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[Egypt declares Brotherhood 'terrorist group' – Middle East – Al Jazeera English](#)

Egypt's interim government has declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organisation, a move that gives authorities greater freedom to crack down on the group. Hossam Eissa, a deputy prime minister, announced the decision on Wednesday night after a lengthy cabinet meeting.

"The cabinet has declared the Muslim Brotherhood and its organisation as a terrorist organisation," he said.



The cabinet's announcement came one day after a [deadly car bombing](#) outside a police headquarters in the Nile Delta city of Mansoura. Fourteen people were killed in the blast, most of them officers, and more than 150 others were wounded.

A Sinai-based militant group, Ansar Bait al-Maqdis, claimed responsibility for the blast in a statement published online on Wednesday.

But the government blamed the Brotherhood for the attack, though it provided no evidence connecting the group to the attack.

The Brotherhood's London press office issued a statement on Tuesday that "strongly condemned" the bombing.

"Egypt suffered an ugly crime committed by the Muslim Brotherhood," Eissa said. "It is a clear declaration from [the group], which has not known anything but violence since its beginning."

The Brotherhood has staged near-daily protests since President Mohamed Morsi was ousted by the army in July following widespread popular protests. Thousands of its members have been killed and jailed since then, and the group has faced mounting legal problems.

In September, a court ordered the [Brotherhood banned and its assets seized](#), a decision that was upheld on appeal in November.

Wednesday's decision takes the ban a step further: Under the Egyptian penal code, members of the Brotherhood could now face up to five years in prison simply for belonging to the group.

Morsi himself is already in prison, facing charges that include espionage and terrorism. Most of the Brotherhood's leadership has also been jailed since the coup.

Ahmed el-Borai, the minister of social solidarity, said that the cabinet also would notify other Arab states which are signatories to international conventions against terrorism.

The Brotherhood has sister organisations, and extensive fundraising operations, in many countries around the region.

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Rogoff, Reinhart and Ricardian Equivalence

David Howden
St. Louis University – Madrid Campus
Email: dhowden@slu.edu

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The largest economics controversy of the year belonged to Ken Rogoff and Carmen Reinhart for their research describing the relationship between economic growth and government debt. Their research, based on their popular book looking at the striking similarities between recurring booms and busts, argued that there is a critical level of debt above which economic growth is compromised (Rogoff and Reinhart 2009, 2010). Loosely stated, they argued that government debt above 90 percent of a country's GDP is harmful to economic growth.

Earlier this year this conclusion was brought into disrepute when a review article argued that Rogoff and Reinhart's study was plagued by "coding errors, selective exclusion of available data, and unconventional weighting of summary statistics lead to serious errors that inaccurately represent the relationship between public debt and GDP growth among 20 advanced economies in the post-war period" (Herndon, Ash and Pollin 2013).

In the melee that ensued there was a critical point all but lost. There is a relationship between debt and growth, and whether Reinhart and Rogoff massaged their numbers to get the result in question is of only secondary importance. Like all great laws in economics, the quantitative relationship is never fixed though the qualitative relationship is definitively identifiable (Mises 1962: 62-63). Just as the basic logic of a binding price floor implies that, for example, a minimum wage will cause some marginal workers to be unemployed, the same logic yields no definitive result.

No self-respecting economist would argue that a 5 percent increase in the minimum wage will decrease employment by 2 percent. By the same reasoning, it befuddles belief that otherwise respectable economists Reinhart and Rogoff would invoke the same reasoning with their 90 percent debt-to-GDP cutoff. (In their defense, this figure was less important in their work than the popular press later made it out to be.)

If Reinhart and Rogoff are guilty of anything, it is of an overly narrow analysis that ignores some important variables. In particular, the exclusive focus on the role of debt on growth, while useful within the restricted confines of their study, lacks practical importance when viewed in isolation.

1. What's Debt Good For?

Consider the four uses an individual has for his money: consumption, investment, taxes and debt repayment. Consumption improves a person's well-being in the present, and investment does so in the future. Taxes fund either government consumption or investment, with the usual problem in identifying how valued either of those activities are. One fact is clear: to the extent that taxes reduce private income they hamper the ability for private individuals to use their earnings to improve their well-being. Debt repayment does the same. (My own article "The Quantity Theory of Money" in this issue further explores the implications of debt repayment on consumption and investment activity.)

An individual's well-being will be unambiguously highest when he has the largest portion of his income available to spend on consumption or investment activities. This implies that tax *and* debt minimization are both key factors. Note also that well-being is not just the social property of having a satisfied and content population; it also translates into higher levels of economic growth. More consumption expenditure today means that businesses must hire more employees and increase production to satisfy these demands. Increasing consumption expenditure might lead to more jobs in the present, but at the expense of the investment needed to increase the rate of economic growth in the future. Investment expenditure has a similar result, though it is aimed at satisfying consumption demands expected to prevail at some future time. The more investment expenditure we made in the present, the greater the rate of economic growth in the future (assuming all goes well, of course).

Taxes and debt repayment, to the extent that they reduce the amount of funding available for consumption and production activities, reduce economic growth and the well-being of society's members in the present.

Rogoff and Reinhart look at debt levels and the relationship to growth, and from this they get a crude measure of the effect of debt repayment on economic growth. I say it is a crude measure because the total level of debt is not the key factor. The amount of debt *being repaid each period* is vital, and this results from the total amount of debt scheduled for repayment and the prevailing interest rate.

However, taxes are also important and Rogoff and Reinhart largely sidestep this issue. This is not to criticize the Harvard economists, as their goal was narrowly focused on looking at the historical role of debt in times of crisis. In drawing policy conclusions, something the press was eager to tease out of their research, one needs to have a comprehensive look at the greater facts at hand.

Very few countries run high public deficits *and* levy high tax rates. The reason is, as we shall see, that it is difficult to do so and the result is often detrimental to growth. Instead, most countries treat the choice as binary: either high taxes and low deficits, or high deficits with low taxes.

One end of the spectrum might be Norway. Well known for its high tax regime, total Norwegian tax receipts totaled 42.2 percent of its economy last year. This small Scandinavian country has chosen to finance its public spending exclusively through taxes. Indeed, last year the Norwegian government ran a budget surplus of 13.9 percent of GDP thus reducing the amount of government debt outstanding. High taxes have removed the necessity for the government to finance itself through borrowing.

Take the opposite end of the spectrum. The United States is widely viewed as a low tax regime, and at 24 percent of its GDP the total tax collections from all levels of government are low relative to many of its developed counterparts. This low level of tax receipts has left the U.S. government dependent on borrowing to make up the remainder. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the United States runs one of the largest government deficits in the developed world, at 11 percent of GDP in 2012. Americans pay low taxes today for their services, but at some point in the future the bill will come due.

2. Quibbling about Ricardian Equivalence

In one sense, taxes and deficits are two sides of the same coin. Indeed, the British political economist David Ricardo first hypothesized such a relationship, only to downplay its practical relevance. In a nutshell, the hypothesis that now bears his name as "Ricardian equivalence" states that since governments can either raise money through taxes or bond issuances, and that these bonds must be eventually repaid (through taxes), the choice is not binary but unique – taxes now or taxes later.

Under one strict formulation, if a government incurs a large debt today individuals will bolster their savings in the expectation of future higher taxes to pay off the debt. This increase in savings decreases consumption by a similar amount, thus having the same effect as increased taxes would.

I'm not so sure it's as simple as that (and neither did Ricardo). The people who benefit from the deficit spending today may not live to see their taxes pay off that same debt in the future (Buchanan 1976). Perhaps most importantly, the strict interpretation of Ricardian equivalence views savings and investment as lost economic activity. Similar to how Keynes' paradox of thrift argued that only consumption expenditure can stimulate an economy, savings are viewed as a "leakage" from the system, and a form of lost income. Yet as Hayek (1931) so succinctly put it, investment in production must come prior to consumption, and thus savings is a necessary step in enabling demand to be fulfilled.

Despite some arguments as to what degree Ricardian equivalence holds quantitatively true, there is a basic truism in its qualitative message. Spending in the present that is not directed towards consumption and investment activity – including taxes and debt repayment – are net negatives that reduce our well-being. In this light we can agree with Mises' prescient analysis almost one hundred years ago: "it is fundamentally a matter of indifference whether [the government] ... imposes a one-time tax on him of half his wealth or takes from him every year as a tax the amount that corresponds to interest payments on half his wealth" (Mises 1919: 168, as quoted in Garrison 2001: 89).

Consumption improves our well-being today, and investment is aimed at improving it in the future. At times government expenditure can take on the appearance of consumption or investment activity, though it can never be valued as highly as voluntarily activities can be. People act to relieve their most pressing needs, and only by voluntarily directing their own income can we be certain that the most dire of these needs has been fulfilled.

Income spent repaying debt, especially public debt, removes the possibility of improving our well-being by expenditure on consumption that would directly provide satisfaction. Kenneth Rogoff and Carmen Reinhart have done a great service in making this apparent, and showing that too much debt (and more importantly, debt repayment) compromises growth. A look at the pernicious effects of taxes in reducing our well-being would tell a much more complete story.

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DECEMBER 25, 2013 10:02 AM / [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

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By: Tom Chatham

The Chinese have made no secret of their discontent with the massive money printing by the U.S. that is threatening to diminish their massive holdings. They are currently on a massive buying spree to get every ounce of gold they can as fast as they can. The U.S. interests are holding down the price of PMs in an effort to fool the average person into believing that everything is just fine. This manipulation is playing right into the hands of China as they continue to buy.

The amount of gold moving from London to the east is creating a drain on vaults in the west and it is only a matter of time before they go empty. When that happens, the price of physical will skyrocket and no amount of paper will be able to stop it. The end of the line for paper gold and silver is getting close. With China buying over 1,000 tons of gold every year for the past few years plus what they mine themselves, their vaults are filling up fast. Once they have a sufficient amount, they will complete the destruction of the Dollar with massive dumping of their U.S. bonds.

China has already signaled the end of the dollar when it recently announced it would start invoicing all of its oil imports in Renminbi. It has also announced it will no longer be adding any more foreign reserves to its holdings. This is an indication that China will begin to build up its own middle class to absorb much of its production just as the U.S. did in the last century. This is a clear signal that the loss of reserve currency status for the U.S. is not far off.

As if to make an even bolder statement, China is working on an agreement with Nicaragua to build a canal that rivals the Panama Canal. China is also talking about operating their own oil futures market that will be priced in Yuan. At least half of the OPEC nations have expressed interest in the endeavor.

As if life were not difficult enough in the U.S. right now, the loss of reserve currency status will hit like a financial tsunami that will push Americans over the edge before they know what hit them. This will cause all of our imports to increase in price until we can no longer afford them. This is a fact that few Americans know or understand. Most like to pretend everything will be fine and keep their head in the sand to stop any negative information from getting through but this crisis is going to run up and bite them in the ass whether they want to know or not. This is why so many will lose everything they have in the coming months. They can ignore reality but they will not be able to ignore the consequences of ignoring reality.

There are going to be rough times ahead and most Americans refuse to admit it and prepare for the worst. There has usually been someone or some thing to step in in the past and cushion the fall for most but this time there will be no one there to stop the pain. The death of

the dollar will be one of those times in life that everyone will remember for many years to come.

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[Analysis: As Egypt hardliners gain, scope for conflict grows | Top News | Reuters](#)

By Tom Perry

CAIRO (Reuters) – If there was any hope left that the generals who overthrew Egypt's elected president six months ago might ease the state's crackdown on dissent, a suicide bomb that ripped through a police station on Tuesday may have destroyed it.

The most populous Arab country enters the new year with deeper divisions in its society and more bloodshed on its streets than at any point in its modern history. The prospects for democracy appear bleaker with every bomb blast and arrest.

The army-backed government says it will shepherd Egypt back to democracy and points out that the state defeated Islamist militants when they last launched waves of attacks in the 1990s. But this time around there are more weapons and harder ideologies, and a bitter example of a failed democratic experiment to toughen positions on all sides.

Like much of the recent violence, the bombing that killed 16 people on Tuesday was bloodier than all but the very worst attacks of the 1990s. The tactic of using suicide bombers to hit security forces is more familiar to Iraq or Syria than to Egypt, which for all its history of militancy is one of the few big Arab states that has never experienced a modern civil war.

The blast was claimed by a Sinai Peninsula-based Islamist militant group, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, which has stepped up attacks on government targets in recent months and narrowly failed to assassinate the interior minister in September.

The blast set off mob attacks on the shops, homes and vehicles of people believed to be supporters of ousted President Mohamed Mursi's Muslim Brotherhood.

"After the funerals of the martyrs, angry people smashed my pharmacy and my brother's shop," said Mohamed Heikal, a Brotherhood activist in the city of Mansoura, scene of Tuesday's bombing. "We had nothing to do with what happened," he said, condemning the bombing as a terrorist attack.

With much of the public feverishly backing the government's calls to uproot the Brotherhood, talk of political accommodation is non-existent. Analysts see little or no chances of a political deal to stabilize a nation in turmoil since Hosni Mubarak's downfall in 2011.

Signs of escalation abound. Mursi and other top Brotherhood leaders have been ordered to stand trial on charges that could lead to their execution. They are charged with conspiring with foreigners to carry out a terrorist plot against Egypt.

Following Tuesday's attack, Prime Minister Hazem el-Beblawi declared the Brotherhood a terrorist organization.

Meanwhile, the frequency of attacks suggests militants are taking centre stage within the Islamist movement, further diminishing hopes of the state reaching an accommodation with moderates and strengthening the hawks in government.

One consequence could be to increase the chances of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi becoming Egypt's next president.

The army chief who deposed Mursi after mass protests against Brotherhood rule has yet to decide whether to run, an army source said. Though Sisi would almost certainly win were he to run, the source said he is hesitant partly due to the mountain of problems awaiting Egypt's next head of state.

But analysts say the increase in violence makes it less likely Sisi and those around him would trust anyone else with the reins of power.

"The more dire the situation becomes, the less a second tier civilian candidate will be seen able to take charge of the situation," said Michael Wahid Hanna, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation, a New York-based think-tank. "This type of deterioration will increase pressure on Sisi to run."

MOST SOLDIERS KILLED SINCE '73 WAR

Crowds that gathered outside the compound hit in Tuesday's attack to show support for the security forces brandished Sisi's portrait.

Egypt has experienced violence for decades including the assassination of President Anwar Sadat by an Islamist gunman in 1981, and attacks on tourist sites in the 1990s that hurt the economy. But civil bloodshed has now reached an unprecedented level.

A conservative estimate puts the overall death toll since Mursi's fall at well over 1,500. Most of those killed were Mursi supporters, including hundreds gunned down when the security forces cleared a protest vigil outside a Cairo mosque.

At least 350 members of the security forces have also been killed in bombings and shootings since Mursi's downfall. The state has declared them martyrs of a war on terror.

The army has suffered its greatest casualties since the 1973 Middle East war, most of them in the Sinai Peninsula, where the most heavily armed Islamists are based.

The blood spilt since Mursi's downfall has evoked comparisons with Algeria – a country pitched into a decade of civil war in 1991 when its army aborted an experiment with democracy because Islamists looked set to win power.

Some dismiss that comparison, arguing the past failures of militants in Egypt should dissuade Islamists from following that path.

But as the attacks spread beyond the Sinai Peninsula, the risks are compounded by the large quantities of weapons smuggled in from neighboring Libya since the downfall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, in a war that saw his arsenals looted by rebels.

"This particular incident shows that the group operating in Mansoura is very organized, well equipped and capable," said Mustapha Kamel Al-Sayid, a professor of political science at Cairo University, referring to the Nile Valley town where Tuesday's attack took place.

"This points to the difficulty of any kind of compromise between the government and Islamist groups."

FREEDOMS IN DANGER

The Brotherhood, most of whose leadership are in jail, continues to reiterate its mantra of peaceful resistance and denies turning to violence.

It is pressing a campaign of protests on university campuses where its followers routinely clash with the police.

But as that strategy fails to make much of an impact, there is a risk of radical logic winning over its supporters, posing a threat to the Brotherhood itself.

Analysts believe the security establishment now has a firm grip over the course of government, reasserting political influence that diminished after the 2011 uprising. Activists say the freedoms won in that uprising are in danger.

The state has widened a crackdown on dissent, on December 22 jailing three leading secular activists to three years in prison for breaking a law that severely curbs the right to protest – a major blow against those behind the January 25, 2011 revolution.

"What we see now is a security apparatus that really seems to be out of control, going after individuals and groups it has grudges against," said Nathan Brown, a professor of political science at George Washington University.

"You do sometimes hear murmurs that people in the leadership worry that an overly harsh set of actions will make the political divisions in Egypt worse, and there has to be some kind of lessening of the security crackdown.

"This bombing puts off that date."

Khaled Dawoud, a liberal politician, said the wave of Islamist attacks will make calls for reconciliation even less popular. He has continued to call for a political accommodation even after being stabbed by Mursi supporters in October.

"In any country where terrorism takes place, public freedoms and hopes for democracy suffer a retreat. That is the law of gravity," he said.

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[Thanks to Dredging and Coal, the Great Barrier Reef Is More Threatened Than Ever | Motherboard.](#)

By Jason Louv



Satellite image of the reef, courtesy NASA

On December 10, the Australian government approved the expansion of a coal port at Abbot Point in Northern Queensland. A victory for Australia's booming coal economy, it may also massively wound the nearby Great Barrier Reef.

That decision, however, has proved so massively controversial that the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has now [delayed its decision](#) on whether to grant permits to dump the dredge spoil in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park until January 31.

Expansion of the coal port will entail dredging 3 million cubic meters of mud from the site, which will then be dumped into land infill projects. Australia's environment minister Greg Hunt [told Reuters](#) that the current agreement was reduced from 38 million cubic meters of dredging to protect the environment, while [Greenpeace countered](#) that any dredging on this scale will have disastrous effects on the reef. Adding to the environmental toll is the 120 million tonnes of added coal shipping capacity the port's four new terminals will provide.

Abbot Point will handle exports from the Galilee Basin, a geological depression that boasts massive coal reserves, but which up to now has lacked export infrastructure. The project will also create a coal-shipping highway directly through the Great Barrier Reef for thousands of ships to export coal to energy-hungry Asia. According to the Christian Science Monitor, [Australia's coal exports](#), already the largest in the world, have increased by 30 percent within the last year alone.

Indian firm Adani Group, seeking resources for the subcontinent's similarly massive energy demands, will helm the Abbot Point project. Greenpeace estimates that the number of ships passing through the reef will increase from 1,700 a year to 10,150 by 2020. An \$18 billion liquid gas facility and pipeline will also be built at nearby Curtis Island.

Construction of the Abbot Point coal port reached provisional approval directly following the election of Prime Minister Tony Abbott—a [climate denier](#)—whose conservative Liberal-National coalition took power in September amid promises of mining and gas industry expansion. Hunt approved the construction of the coal port along with the proviso that it will be built with the "[strictest conditions in Australian history](#)."

Despite those assurances, both environmentalists and the Australian tourism industry were enraged by the December 11 decision. According to [a report from the reef's government authority](#), the Great Barrier Reef boosted the Australian economy by \$5.68 billion from 2011-2012, and created 69,000 full-time jobs, mostly in tourism. Those numbers, however, are dwarfed by the [\\$20 billion a year](#) in tax revenues paid by Australia's coal industry into federal and state budgets.

If the dumping permits are granted, it's just the latest blow to the Great Barrier Reef. The world's largest structure constructed by living beings, the reef stretches 1,400 miles along the east coast of Australia, and can be seen from space. It's also a Unesco World Heritage Site. The Great Barrier Reef, and coral reefs like it, are among the world's most diverse ecosystems, playing host to [about a quarter of marine life](#), despite only covering 0.2 percent of the ocean's total area.

While the dredging problem will likely remain relatively localized, the Great Barrier Reef has already been hit hard by climate change, and massive growth in the Australian coal industry will only make the problem worse. The reef's [coral cover has declined by 50 percent](#) over the last three decades due to pollution, ocean acidification, floods, cyclones and the epidemic spread of the crown-of-thorns starfish, which eats coral. Atmospheric carbon dioxide has also made it increasingly difficult for marine animals, including corals, to produce shells. That's on top of nearly a century of reef-killing [agricultural runoff and development](#). Charlie Veron, chief scientist of the Australian Institute of Marine Science, [has predicted](#) that the Great Barrier Reef has no more than 20 years left.

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Motorists in Pakistan are being forced to wait for hours to refuel their cars with compressed natural gas. Photograph: Farooq Naeem/AFP/Getty Images

When [Pakistan](#) first started promoting compressed natural gas to the nation's motorists in the 1990s, the alternative to petrol seemed like a wonder fuel.

Getting motorists to convert their cars to run on cleaner, cheaper gas would cure urban pollution and lower demand for the imported oil that was gobbling the country's foreign currency reserves.

Car owners loved it and today 80% of all cars in Pakistan run off compressed natural gas (CNG), according to the Natural and Bio Gas Vehicle Association (NGVA), a European lobby group. Only Iran has more gas cars running on the road.

But as the country struggles with a chronic gas shortage, Pakistan's 20-year CNG experiment seems to have been thrown into reverse gear.

The government has introduced strict rationing. And there have even been discussions about shutting down thousands of gas stations for the whole of the winter. "CNG is finished in Pakistan," said Owais Qureshi, the owner of a handful of once lucrative gas stations in Rawalpindi. "I'm not going to invest any more money in it."

It has been years since he has been legally allowed to sell and install CNG conversion "kits": essentially large gas cylinders that are placed in the boot of a car to feed the engine. The system allows for cars to still be able to use petrol instead, if required.

Although CNG is popular with an estimated 2.8m motorists in Pakistan, according to the NGVA, the increasingly scarce resource is also in demand from other sectors – including the country's factories and for domestic use.

"The government has been left with little choice but to put a lid on it because there simply isn't much gas left," said Farrukh Saleem, an economist. "It has been a massive policy failure because the government actively promoted CNG knowing full well that natural gas reserves would not last beyond 25 years."

Successive governments heavily subsidised CNG, ran schemes to encourage car conversions and dished out licences to political allies to build gas stations.

But abandoned stations are now a common sight around the country. So too are queues of hundreds of motorists waiting to fill their cars on Wednesdays – the last remaining day of the week in many places on which CNG is legally allowed to be sold.

This weekly ordeal for CNG users is compounded by a chronic lack of electricity, the other aspect of Pakistan's energy crisis. And because electricity is needed to run the gas compressors used by CNG stations car re-filling grinds to a halt during the many power cuts.

But cash-strapped motorists are usually prepared to queue for many hours for the gas to be turned back on, with many saying they cannot afford the higher price of petrol.

"All over the world countries are promoting CNG but in Pakistan they are killing it off," said Ghiyas Abdullah Paracha, chairman of All Pakistan CNG Association.

"If we don't have enough gas we should import LNG [liquid natural gas]."

Pakistan, however, has failed to build the infrastructure needed to import large amounts of gas from overseas. A legal challenge by Pakistan's activist supreme court killed off one scheme to build a massive LNG terminal in Karachi.

The other lifeline for Pakistan's CNG supply is a controversial, multi-billion dollar pipeline to import natural gas from Iran. But Pakistan lacks the cash to build its half of the pipeline and the US has warned that completing the project would be in breach of US economic sanctions imposed on Iran.

Even as natural gas is being touted elsewhere in the world as a great alternative to petrol, soon it may be a mere memory in Pakistan.

Paracha fondly recalls the grand opening of the first CNG station in Karachi, which was built with foreign aid money. "It was the start of a revolution," he said. "Before CNG came you could not see the sky in the cities because the air was so polluted."

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Apocalypse 2012: The one-year anniversary of Nothing Happened Day

DECEMBER 25, 2013 8:27 AM / [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

Apocalypse 2012: The one-year anniversary of Nothing Happened Day

by [Brian Kaller](#), originally published by [Restoring Mayberry](#) | DEC 23, 2013

Three hundred and sixty-five days ago, millions of people felt a growing sense of — I was going to write “relief,” but it might have been “disappointment” — when the world didn't end on Fake Mayan Prophecy Day. Social media users around the world greeted the non-event with the kind of viral mockery everyone loves these days, so long as it's someone else's beliefs being mocked.

Such scares, however, can be serious business; a few weeks before the predicted end of the world, Britain's *Telegraph* newspaper reported that “panic buying of candles and essentials has been reported in China and Russia, along with an explosion in sales of survival shelters in America. In France believers were preparing to converge on a mountain where they believe aliens will rescue them.”



China might seem a strange place for the apocalypse idea to crop up, but the *Telegraph* said that “In China ... a wave of paranoia about the apocalypse can be traced to the 2009 Hollywood blockbuster ‘2012.’ The film ... was a smash hit in China, as viewers were seduced by a plot that saw the Chinese military building arks to save humanity.”

That \$200 million steaming pile of callous manipulation, I suspect, did a great deal to boost the 2012 myth from New Age circles into the mainstream. [As I wrote a couple of years ago](#) we might be able to forgive filmmakers for creating an overpriced package of ridiculous escapism like *The Core* or *Volcano*. Unlike those films, however, and like the fundamentalist *Left Behind* series, the film implied their fictional work presaged actual and imminent tragedies.

The filmmakers also dropped the “Rapture” name for extra points among the mega-church crowd, both in the script and in the cruel advertising line, “Will You Be Left Behind?” The difference is that the *Left Behind* authors seem to truly believe their dubious theology, whereas the filmmakers seemed to be exploiting the genuine fears of real people to make some quick cash.

Even if only one person in ten thousand takes them seriously, scares like the 2012 fakery can cost real people their lives. David Morrison, an astronomer at NASA, told the *Telegraph* that “at least once a week I get a message from a young person, as young as 11, who says they are ill and/or contemplating suicide because of the coming doomsday. I think it's evil for people to propagate rumours on the internet to frighten children.”

Apocalyptic scares have cropped up throughout history, and no one has written a more readable overview of them than John Michael Greer. His drily funny book *Apocalypse Not: Everything You Know About 2012, Nostradamus and the Rapture is Wrong* probably saw sales fall off after Nothing Happened Day, but should still be read as immunisation against the

next one.

One area Greer could have explored more, perhaps, was “Why Mayans?” Why not prophecies from Norwegians, or Saudis, or any other group? The answer seems to be twofold; first, it’s easier to project any beliefs or ideology you like on a now-extinct group that can’t protest. There are some descendants of the Mayans left, who have rightly objected to their pop-culture co-opting, but poor Third-Worlders do not generally have the media influence of California New Age gurus.

The other reason has to do with the exalted place Native Americans hold in popular culture. Of course Native Americans were the victims of the greatest human genocide in history, and even into the mid-20th century were portrayed in popular fiction as villainous savages. The response of the Sixties counterculture, though, was insulting in a different direction, projecting onto Native tribes whatever ancient wisdom they wanted to hear. This was done mainly through the use of Italians and other Europeans pretending to be Natives, making up New Age teachings and passing them off as authentic.

As John Miller wrote in the *National Review*, “Between 1960 and 2000, the number of Americans claiming Indian ancestry on their census forms jumped by a factor of six. Neither birth-rates nor counting methodologies can account for this explosive growth. Instead, the phenomenon arises in large part from the increasingly idealistic place Indians occupy in the popular imagination. Much of it is based on harmless sentiment mixed into a hash of unverifiable family legends and wishful thinking among folks who hang dream-catchers from their rear-view mirrors. But for a distinct subset, it’s all about personal profit. They’re professional imposters who have built entire careers by putting the sham into shaman.”

In some cases people just claim to be Native when they are not: author and provocateur Ward Churchill, actor “Iron Eyes” Cody, and many others. In others Europeans claim special insight into Native culture: Carlos Castaneda, for example, wrote his entire Don Juan series with supposed interviews based on a reclusive Yaqui Indian no one else ever met, while Lynn Andrews did something similar with her Medicine Woman series. *The Celestine Prophecy*, *Mutant Message from Down Under* — for a while it seemed every year brought more books from dead or remote peoples, offering life-coaching for upscale Westerners.

Some of these teachings are useful in their own right; Canadian ecologist “Grey Owl” married into Native American communities and wrote beautifully about protecting wilderness, even if he was originally an Englishman named Archie Blayney. “The Education of Little Tree” is a lovely story, even if it turned out to be fiction written by a white segregationist.

Decades of such romanticising, though, means that followers of the Sixties counterculture treat Native teachings with a special reverence — even fake ones, and they usually are. I know a number of people who sneered at Harold Camping’s numerous Rapture predictions who seemed to take the Mayan claims seriously — at least, as seriously as anyone takes anything these days, forwarding memes while filtering any convictions through layers of post-hip meta-irony.

The 2012 books I leafed through also yanked science-sounding terms into the discussion whenever possible, describing a “quantum leap” forward in human “evolutionary levels.” Basically, it’s the same technique used by the religious cult “scientology,” stealing bits of words from actual scientific research and using them to imbue their vague hokum with a bogus legitimacy.

Many people I talk to seem unconcerned with doomsday crazes, considering them throwbacks to an earlier age of superstition, which will die out eventually. It’s been a standard line of science and science fiction for a hundred years, recited in everything from H.G. Wells’ *Things to Come* to the *Star Trek* series, that technology would allow humans to outgrow primitive ideas. Instead, however, the opposite has happened — as people spent more of their hours staring at electronic media, they became more susceptible to superstition, for several reasons.

First of all, news and fake news travel instantly around the world, and are increasingly difficult to escape. A year ago today, I was listening to neighbours talk about the alleged Mayan prophecy ... at our local pub in rural Ireland. Locals would have been sitting at the same pub fifty or a hundred years ago — several apocalypse scares ago — but would not have easily known about them; until a few decades ago, few places in Ireland had electricity or modern media. Today, though, people here hear the same celebrity gossip, and watch the same blockbusters and visit some of the same internet sites as people everywhere. Instead of a dubious notion having to infect a critical mass of people in a town before spreading to the next town, a con or conspiracy theory can appear everywhere in the world — to a teenager in Saskatchewan, an old lady in Turkmenistan and an Irish farmer — simultaneously.

The modern world has made us more susceptible to superstition in other ways; when we spend most of our time staring at glowing rectangles rather than living in the real world, it becomes easy to become isolated, paranoid, or trapped in a misinformed bubble of like-minded people. Also, when we spend most of our time moving pixels on a screen for a paycheck, it becomes all the easier to fantasise about fighting zombies or some other more hands-on existence.

Finally, the very nature of our online lives means that information flits in and out of our minds quickly, leading us to forget, only a year later, that there were millions of people who genuinely thought the world would end. It leaves us singularly unprepared for the next fake Apocalypse,

whose rumours are already circulating somewhere.

You might think that people are right to be alarmed, even if it takes a fake Mayan thing to alarm them. Between fossil fuels and climate change, an increasingly fragile economy and a disintegrating culture, humanity faces all kinds of problems. I've been writing about them for years; is it hypocritical of me, you might ask, to criticise someone else's doomsday theory?

But here's the thing: peak oil was never the apocalypse. When the theory of peak oil was revived around the turn of the millennium, some well-intentioned and otherwise beneficial thinkers saw in it the doomsday they had been waiting for. Ten years ago, however, when I wrote my first magazine cover story on peak oil, I said that we "won't wake up Amish one day," and when conventional oil peaked a few years ago, we didn't. Rather, the promising peak oil movement dissipated somewhat after that, perhaps because the countdown had ended and the world had not collapsed. Framing peak oil as the apocalypse harmed the movement's credibility, and undermined the very useful contributions of volunteers in local communities around the world.

Climate change is also not the apocalypse, in that sense. Almost all scientists agree that humans are causing climate change at a geologically alarming pace, but on a human scale the change is slow and scattershot enough to leave many non-scientists unconvinced. Even when events do happen – this or that city being devastated, a record-breaking summer, droughts and floods like no one has ever seen – no one can prove that climate change caused it, and with our short modern memories we quickly move on. Claiming that "we have only ten years left" to stop climate change, as some activists have done for decades, only discredits climate science in the eyes of the public when, ten years later, the changes have been small or quickly forgotten.

None of these crises in our culture, our economy, or in the living world constitute the Apocalypse of John of Patmos, or any of the rest of the Antilegomena. They are not the Big One people have been waiting for, and people need to stop waiting. None of them will wipe out everyone you don't like, and leave them sorry they doubted you. None of them will eliminate all those other humans standing in front of you in the grocery queue, leaving you with all their stuff.

I do expect a great many crises in the years to come – more weather disasters, economic crashes, wars and rumours of wars. I expect that actions that were once considered unspeakable might become commonplace, just as actions fifty or a hundred years ago are unthinkable to us, and vice versa. Preparing for such long-term events, though, means working with others, making your little corner of the world more resilient in the face of change, and adhering to a consistent set of principles even when the culture shifts tectonically under your feet. It means changing your life in a thousand small and tangible ways.

At some point, of course, the world will end – for you. That sobering realisation – in Greek, *Apokalypsi*, or Revelation – is what most apocalyptic scriptures are really about; the commonly cited passages about the end of the world take on a very different meaning when you posit that they are not talking about a universal end, but a personal one. That's what most religions are about: When done rightly, they help you spend your remaining years meaningfully, to think of others before yourself, to set an example the world can see, and to bring you closer to God.

Doomsday thinking, as in the Mayan 2012 belief, does the opposite. It encourages people to retreat into a bubble of believers. It discourages people from making small improvements, when everything is about to be swept away. It makes people passive in the face of predestination. It tells people that God will come to them, and they don't need to do anything.

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Kim visited the Command of Large Combined Unit 526 on Tuesday to mark the day his father became supreme commander [EPA]

North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un has warned war could break out “without any prior notice” and urged his military to bolster its combat readiness, state media reported. The call on Wednesday comes one day after a US-Korea Institute at [Johns Hopkins University report](#) said that satellite imagery suggested that the North might have begun producing fuel rods for its recently restarted nuclear reactor.

There has been heightened tension on the Korean Peninsula following the execution of Kim’s uncle and former mentor in an unusually public purge.

Seoul and Washington have warned of possible provocative acts by the nuclear-armed North following the execution of Jang Song-Thaek, a senior leader who was also the uncle and former political mentor of the younger leader.

Kim visited the Command of Large Combined Unit 526 on Christmas Eve, the North’s official Korean Central News Agency said.

“He instructed the unit to put utmost spurs on rounding off its combat readiness... always bearing in mind that a war breaks out without any prior notice,” it said.

The unit is based in the North’s western port city of Nampo, according to the South’s Yonhap news agency.

‘Ominous’ situation

The Johns Hopkins University report said that satellite imagery had identified facilities at the Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Centre that might produce fuel for North Korea’s recently restarted plutonium production reactor and the Experimental Light Water Reactor still under construction.

“The identification of these facilities indicates a more wide-ranging, extensive effort by North Korea to modernise and restart the Yongbyon complex dating back to 2009 than previously understood,” the report said.

South Korean President Park Geun-Hye called for “watertight security readiness” during her trip on Tuesday to a frontline guard post, as she described the situation over the border as “ominous”.

“We should react sternly and mercilessly to any provocations by North Korea,” she said.

The reclusive state’s propaganda mill has gone into overdrive in recent days, describing Jang as a traitor while extolling Kim’s leadership.

Tens of thousands of troops pledged loyalty to him in a mass rally on the death anniversary of his father last Tuesday.

The Kim dynasty has ruled the impoverished but nuclear-armed state since 1948 with an iron fist and pervasive personality cult.

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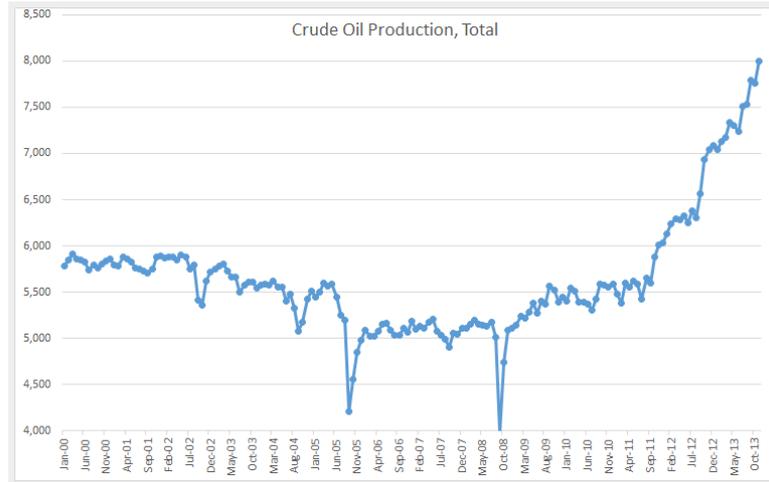
The U.S. Monthly Energy Review, US Oil Production, Peak Oil, CrudePeak Oil Barrel

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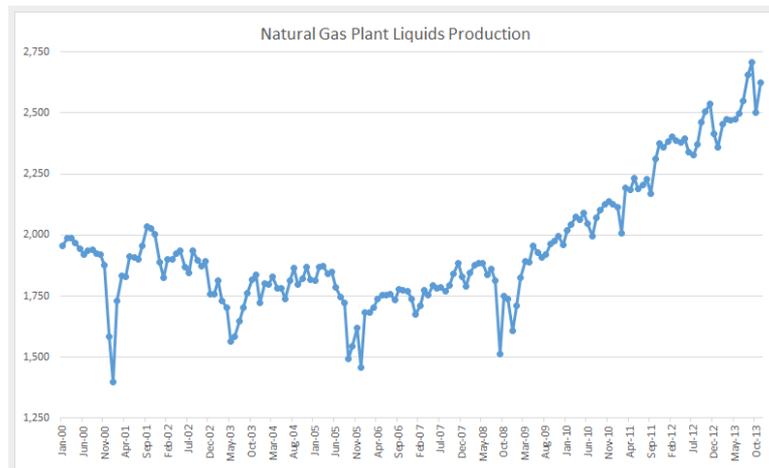
by RON PATTERSON posted on DECEMBER 24, 2013

The US [Monthly Energy Review](#) is now up with all the US Oil and Gas data for November. US (estimated) Crude + Condensate production was 8,002 kb/d for November. I think that will be revised later because the Bakken had a bad month in November.

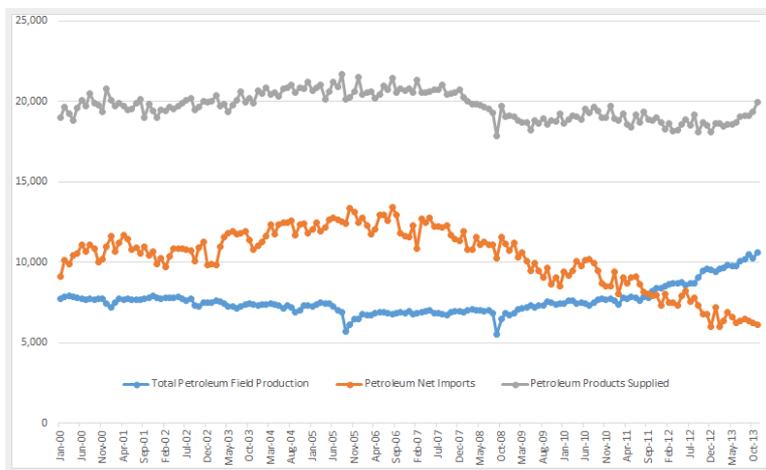


The average, so far this year, has been 7,438 kb/d and if December production is as much as November then the average for 2013 will be about 7,485 kb/d. AEO 2014 estimated 2013 production at 7,756 kb/d so it would appear that they are already a bit high with their prediction.

Natural gas liquids, along with natural gas is supposed to be a major player in our drive for "energy independence", is up about 1 million barrels per day since 2006.



In the chart below I have charted Net Imports along with Total Field Production, (NGLs + Crude) and Petroleum Products Supplied. The difference between Total Field Production and Petroleum Products Supplied is the distance we must go to reach energy independence.



Although most of my charts are not zero based, because I like to amplify change, I have made this one zero based because I wanted to show how far we have come and how far we have to attain energy independence.

Products Supplied increased by 614 kb/d in November and is up 1,864 kb/d since last December. And notice also that we are back to 20 million barrels per day of consumption.

Important Notice: The only reliable monthly world crude oil production numbers has come from the EIA. I find it extremely frustrating however that the EIA does not see world oil production as a priority. They seem to get later and later each month with their updates. When the old International Petroleum Monthly was published the data was only two months behind at most. Now we must rely on the [International Energy Statistics](#) page. Their last update was about 5 weeks ago with the July data. Now they are almost 5 months behind and I don't expect anything before the first of the year. Friday I posted Patricia Smith, the EIA person who posts the data, though she does not compile it. Here is the exchange:

To: Patricia Smith

Patricia, every day I check, several times, to see if the International Energy Statistics has been updated. And every time I am disappointed. Do you have any idea when it will be posted?

And I am worried, is there a chance that this report will be cancelled?

Thanks and I am anxiously awaiting your reply,

Ron Patterson

Here is the reply I received Monday:

Hello Ron,

Due to a staff shortages, technical and database issues, and other priorities, some of the data are late getting posted to the web. There have been so many changes, but hopefully the international program will not be cancelled. Please be assured that we are working very hard to get the thousands of data records updated, I just can't tell you an exact date. What specifically are you looking for?

Pat

I replied and thanked her for her reply and told her I was looking for world crude oil production data from all oil producing nations. But from the tone of her post I am not hopeful.

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