

Screenscope, Inc.

EXTREME REALITIES: SEVERE WEATHER, CLIMATE CHANGE AND OUR NATIONAL SECURITY

Premieres Monday, December 15, 2014 on PBS

Matt Damon Narrates New Episode of Award-Winning PBS Series *Journey to Planet Earth*



Are the risks associated with extreme weather events threatening our national security? Can climate change contribute to the fall of political regimes and the strengthening of terrorist groups?

Extreme Realities: Severe Weather, Climate Change and Our National Security investigates these critical issues and points to innovations that can help us adapt to the increased probability of heat waves, hurricanes, floods and droughts — “*the*

new normal.” The latest episode in the award-winning *Journey to Planet Earth* series, ***Extreme Realities*** travels from Afghanistan to the Arctic, from Bangladesh to Benin, from Russia to the U.S. to explore the unexpected national security consequences of severe weather and climate change. Produced by Emmy Award-winning filmmakers Marilyn and Hal Weiner and narrated by Matt Damon, ***Extreme Realities*** premieres Monday, December 15, 2014, 10:00-11:00 p.m. ET ([check local listings](#)) on PBS.

Among those featured in the documentary are Pulitzer Prize-winning author and journalist Thomas Friedman, World Bank President Jim Yong Kim, former CIA Director James Woolsey, environmental visionary Lester Brown, and former EPA Administrator Carol Browner.

Extreme Realities explains how extreme weather is already affecting the geopolitical landscape. Investigative journalist Christian Parenti, author of *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence*, explains how drought has created an unholy alliance between poor Pashtun farmers and the Taliban in southern Afghanistan. “The only crop in Afghanistan that can survive – given the severe drought conditions – is opium poppy,” he said. “Poppy uses one-sixth the amount of water that wheat uses. So farmers turn to poppy because that’s a way that you can feed your family under these drought conditions.” In return for a fee from the farmers, the Taliban protect the illegal crop from eradication — and find a steady supply of future recruits among the farmers’ sons. Drought has also led to increased violent conflict over scarce resources in Kenya, a region already stressed by poor economic policies and weak local governments.

Extreme Realities examines the geopolitical threats posed by the increasing number of climate change refugees. “When we think about the connection between climate change and national security one of the biggest worries that people have is how extreme weather events — how climate change in general — is going to lead to increased refugees around the world,” said Andrew Light, Senior Adviser on Climate Change, U.S. Department of State.

India is facing the prospect of millions of refugees from Bangladesh, its poor neighbor to the East, where projected sea-level rise threatens to cover 60% of the country’s low-lying farmland. To stem the growing human tide, India has already constructed a 2500-mile barbed-wire fence along the border protected by armed guards — now one of the most dangerous frontiers in the world.

Extreme Realities also provides evidence that the devastating impact of climate change is already being felt. In 2010 a rare weather occurrence took place: the jet stream split in two, one arm dipping south over the Himalayas, where it picked up massive amounts of moisture, and the other arm flowing north over Russia. In Pakistan the annual monsoon rains became turbo-charged, resulting in devastating floods that left twenty million people homeless. With the Pakistani government overwhelmed by the scope and scale of the disaster, foreign aid workers rushed in to help the victims. Taking advantage of the situation, the Taliban stepped in to provide aid, threatening violence against outsiders and warning them to stay away. “People on the ground are suffering,” said Paul O’Brien, vice president of Oxfam. “They want help and they will look for help anywhere that they can get it – including from organizations that the United States views as terrorists.”

Meanwhile in Russia, the jet stream brought drought, heat waves, and thousands of wild fires. Temperatures rose to the highest in 500 years, with Muscovites suffering in 100-degree heat. Fifty-six thousand deaths were attributed to a combination of wildfires, smog and extreme heat. The Russian grain harvest failed, causing wheat shortages and soaring bread prices in the Middle East, a region that includes some of the largest wheat-importing countries in the world. What started out as a protest against the rising price of food soon escalated into a protest against a wide range of economic and human rights issues. It became what the news media quickly labeled the “Arab Spring.”

The connection between climate change and national security is also playing out amongst the world’s wealthiest nations. At the top of the world, a dynamic new landscape is emerging as the polar ice cap melts. With the sea ice rapidly retreating, the stage is set for a new gold rush; governments are scrambling to carve up the now-accessible oil and gas reserves in the Arctic. Russia has aggressively pursued its claims and has become the first country to drill for oil above the Arctic Circle. Leaked documents indicate that Moscow isn’t ruling out the possibility of armed conflict over this last frontier. And every other Arctic nation — the U.S., Canada, Norway and Denmark — has increased its military presence or carried out military exercises in the region.

Despite the daunting challenges extreme weather and climate change present, there are glimmers of hope. In Benin, solar technology has brought power and irrigation to thousands of people. In a testing facility in South Carolina, engineers simulate conditions found in wildfires, hurricanes

and windstorms with the goal of designing structures that can withstand the challenges of extreme weather. In the Netherlands, where two thirds of the population live below sea level, engineers and architects have designed seawalls, floodgates, moveable flood barriers, and homes that can float.

While it's clear that these innovations can ease the burden of extreme weather events, adaptation comes with a hefty price tag. But the cost of doing nothing may be greater. "Damage along coastal areas as a result of extreme weather events costs us about six billion dollars a year," said Jim Yong Kim, President of the World Bank. "By 2050 our estimate is that cost is going to go up to one trillion dollars a year."

"In this day and age, with the world tied to some extent by a possibility of different types of climate catastrophe, with it tied by the Internet, with it tied by international trade — we have an awfully hard time staying away from other countries' problems," said James Woolsey, Former Director, CIA. "We can ignore them if we want, but they may get worse."

In a world besieged by more severe weather events than ever, climate change has become a major foreign policy issue in the 21st century. This is the new normal.

Participants

- Jim Yong Kim, President, World Bank
- Paul O'Brien, Vice President, Oxfam
- Lester Brown, President, Earth Policy Institute
- Andrew Light, Senior Adviser on Climate Change, U.S. Department of State
- Kurt Campbell, Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State
- Christian Parenti, journalist and author of *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence*
- James Woolsey, Former Director, CIA
- Thomas R. Armstrong, Global Change Program, Office of the President
- Sherri Goodman, Former Deputy, Undersecretary of Defense
- Keya Chatterjee, Climate Scientist, World Wildlife Fund
- Heidi Cullen, Chief Climatologist, Climate Central
- Phil Radford, Executive Director, Greenpeace USA
- Thad Allen, Former Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard
- Carol Browner, Former EPA Administrator
- Tom Friedman, Author/Journalist
- Robert Freling, Executive Director, Solar Electric Light Fund
- Carl Hedde, Munich Re America

Credits

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Written & Directed By
HAL WEINER

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About Screenscope

Founded by Marilyn and Hal Weiner, Screenscope is a film production company based in Washington, DC that has produced more than 225 documentaries, four public television series and three feature films. The Weiners have won Emmy Awards for *The Earth Summit Pledge*, commissioned by the United Nations to open the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, and *Streets of Sorrow*, an NBC documentary about a support group that helps individuals cope with the violent death of a family member.

Screenscope's *Journey to Planet Earth* is a PBS series that reveals new ways of looking at the delicate relationship between people and the world they inhabit. The series is designed to help viewers understand and cope with the complexities of developing an agenda to deal with the most important environmental issues of the 21st century.

Additional information is available at <http://www.pbs.org/journeytoplanetearth/>

About South Carolina ETV

South Carolina ETV has a strong history of bringing quality programming to national public television and radio. From critically-acclaimed series such as *Firing Line* and *Piano Jazz with Marian McPartland* to countless award-winning arts, performance, documentary and international specials, SCETV Presents is dedicated to producing and presenting fresh, innovative public media programming for national and international audiences. SCETV is the South Carolina public educational broadcasting network with 11 television and eight radio transmitters, and a multi-media educational system. By using television, radio and the web, SCETV's mission is to enrich lives by educating, informing and connecting citizens, celebrating our culture and environment and instilling the joy of learning. More information is available at scetv.org.

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For further information and photos visit <http://www.pbs.org/pressroom>