mobilisation provides a far smarter way forward and the basis for building a serious alliance between those concerned about economic and political stability, those who are inspired by the technology and business opportunities, and those concerned about climate change.

The scientific and economic evidence of the risks posed by climate change demands nothing less than an emergency speed transition. But it also might be an approach that could quite reasonably be seen as a mobilisation to save the economy — and frankly it's the best idea we have to do so.

A climate mobilisation could result in enormous reductions in the loss of life, huge economic benefits including innovation, technology and massive job creation.





PAUL GILDING

Sustainability Writer & Advisor

Paul Gilding has spent 35 years doing everything he can think of to change the world. He has served in the Australian military, chased nuclear armed aircraft carriers in small inflatable boats, plugged up industrial waste discharge pipes, been global CEO of Greenpeace, taught at Cambridge University, owned and run two ground-breaking sustainability focused companies, and been a close confidant and advisor to the CEOs of some of the world's largest companies.

Despite his clear lack of progress, the unstoppable and flexible optimist is now an author and advocate. His widely acclaimed book "The Great Disruption" prompted Tom Friedman to write in the New York Times: "Ignore Gilding at your peril". Paul now travels the world alerting people - in business, community groups, government and even the military - to the global economic and ecological crisis now unfolding around us as the world economy reaches and passes the limits to growth.

Paul is confident we can get through what's coming and, in fact, thinks we will rise to the occasion with change on a scale and at a speed that is incomprehensible today. He tells us to get prepared for The Great Disruption and "the end of shopping" as we reinvent the global economy and our model of social progress.

Paul's history is one of deep commitment to social action and cutting edge experiments in social change in both the business and non-profit sector. His active engagement on sustainability has seen him break new ground in many areas as an entrepreneurial businessman and CEO, and as a creative campaigner and activist.

PUBLICATIONS

The Great Disruption - How the Climate Crisis will Transform the Global Economy (2011)

The One Degree War Plan (2010)

Carbon Induced Financial Disruption - The investment risk in fossil fuels (2010)

Sustainability and the global financial crisis (2009)

The Great Disruption letter (2008)

Scream Crash Boom 2 - The Great Disruption (2008)

Scream Crash Boom (2005)

Safe Companies: An Alternative Approach to Operationalizing Sustainability (2002)

Single Bottom Line Sustainability (2002)

The Climate Mobilization U.S.A

VICTORY PLAN

theclimatemobilization.org

DOWNLOAD
FULL PAPER

By Ezra Silk



Published by Breakthrough - National Centre for Climate Restoration
Melbourne, Australia | September 2016
breakthroughonline.org.au