The story then moves to Central Asia to explore the climatic elements of the Afghanistan war and the Pakistan-India conflict. While in the region, we take a side trip to Kyrgyzstan, because it is an extreme case of climatically driven social breakdown. Moving east, we visit Andhra Pradesh to explore the links between neoliberalism, climate change, and the spread of Maoist guerillas in eastern India. Jumping across the Pacific, we resume the story in Brazil, where I link climate change in the Nordeste to extreme violence in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas. In that section, Cold War-era repression and neoliberalism are seen working in concert. Then we move north to the border between Mexico and the United States, delving more deeply into the legacy of neoliberal capitalism, which—far more than Cold War violence—is the main root of instability in Mexico. We return to the United States and look at how border militarization and xenophobia are increasingly shaped by the meltdown in northern Mexico.

Finally, I consider what is to be done. I argue that the best way to address the effects of climate change is to tackle the political and economic crises that have rendered us so vulnerable to climate-induced chaos in the first place. But ultimately, mitigation remains the most important strategy. The physical impacts of climate change—rising sea levels, desertification, freak storms, and flooding—are certainly frightening, but so are the emerging social and political aspects of adaptation, which too often take destructive and repressive forms. We must change that.

Ultimately, the most important thing is mitigation: we must decarbonize our economy.

CHAPTER 2

Military Soothsayers

Dealing with such fractured or failing states is, in many ways, the main security challenge of our time.
—Robert Gates, secretary of defense, 2010

The Pentagon is planning for a world remade by climate change. You could even say that the Pentagon is planning for Armageddon. In the summer of 2008, Dr. Thomas Fingar, deputy director of national intelligence for analysis, gave the US Congress a classified briefing on the military implications of climate change: “Food insecurity, for reasons both of shortages and affordability, will be a growing concern in Africa as well as other parts of the world. Without food aid, the region will likely face higher levels of instability—particularly violent ethnic clashes over land ownership.”

“Closer to home,” continued Fingar, “the United States will need to anticipate and plan for growing immigration pressures. . . . Extreme weather events and growing evidence of inundation will motivate many to move sooner rather than later. . . . As climate changes spur more humanitarian emergencies, the international community’s capacity to respond will be increasingly strained.”

Military planning, conceived of as a response to events, also shapes them. Planning too diligently for war can preclude peace. America’s overdeveloped military capacity, its military-industrial complex, has created
powerful interests that depend on, therefore promote, war. Now the old military-industrial complex—companies like General Electric, Lockheed, and Raytheon, with their fabulously expensive weapons systems—has been joined by a swarm of smaller security firms offering hybrid services. Blackwater, DynCorp, and Global come to mind, but private prison companies like Corrections Corporation of America, Management and Training Corporation, and The Geo Group are also involved. This new security-industrial complex offers an array of services at home and abroad: surveillance; intelligence; border security; detention; facility and base construction; antiterrorism consulting; military and police logistics, analysis, planning, and training; and, of course, personal security.

Their operations are found wherever the United States projects power: in Afghanistan, running supply convoys, serving food, and providing translators; in Columbia, spraying coca fields and training the military; in the Philippines, training the police; in Mexico guarding businessmen; and all along the US-Mexico border, processing immigrant detainees. This new economy of repression helps promulgate a xenophobic and bellicose ideology. For example, private prison companies lobbied hard for passage of Arizona’s tough anti-immigration law in 2010.2

As a politics of climate change begins to develop, this matrix of parasitic interests has begun to shape adaptation as the militarized management of civilization’s violent disintegration.

The Apocalypse on Paper
A slew of government reports has discussed the social and military problems posed by climate change. In 2008, Congress mandated that the upcoming 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review—the policy document laying out the guiding principles of US military strategy and doctrine—consider the national-security impacts of climate change. The first of these investigations to make news, a 2004 Pentagon-commissioned study called “An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and Its Implications for United States National Security,” was authored by Peter Schwartz, a CIA consultant and former head of planning at Royal Dutch/Shell, and Doug Randall of the California-based Global Business Network.3 The report was made at the behest of octogenarian military theorist cum imperial soothsayer Andrew Marshall. Known to his followers as Yoda, after the wrinkled, dwarfish puppet of Star Wars fame, Marshall got his start at the RAND Corporation in 1949 as a specialist on nuclear Armageddon and its alleged survivability. He moved from RAND to the Pentagon during Richard Nixon’s presidency and served every president since.4 (It is interesting to note the presence of atomic-era Cold Warrior physicists among both the climate-change denialists and the military adaptationists. In his book How to Cool the Planet, Jeff Goodell remarks on the same set’s infatuation with the high-tech solutions promised by geoengineering, in particular Lawrence Livermore Laboratory’s Lowell Wood, a tie-dye wearing disciple of Edward Teller.5)

Schwartz and Randall’s report correctly treats global warming as a potentially nonlinear process.6 And they forecast a new Dark Ages:

Nations with the resources to do so may build virtual fortresses around their countries, preserving resources for themselves. . . . As famine, disease, and weather-related disasters strike due to the abrupt climate change, many countries’ needs will exceed their carrying capacity. This will create a sense of desperation, which is likely to lead to offensive aggression in order to reclaim balance. . . . Europe will be struggling internally, large numbers of refugees washing up on its shores and Asia in serious crisis over food and water. Disruption and conflict will be endemic features of life. Once again, warfare would define human life.7

In 2007 there came more reports on climate and security. One, from the Pentagon-connected think tank CNA Corporation, convened an advisory board of high-ranking former military officers to examine the issues—among them General Gordon Sullivan, former chief of staff, US Army; Admiral Donald Pilling, former vice chief of naval operations; Admiral Joseph Prueher, former commander in chief of the US Pacific Command; and General Anthony Zinni, retired US Marine Corps and former commander in chief of US Central Command. That report
envisioned permanent counterinsurgency on a global scale. Here is one salient excerpt:

Climate change acts as a threat multiplier for instability in some of the most volatile regions of the world. Many governments in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East are already on edge in terms of their ability to provide basic needs: food, water, shelter and stability. Projected climate change will exacerbate the problems in these regions and add to the problems of effective governance. Unlike most conventional security threats that involve a single entity acting in specific ways at different points in time, climate change has the potential to result in multiple chronic conditions, occurring globally within the same time frame. Economic and environmental conditions in these already fragile areas will further erode as food production declines, diseases increase, clean water becomes increasingly scarce, and populations migrate in search of resources. Weakened and failing governments, with an already thin margin for survival, foster the conditions for internal conflict, extremism, and movement toward increased authoritarianism and radical ideologies. The U.S. may be drawn more frequently into these situations to help to provide relief, rescue, and logistics, or to stabilize conditions before conflicts arise.8

Another section notes:

Many developing countries do not have the government and social infrastructures in place to cope with the types of stressors that could be brought on by global climate change. When a government can no longer deliver services to its people, ensure domestic order, and protect the nation's borders from invasion, conditions are ripe for turmoil, extremism and terrorism to fill the vacuum... the greatest concern will be movement of asylum seekers and refugees who due to ecological devastation become settlers.9

In closing the report notes, "Abrupt climate changes could make future adaptation extremely difficult, even for the most developed countries."10

Another report from 2007, the most scientifically literate of the lot, titled The Age of Consequences: The Foreign Policy National Security Implications of Global Climate Change, was produced by the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Center for a New American Security. Its prominent authors included Kurt Campbell, former deputy assistant secretary of defense; Leon Fuerth, former national security advisor to Vice President Al Gore; John Podesta, former chief of staff for President Bill Clinton; and James Woolsey, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Age of Consequences laid out three plausible scenarios for climate change, each pertaining to different global average-temperature changes. The authors relied on the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change but noted, "Recent observations indicate that projections from climate models have been too conservative; the effects of climate change are unfolding faster and more dramatically than expected."11 The report conceives of future problems not in terms of interstate resource wars but as state collapse caused by "disease, uncontrolled migration, and crop failure, that... overwhelm the traditional instruments of national security (the military in particular) and other elements of state power and authority."12 Green ex-spook James Woolsey authored the report's final section laying out the worst-case scenario. He writes:

In a world that sees two meter sea level rise, with continued flooding ahead, it will take extraordinary effort for the United States, or indeed any country, to look beyond its own salvation. All of the ways in which human beings have dealt with natural disasters in the past... could come together in one conflagration: rage at government's inability to deal with the abrupt and unpredictable crises; religious fervor, perhaps even a dramatic rise in millennial end-of-days cults; hostility and violence toward migrants and minority groups, at a time of demographic change and increased global migration; and intra- and interstate conflict over resources, particularly food and fresh water. Altruism and generosity would likely be blunted.13
Other developed states have conducted similar studies, most of them classified. The Australian Defense Forces (ADF) produced a report on climate conflict in 2007, a summary of which was leaked two years later: “Environmental stress, caused by both climate change and a range of other factors, will act as a threat multiplier in fragile states around the world, increasing the chances of state failure. This is likely to increase demands for the ADF to be deployed on additional stabilisation, post-conflict reconstruction and disaster relief operations in the future.”

The European powers are also planning for the security threats of a world transformed by climate change. The European Council released a climate-security report in 2008, noting that “a temperature rise of up to 2°C above pre-industrial levels will be difficult to avoid. . . . Investment in mitigation to avoid such scenarios, as well as ways to adapt to the unavoidable should go hand in hand with addressing the international security threats created by climate change; both should be viewed as part of preventive security policy.”

In familiar language the report noted, “climate change threatens to overburden states and regions which are already fragile and conflict prone,” which leads to “political and security risks that directly affect European interests.”

In reality, this new map is just the old map—the geography of empire. Barnett even sounds a bit like economic historian Immanuel Wallerstein, using the “periphery” and “core.” Or consider how John Stuart Mill famously described colonial geography at the dawn of mercantilist capitalism: “Our West Indian colonies cannot be regarded as countries with a productive capital of their own. . . . [Instead, they] are places where England finds it convenient to carry on the production of sugar, coffee and a few other tropical commodities.”

Capitalism has always functioned as an international system. The origins of this mighty global economy arose from connections that stretched across the globe and involved the spice trade of the Dutch East Indies, the Atlantic slave trade, and the flow from Russia and Poland of grain, honey, and timber. And it may well be along these same lines that the world capitalist economy begins to unravel. Barnett’s Gap is not so much excluded
(or, as he says, “nonintegrated”) as it is historically exploited and politically subjugated. Thus, its states are too often weak and corrupt. Now, add climate change, and this geography—which had been making some progress in terms of the United Nations’ human-development index of well-being measured primarily in terms of income, life expectancy, and education—will sink into greater misery and violent chaos.  

**CHAPTER 3**

**War for a Small Planet:**

**Adaptation As Counterinsurgency**

The United States possesses overwhelming conventional military superiority. This capability has pushed its enemies to fight US forces unconventionally, mixing modern technology with ancient techniques of insurgency and terrorism... Defeating such enemies presents a huge challenge to the Army and Marine Corps.  


**Hard State versus Failed State**

Political adaptation presents stark choices. There is a real risk that strong states with developed economies will succumb to a politics of xenophobia, racism, police repression, surveillance, and militarism and thus transform themselves into fortress societies while the rest of the world slips into collapse. By that course, developed economies would turn into neofascist islands of relative stability in a sea of chaos. But a world in climatological collapse—marked by hunger, disease, criminality, fanaticism, and violent social breakdown—will overwhelm the armed lifeboat. Eventually, all will sink into the same morass.

However, another path is possible. Progressive political adaptation—coupled with aggressive and immediate mitigation—can involve moving toward greater cooperation and economic redistribution within states and between North and South. I will touch on these ideas at the end of this book. Unfortunately, the early stages of political adaptation do not inspire much confidence. The politics of the armed lifeboat seem to be winning.

IT WAS A SPLENDID little war in a pathetic little country—a classic case of old meets new, banana republic meets failed state. No one was sure why, but the two main ethnic groups were at war; refugees needed humanitarian assistance, and panicked crowds had to be controlled. The NGOs and a gaggle of pestering journalists were not helping. To restore order, the US Marine Corps had landed.

“Get back!” shouted a young marine trying to contain civilians who surged toward some sort of a feeding or detention station.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“These civilians need humanitarian assistance, and we have to screen them, check out that none of them are armed,” the marine said. A helicopter swept low overhead. From a high-rise building nearby came the muffled pop of gunfire.