

Counterflow

By Steve Huntoon

A Climate ‘Game of Chicken’

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It has become increasingly clear that environmentalists are engaged in a game of chicken, with Earth in the balance.

The environmental community by and large will not tolerate any consideration of Plan B, solar geoengi-

neering (such as sand or salt in the stratosphere), which I’ve *discussed before*, contending this would discourage measures necessary to get to net zero (*Plan A*).

Gale Force Headwinds for Plan A

Meanwhile, the world isn’t adopting the requisite Plan A measures for a slew of reasons,

such as the reality that renewable resources are expensive, especially when they have to be firmed up by storage *to cover* renewable *droughts*. And we need to remember that higher electric rates are themselves *deadly*.

Carbon dioxide is the ultimate negative externality, meaning that any given reduction by any individual, state or even country provides no particular benefit to whoever makes the reduction. And that’s assuming that carbon reduction measures actually work — a Herculean assumption given *actual results* over the past 20 years.

And it won’t be enough to reverse the annual increase in the world’s carbon emissions (whenever that might happen). As *The Economist* points out, “what matters to the climate is not the rate of emissions, but the cumulative total. Until that stabilizes, all other things being equal, temperatures will continue to increase.”

Please note that Plan B need not last long if

the environmental community is right that renewable energy actually is cheaper than fossil fuel energy or will become so. But so far that’s not what the world is experiencing, as I’ve discussed and as a recent *Wall Street Journal op-ed piece* reinforced.

The Fear Factor

Let me address one other objection to solar geoengineering — that it might do scary things (just plug it into Google and you’ll get a parade of horrors). This objection ignores that we have been putting toxic aerosols like sulfur dioxide into the atmosphere for a couple of hundred years. As I *discussed before*, these toxic aerosols have greatly reduced global warming from what it otherwise would be, and the recent reduction in toxic aerosols due to regulation is greatly adding to global warming from what it otherwise would be. Yes, it’s ironic.

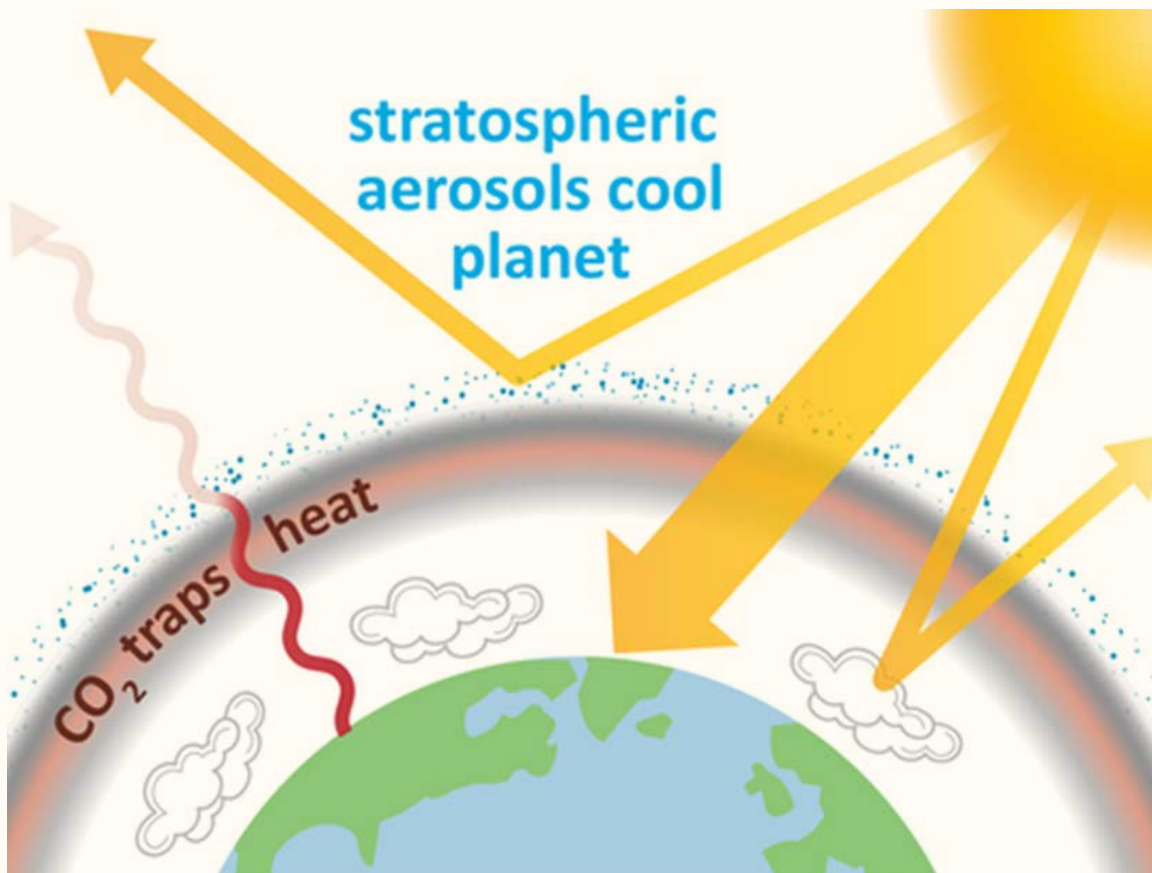
The key takeaway is that solar geoengineering could replace the toxic aerosols of the past with non-toxic aerosols like sand or salt. Not very scary.

Wrapping up

Where does that leave us? Because the environmental community cannot change the economic fundamentals driving decisions by most of the world, it should reconsider its demand that the world suffer the consequences of these decisions. The environmental community should constructively engage on Plan B.

The impossible dream should not be the enemy of the possible good. ■

P.S. For something completely different: If you’re a fan of classic rock, I’ve compiled, dare I say it, “iconic” videos from that bygone era. And best wishes for the new year!



David Keith's Research Group