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The Federal Government Should Help Hurricane Victims and Rebuild Destroyed Communities

George W. Bush

George W. Bush is president of the United States.

Hurricane Katrina has uprooted and left homeless hundreds of thousands of people. The national government must do what it takes to help people rebuild their homes and to restore the areas hardest hit by the storm, including the city of New Orleans. The United States also has a responsibility to help confront the poverty-related problems made evident in Hurricane Katrina’s aftermath. The hurricane has shown the generosity of the American people, and by working together the communities of the Gulf Coast can be made better than they were.

Good evening. I’m speaking to you from the city of New Orleans, nearly empty, still partly under water, and waiting for life and hope to return. Eastward from Lake Pontchartrain, across the Mississippi coast, to Alabama into Florida, millions of lives were changed in a day by a cruel and wasteful storm.

In the aftermath, we have seen fellow citizens left stunned and uprooted, searching for loved ones, and grieving for the dead, and looking for meaning in a tragedy that seems so blind and random. We’ve also witnessed the kind of desperation no citizen of this great and generous nation should ever have to know—fellow Americans calling out for food and water, vulnerable people left at the mercy of criminals who had no mercy, and the bodies of the dead lying uncovered and untouched in the street.

Stories of Generosity and Heroism

These days of sorrow and outrage have also been marked by acts of courage and kindness that make all Americans proud. Coast Guard and other personnel rescued tens of thousands of people from flooded neighborhoods. Religious congregations and families have welcomed strangers as brothers and sisters and neighbors. In the community of Chalmette, when two men tried to break into a home, the owner invited them to stay—and took in 15 other people who had no place to go. At Tulane Hospital for Children, doctors and nurses did not eat for days so patients could have food, and eventually carried the patients on their backs up eight flights of stairs to helicopters.

Many first responders were victims themselves, wounded healers, with a sense of duty greater than their own suffering. When I met Steve Scott of the Biloxi Fire Department, he and his colleagues were conducting a house-to-house search for survivors. Steve told me this: “I lost my house and I lost my cars, but I still got my family . . . and I still got my spirit.”

There is no way to imagine America without New Orleans, and this great city will rise again.

Across the Gulf Coast, among people who have lost much, and suffered much, and given to the limit of their power, we are seeing that same spirit—a core of strength that survives all hurt, a faith in God no storm can take away, and a powerful American determination to clear the ruins and build better than before.

Tonight so many victims of the hurricane and the flood are far from home and friends and familiar things. You need to know that our whole nation cares about you, and in the jour-
ney ahead you’re not alone. To all who carry a burden of loss, I extend the deepest sympathy of our country. To every person who has served and sacrificed in this emergency, I offer the gratitude of our country. And tonight I also offer this pledge of the American people: Throughout the area hit by the hurricane, we will do what it takes, we will stay as long as it takes, to help citizens rebuild their communities and their lives. And all who question the future of the Crescent City need to know there is no way to imagine America without New Orleans, and this great city will rise again.

The work of rescue is largely finished; the work of recovery is moving forward.

Recovery and Rebuilding

In the task of recovery and rebuilding, some of the hardest work is still ahead, and it will require the creative skill and generosity of a united country.

Our first commitment is to meet the immediate needs of those who had to flee their homes and leave all their possessions behind. For these Americans, every night brings uncertainty, every day requires new courage, and in the months to come will bring more than their fair share of struggles. . . .

Our second commitment is to help the citizens of the Gulf Coast to overcome this disaster, put their lives back together, and rebuild their communities. Along this coast, for mile after mile, the wind and water swept the land clean. In Mississippi, many thousands of houses were damaged or destroyed. In New Orleans and surrounding parishes, more than a quarter-million houses are no longer safe to live in. Hundreds of thousands of people from across this region will need to find longer-term housing. . . .

The federal government will undertake a close partnership with the states of Louisiana and Mississippi, the city of New Orleans, and other Gulf Coast cities, so they can rebuild in a sensible, well-planned way. Federal funds will cover the great majority of the costs of repairing public infrastructure in the disaster zone, from roads and bridges to schools and water systems. Our goal is to get the work done quickly. And taxpayers expect this work to be done honestly and wisely—so we’ll have a team of inspectors general reviewing all expenditures.

In the rebuilding process, there will be many important decisions and many details to resolve, yet we’re moving forward according to some clear principles. The federal government will be fully engaged in the mission, but Governor [Haley] Barbour, Governor [Kathleen] Blanco, Mayor [Ray] Nagin, and other state and local leaders will have the primary role in planning for their own future. Clearly, communities will need to move decisively to change zoning laws and building codes, in order to avoid a repeat of what we’ve seen. And in the work of rebuilding, as many jobs as possible should go to the men and women who live in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.

Our third commitment is this: When communities are rebuilt, they must be even better and stronger than before the storm. Within the Gulf region are some of the most beautiful and historic places in America. As all of us saw on television, there’s also some deep, persistent poverty in this region, as well. That poverty has roots in a history of racial discrimination, which cut off generations from the opportunity of America. We have a duty to confront this poverty with bold action. So let us restore all that we have cherished from yesterday, and let us rise above the legacy of inequality. When the streets are rebuilt, there should be many new businesses, including minority-owned businesses, along those streets. When the houses are rebuilt, more families should own, not rent, those houses. When the regional economy revives, local people should be prepared for the jobs being created.

Americans want the Gulf Coast not just to survive, but to thrive; not just to cope, but to overcome. We want evacuees to come home, for the best of reasons—because they have a real chance at a better life in a place they love.

Three Initiatives for Rebuilding

The cash needed to support the armies of compassion is great, and Americans have given generously. When one resident of this city who lost his home was asked by a reporter if he would relocate, he said, “Naw, I will rebuild—but I will build higher.” That is our vision for the future, in this city and beyond: We’ll not just rebuild, we’ll build higher and better. To meet this goal, I will listen to good ideas from Congress, and state and local officials, and the private sector. I believe we should start with three initiatives that the Congress should pass.

Tonight I propose the creation of a Gulf Opportunity Zone, encompassing the region of the disaster in Louisiana and Mississippi and Alabama. Within this zone, we should provide immediate incentives for job-creating investment, tax relief for
small businesses, incentives to companies that create jobs, and loans and loan guarantees for small businesses, including minority-owned enterprises, to get them up and running again. It is entrepreneurship that creates jobs and opportunity; it is entrepreneurship that helps break the cycle of poverty; and we will take the side of entrepreneurs as they lead the economic revival of the Gulf region.

I propose the creation of Worker Recovery Accounts to help those evacuees who need extra help finding work. Under this plan, the federal government would provide accounts of up to $5,000, which these evacuees could draw upon for job training and education to help them get a good job, and for child care expenses during their job search.

And to help lower-income citizens in the hurricane region build new and better lives, I also propose that Congress pass an Urban Homesteading Act. Under this approach, we will identify property in the region owned by the federal government, and provide building sites to low-income citizens free of charge, through a lottery. In return, they would pledge to build on the lot, with either a mortgage or help from a charitable organization like Habitat for Humanity. Home ownership is one of the great strengths of any community, and it must be a central part of our vision for the revival of this region.

"Americans want the Gulf Coast not just to survive, but to thrive."

In the long run, the New Orleans area has a particular challenge, because much of the city lies below sea level. The people who call it home need to have reassurance that their lives will be safer in the years to come. Protecting a city that sits lower than the water around it is not easy, but it can, and has been done. City and parish officials in New Orleans, and state officials in Louisiana will have a large part in the engineering decisions to come. And the Army Corps of Engineers will work at their side to make the flood protection system stronger than it has ever been.

The work that has begun in the Gulf Coast region will be one of the largest reconstruction efforts the world has ever seen. When that job is done, all Americans will have some-thing to be very proud of—and all Americans are needed in this common effort. It is the armies of compassion—charities and houses of worship, and idealistic men and women—that give our reconstruction effort its humanity. They offer to those who hurt a friendly face, an arm around the shoulder, and the reassurance that in hard times, they can count on someone who cares. By land, by sea, and by air, good people wanting to make a difference deployed to the Gulf Coast, and they’ve been working around the clock ever since.

The cash needed to support the armies of compassion is great, and Americans have given generously...

**Examining the Government Response**

The government of this nation will do its part, as well. Our cities must have clear and up-to-date plans for responding to natural disasters, and disease outbreaks, or a terrorist attack, for evacuating large numbers of people in an emergency, and for providing the food and water and security they would need. In a time of terror threats and weapons of mass destruction, the danger to our citizens reaches much wider than a fault line or a flood plain. I consider detailed emergency planning to be a national security priority, and therefore, I’ve ordered the Department of Homeland Security to undertake an immediate review, in cooperation with local counterparts, of emergency plans in every major city in America.

I also want to know all the facts about the government response to Hurricane Katrina. The storm involved a massive flood, a major supply and security operation, and an evacuation order affecting more than a million people. It was not a normal hurricane—and the normal disaster relief system was not equal to it. Many of the men and women of the Coast Guard, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the United States military, the National Guard, Homeland Security, and state and local governments performed skillfully under the worst conditions. Yet the system, at every level of government, was not well-coordinated, and was overwhelmed in the first few days. It is now clear that a challenge on this scale requires greater federal authority and a broader role for the armed forces—the institution of our government most capable of massive logistical operations on a moment’s notice.

Four years after the frightening experience of September the 11th, Americans have every right to expect a more effective
response in a time of emergency. When the federal government fails to meet such an obligation, I, as President, am responsible for the problem, and for the solution. So I've ordered every Cabinet Secretary to participate in a comprehensive review of the government response to the hurricane. This government will learn the lessons of Hurricane Katrina. We're going to review every action and make necessary changes, so that we are better prepared for any challenge of nature, or act of evil men, that could threaten our people.

"The cash needed to support the armies of compassion is great, and Americans have given generously."

The United States Congress also has an important oversight function to perform. Congress is preparing an investigation, and I will work with members of both parties to make sure this effort is thorough.

Hope for the Future

In the life of this nation, we have often been reminded that nature is an awesome force, and that all life is fragile. We're the heirs of men and women who lived through those first terrible winters at Jamestown and Plymouth, who rebuilt Chicago after a great fire, and San Francisco after a great earthquake, who reclaimed the prairie from the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. Every time, the people of this land have come back from fire, flood, and storm to build anew—and to build better than what we had before. Americans have never left our destiny to the whims of nature—and we will not start now.

These trials have also reminded us that we are often stronger than we know—with the help of grace and one another. They remind us of a hope beyond all pain and death, a God who welcomes the lost to a house not made with hands. And they remind us that we're tied together in this life, in this nation—and that the despair of any touches us all.

I know that when you sit on the steps of a porch where a home once stood, or sleep on a cot in a crowded shelter, it is hard to imagine a bright future. But that future will come. The streets of Biloxi and Gulfport will again be filled with lovely homes and the sound of children playing. The churches of Alabama will have their broken steeple mended and their congregations whole. And here in New Orleans, the street cars will once again rumble down St. Charles, and the passionate soul of a great city will return.

In this place, there's a custom for the funerals of jazz musicians. The funeral procession parades slowly through the streets, followed by a band playing a mournful dirge as it moves to the cemetery. Once the casket has been laid in place, the band breaks into a joyful "second line"—symbolizing the triumph of the spirit over death. Tonight the Gulf Coast is still coming through the dirge—yet we will live to see the second line.

Thank you, and may God bless America.
Federal Government Spending on Hurricane Victims Should Be Limited

Duane D. Freese

Duane D. Freese is a journalist and writer.

Politicians, including President George W. Bush, have made extravagant promises to help victims and rebuild the Gulf region following Hurricane Katrina. However, care must be taken to ensure that such programs do not bankrupt the federal government or make it more difficult to help victims of future disasters. Programs aimed at discrete groups such as hurricane victims inevitably expand into expensive government programs that serve every community hit by a disaster or problem. The government should focus its efforts on infrastructure and on providing educational training and limited assistance to hurricane victims.

With apologies to Isaac Newton, every catastrophic action leads to a massive political and economic overreaction. And with apologies to George Santayana, those politicians and bureaucrats who remember the lessons of history are doomed to have learned the wrong ones.

That certainly has been the case with Hurricane Katrina. The outpouring of support for people in the Gulf region from every part of the country is heartening. And federal spending to rebuild infrastructure is essential to the general economic health of the nation, even if it does temporarily increase federal spending. The Wall Street Journal quoted Ben Bernanke, chairman of the president's Council of Economic Advisers, "The costs of rebuilding after Katrina are, of course, substantial and will add to the budget deficit in the near term; incurring those costs is essential if we are to repair the unprecedented damage wrought by that natural disaster. This necessary spending should not, however, jeopardize the president's long-term deficit-reduction goals."

To repair and revive is one thing, though; to rebuild New Orleans better than it was, as President Bush promised . . . , or bring all the New Orleans residents back as Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco vowed . . . , is something else.

Republican senators have sent a letter to the president calling for a Marshall Plan. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich has suggested creating a new government-sponsored enterprise—a Gulf States Redevelopment Corp, backed by the federal government and regulated by regional officials, that would issue bonds and make loans for development and the levees. Jack Kemp, a former House member and head of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, has succeeded in pushing his long-championed enterprise zones idea, with Bush promising to create an Opportunity Zone for the gulf region.

A Question of Fairness

Everybody cares. But this outpouring of aid raises a big question of fairness—not to mention common sense in federal subsidies encouraging people to live below sea level in hurricane prone zones.

Already in Washington, D.C., homeless families and individuals who've waited in line for housing vouchers for months are being told they'll wait some more so aid can flow to the victims of Katrina.

Katrina victims will get $5,000 for training so they might
better their lives. Other poor people, not from hurricane-prone areas, pay for training themselves or remain stuck in low-paying jobs. To rectify this seeming injustice, some are calling for a massive expansion of vouchers and of training programs, all at taxpayer expense, to make sure no one is left out. As many of the poor are minorities, how can the president refuse them? After all, hasn't he admitted now that poverty among minorities is a legacy of discrimination, and doesn't the federal government, if it is going to relieve poverty of minorities in New Orleans have the same obligation in other places where poor minorities live? Are some poor more worthy due to location than others?

"Grand strategies to rebuild New Orleans better than it was will only lead to every community seeking similar advantages."

Helping the victims of Katrina is expensive enough, but it will quickly become unaffordable when the programs for New Orleans and the Gulf morph into programs to serve every other community with a problem.

How Government Programs Grow
That's what happened after the urban riots in the 1960s. Urban Development Action Grants aimed at revitalizing and improving inner cities were converted due to program failures into Community Development Block Grants for poor communities. And that morphed into programs to help poor sections in any community. The Government Accountability Office (formerly, the General Accounting Office) reported in 2000 that wealthy "Greenwich Connecticut received five times more funding per person in poverty in 1995 than that provided to Camden, New Jersey, even though Greenwich, with per capita income six times greater than Camden, could more easily afford its own community development needs."

As the National Academy of Sciences noted in a report in 1983, "Whatever the original reasons for these subsidies, they have often continued, almost as entitlements, without serious assessment of their impact on the flow of capital to other sec-
tors that might improve both national economic efficiency and interregional or intergroup equity."

The complaint here? It's not that the victims of Katrina don't deserve help. But helping others in ways that are not limited in scope will make us less capable of helping victims in future catastrophes.

The federal government should focus its aid on individuals and on infrastructure with importance for interstate commerce and national defense. . . . And the government can help individuals receive training, through the network of community and private two-year colleges around the country.

Grand strategies to rebuild New Orleans better then it was will only lead to every community seeking similar advantages. And it will make the entire nation poorer.
New Orleans Should Not Be Rebuilt

Klaus Jacob

Klaus Jacob teaches disaster risk management at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs.

Hurricane Katrina was in many respects a disaster waiting to happen. New Orleans, in addition to existing in hurricane country, lies ten feet below sea level. Levees and dams are stopgap measures that will not prevent the area from total submersion in the next hundred years. New Orleans cannot be rebuilt as it was. The government should instead plan a careful deconstruction of New Orleans.

It is time to swim against the tide. The direction of public discourse in the wake of Katrina goes like this: First we save lives and provide some basic assistance to the victims. Then we clean up New Orleans. And then we rebuild the city. Most will rightly agree on the first two. But should we rebuild New Orleans, 10 feet below sea level, just so it can be wiped out again?

Some say we can raise and strengthen the levees to fully protect the city. Here is some unpleasant truth: The higher the defenses, the deeper the floods that will inevitably follow. The current political climate is not conducive to having scientific arguments heard before political decisions are made. But not doing so leads to the kind of chaos we are seeing now.

This is not a natural disaster. It is a social, political, human and—to a lesser degree—engineering disaster. To many experts, it is a disaster that was waiting to happen. In fact, Katrina is not even the worst-case scenario. Had the eye of the storm made landfall just west of the city (instead of to the east, as it did) the wind speeds and its associated coastal storm surge would have been higher in New Orleans (and lower in Gulfport, Miss.). The city would have flooded faster, and the loss of life would have been greater.

Geological Realities

What scientific facts do we need before making fateful political, social and economic decisions about New Orleans's future? Here are just two:

First, all river deltas tend to subside as fresh sediment (supplied during floods) compacts and is transformed into rock. The Mississippi River delta is no exception. In the early to mid-20th century, the Army Corps of Engineers was charged with protecting New Orleans from recurring natural floods. At the same time, the Corps kept the river (and some related canals) along defined pathways. These well-intended defensive measures prevented the natural transport of fresh sediments into the geologically subsiding areas. The protected land and the growing city sank, some of it to the point that it is now 10 feet below sea level. Over time, some of the defenses were raised and strengthened to keep up with land subsidence and to protect against river floods and storm surges. But the defenses were never designed to safeguard the city against a direct hit by a Category 5 hurricane (on the Saffir-Simpson scale) or a Category 4 hurricane making landfall just west of the city.

"It is time to face up to some geological realities and start a carefully planned deconstruction of New Orleans."

Second, global sea levels have risen less than a foot in the past century, and will rise one to three feet by the end of this century. Yes, there is uncertainty. But there is no doubt in the scientific community that the rise in global sea levels will accelerate.

What does this mean for New Orleans's future? Government officials and academic experts have said for years that in about 100 years, New Orleans may no longer exist. Period.
Planning the Deconstruction of New Orleans

It is time to face up to some geological realities and start a carefully planned deconstruction of New Orleans, assessing what can or needs to be preserved, or vertically raised and, if affordable, by how much. Some of New Orleans could be transformed into a “floating city” using platforms not unlike the oil platforms offshore, or, over the short term, into a city of boathouses, to allow floods to fill in the ‘bowl’ with fresh sediment.

If realized, this “American Venice” would still need protection from the worst of storms. Restoration of mangroves and wetlands between the coast and the city would need to be carefully planned and executed. Much engineering talent would have to go into anchoring the floating assets to prevent chaos during storms. As for oil production, refining and transshipment facilities, buffer zones would have to be established to protect them from the direct onslaught of coastal storm surges.

Many ancient coastal cities of great fame have disappeared or are now shells of their former grandeur. Parts of ancient Alexandria suffered from the subsidence of the Nile delta, and earthquakes and tsunamis toppled the city’s famed lighthouse, one of the “Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.”

It is time that quantitative, science-based risk assessment became a cornerstone of urban and coastal land-use planning to prevent such disasters from happening again. Politicians and others must not make hollow promises for a future, safe New Orleans. Ten feet below sea level and sinking is not safe. It is time to constructively deconstruct, not destructively reconstruct.

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New Orleans Must Be Rebuilt

George Friedman

George Friedman is the founder of Stratfor, a private geopolitical and public policy intelligence firm. He also directed the Center for Geopolitical Studies at Louisiana State University.

The United States has historically depended on the city and port of New Orleans to handle agriculture and industrial commodities traveling up and down the Mississippi River. Hurricane Katrina has taken out New Orleans as effectively as a nuclear bomb. Port facilities were damaged, not destroyed, but they require a local workforce that after Hurricane Katrina became scattered across America. A paralyzed New Orleans will create a national economic crisis. Geopolitical realities dictate that the city and port of New Orleans must be quickly rebuilt in its present location.

The American political system was founded in Philadelphia, but the American nation was built on the vast farmlands that stretch from the Alleghenies to the Rockies. That farmland produced the wealth that funded American industrialization; it permitted the formation of a class of small landholders who, amazingly, could produce more than they could consume. They could sell their excess crops in the East and in Europe and save that money, which eventually became the founding capital of American industry.

But it was not the extraordinary land or the farmers and ranchers who alone set the process in motion. Rather, it was geography—the extraordinary system of rivers that flowed through

the Midwest and allowed them to ship their surplus to the rest of the world. All of the rivers flowed into one—the Mississippi—and the Mississippi flowed to the ports in and around one city: New Orleans. It was in New Orleans that the barges from upstream were unloaded and their cargos stored, sold, and reloaded on oceangoing vessels. . . . New Orleans was, in many ways, the pivot of the American economy.

"On Sunday, August 28, [2005], nature took out New Orleans almost as surely as a nuclear strike."

For that reason, the Battle of New Orleans in January 1815 was a key moment in American history. Even though the battle occurred after the War of 1812 was over, had the British taken New Orleans, we suspect they wouldn’t have given it back. Without New Orleans, the entire Louisiana Purchase would have been valueless to the United States. Or, to state it more precisely, the British would control the region because the value of the Purchase was the land and the rivers—which all converged on the Mississippi and the ultimate port of New Orleans. The hero of the battle was Andrew Jackson, and when he became president, his obsession with Texas had much to do with keeping the Mexicans away from New Orleans.

During the cold war, a macabre topic of discussion among bored graduate students who studied such things was this: If the Soviets could destroy one city with a large nuclear device, which would it be? The usual answers were Washington or New York. For me, the answer was simple: New Orleans. If the Mississippi River was shut to traffic, then the foundations of the economy would be shattered. The industrial minerals needed in the factories wouldn’t come in, and the agricultural wealth wouldn’t flow out. Alternative routes really weren’t available. The Germans knew it too: a U-boat campaign occurred near the mouth of the Mississippi during World War II. New Orleans was the prize.

**Hurricane Katrina Takes Out the Ports**

On Sunday, August 28, [2005], nature took out New Orleans almost as surely as a nuclear strike. Hurricane Katrina’s geopolitical effect was not, in many ways, distinguishable from a mushroom cloud. The key exit from North America was closed. The petrochemical industry, which has become an added value to the region since Jackson’s days, was at risk. The navigability of the Mississippi south of New Orleans was a question mark. New Orleans as a city and as a port complex had ceased to exist, and it was not clear that it could recover. The ports of South Louisiana (POSL) and New Orleans, which run north and south of the city, are as important today as at any point during the history of the republic. On its own merit, POSL is the largest port in the United States by tonnage and the fifth-largest in the world. It exports more than 52 million tons a year, of which more than half are agricultural products—corn, soybeans, and so on. A large proportion of US agriculture flows out of the port. Even more cargo, nearly 69 million tons, comes in through the port—including not only crude oil, but chemicals and fertilizers, coal, concrete, and so on.

A simple way to think about the New Orleans port complex is that it is where the bulk commodities of American agriculture go out to the world and the bulk commodities needed for American industrialism come in. The commodity chain of the global food industry starts here, as does that of American industrialism. If these facilities are gone, more than the price of goods shifts: the very physical structure of the global economy would have to be reshaped. Consider the impact on the US auto industry if steel doesn’t come up the river, or the effect on global food supplies if US corn and soybeans don’t get to the markets.

**The Shipping Issue**

The problem is that there are no good shipping alternatives. River transport is cheap, and most of the commodities we are discussing have low value-to-weight ratios. The US transport system was built on the assumption that these commodities would travel to and from New Orleans by barge, where they would be loaded on ships or offloaded. Apart from port capacity elsewhere in the United States, there aren’t enough trucks or rail cars to handle the long-distance hauling of these enormous quantities—assuming for the moment that the economics could be managed, which they can’t be.

The focus in the press and television has been on the oil industry in Louisiana and Mississippi. This is not a trivial question, but in a certain sense it is dwarfed by the shipping issue.
First, Louisiana is the source of about 15 percent of US-produced petroleum, much of it from the Gulf. The local refineries are critical to American infrastructure. Were all of these facilities to be lost, the effect on the price of oil worldwide would be extraordinarily painful. If the river itself became un navigable or if the ports are no longer functioning, however, the impact to the wider economy would be significantly more severe. In a sense, there is more flexibility in oil than in the physical transport of these other commodities.

"Unlike in other disasters, [the New Orleans] workforce cannot return to the region because they have no place to live."

There is clearly good news as information comes in. The Louisiana Offshore Oil Port, which services supertankers in the Gulf, suffered minimal damage while Port Fourchon, which serves it, has had no damage that could not readily be repaired. Offshore oil platforms have been damaged but, on the whole, they and the oil transportation network have generally held up.

The news on the river is also far better than might have been expected. The levees on the Mississippi continue to contain the river, which has not changed its course. The levees that broke and allowed water to pour into New Orleans were on the canal side and more weakly constructed. The Mississippi has not silted up and, while the Coast Guard continues to survey the river, it appears to be fully navigable. Even the port facilities, although obviously suffering some damage, are still there. The river as a transport corridor has not been lost.

A Lost City
What has been lost is the city of New Orleans and many of the residential suburbs around it. As I write, most of the population has fled, leaving behind a small number of people in desperate straits. Some are dead, others are dying, and the magnitude of the situation dwarfed the inadequate resources that were made available to relieve the condition of those who were trapped. But it is not the population that is still in and around New Orleans that is of geopolitical significance: it is the population that has left and has nowhere to return to.

The oil fields, pipelines, and ports required a skilled workforce in order to operate. That workforce requires homes. They require stores to buy food and other supplies. Hospitals and doctors. Schools for their children. In other words, in order to operate the facilities critical to the United States, you need a workforce to do it—and that workforce is gone. Unlike in other disasters, that workforce cannot return to the region because they have no place to live. New Orleans is gone, and the metropolitan area surrounding New Orleans is either gone or so badly damaged that most of it will not be habitable for a long time.

It may be possible to jury-rig around this problem for a short time. But the fact is that most of those who have left the area have gone to live with relatives and friends, or are in shelters far from New Orleans. Many also had networks of relationships and resources to manage their exile. But those resources are not infinite—and as it becomes apparent that these people will not be returning to New Orleans anytime soon, they will be enrolling their children in new schools, finding new jobs, finding new accommodations. If they have any insurance money coming, they will collect it. If they have none, then whatever emotional connections they may have to their home, their economic connection to it has been severed. In a very short time, these people will be making decisions that will start to reshape population and workforce patterns in the region.

"The largest port in the United States cannot function without a city around it."

A city is a complex and ongoing process—one that requires physical infrastructure to support the people who live in it and people to operate that physical infrastructure. I don’t simply mean power plants and sewage treatment facilities, although they are critical. Someone has to be able to sell a bottle of milk or a new shirt. Someone has to be able to repair a car or do surgery. And the people who do those things, along with the infrastructure that supports them, are for the most part gone—and they are not coming back anytime soon.

It is in this sense, then, that it seems almost as if a nuclear weapon went off in New Orleans. The people mostly have fled
rather than died, but they are gone. Not all of the facilities are destroyed, but most are. It appears to me that New Orleans and its environs have passed the point of recoverability. The area can recover, to be sure, but only with the commitment of huge resources from outside—and those resources would always be at risk to another Katrina.

"New Orleans is not optional for the United States' commercial infrastructure."

The displacement of population due to destruction, disease, and pollution is the crisis that New Orleans faces. It is also a national crisis, because the largest port in the United States cannot function without a city around it. The physical and business processes of a port cannot occur in a ghost town, and right now, except for the remaining refugees, that is what New Orleans is. It is not about the facilities, and it is not about the oil. It is about the loss of a city's population and the paralysis of the largest port in the United States.

**New Orleans Must Return**

Let's go back to the beginning. The United States historically has depended on the Mississippi and its tributaries for transport. Barges navigate the river. Ships go on the ocean. The barges must offload to the ships and vice versa. There must be a facility to make this exchange possible. It is also the facility where goods are stored in transit. Without this port, the river can't be used. Protecting that port has been, from the time of the Louisiana Purchase, a fundamental national security issue for the United States.

Katrina and the events following it have taken out the port—not by fatally destroying the facilities, but by rendering the area uninhabited and potentially uninhabitable. That means that even if the Mississippi remains navigable, the absence of a port near the mouth of the river makes the Mississippi enormously less useful than it was. For these reasons, the United States has lost not only its biggest port complex, but also the utility of its river transport system—the foundation of the entire American transport system. There are some substi-

tutes, but none with sufficient capacity to solve the problem.

It follows from this that the port will have to be revived and, one would assume, at least some part of the city as well. The ports around New Orleans are located as far north as they can be while still being accessible to oceangoing vessels. The need for ships to be able to pass each other in the waterways, which narrow to the north, adds to the problem. Besides, the Highway 190 bridge in Baton Rouge blocks the river going north for oceangoing vessels. Barges can pass under the bridge, but cargo must first be transferred to them, and for that a port is needed. New Orleans is where it is for a reason: the United States needs a city right there.

New Orleans is not optional for the United States' commercial infrastructure. Vulnerable to inundation, it is a terrible place for a city to be located, but exactly the place where a city must exist. With that as a given, a city of some kind will return there because the alternatives are too devastating. The harvest is coming, and that means that the port, or part of it, will have to be opened soon. The port area will have to be cleared, by herculean effort if necessary. As in Iraq, premiums will be paid to people prepared to endure the hardships of working in New Orleans. But in the end, the city will return because it has to.

Geopolitics concerns permanent geographical realities and the way they interact with political life. If the logic of geopolitics prevails, it will force the city's resurrection, even if it will be greatly changed, and in the worst imaginable place.