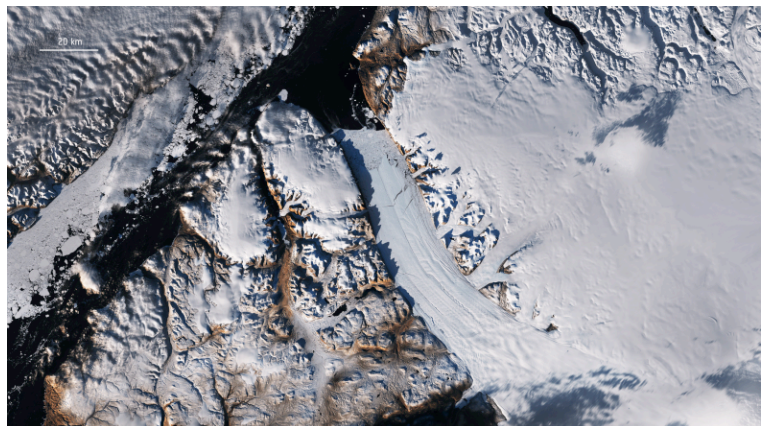


Climate chaos is already here: Iran plans to relocate its capital and Iceland's existence is threatened

Without a political horizon of eliminating fossil fuels and with a target of +1.5°C dead, climate scientists are calling for societal adaptation not only to extreme events but also to 'tipping points', the potential destabilisation of the major systems that regulate the global climate. Iceland has taken the first step.

Andrés Actis

Overshadowed by COP30, Iceland's announcement went largely unnoticed, garnering little political or media attention. The Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate confirmed that the possible collapse of the AMOC, one of the key ocean currents in regulating the global climate, is already an '[existential threat](#)' to the country. This risk will now be addressed as a 'national security issue'. 'This is the first time that a specific climate-related phenomenon has been formally presented to the National Security Council as a possible existential threat,' he admitted to the local press.



This image of the Petermann glacier in northwest Greenland was captured by the Copernicus Sentinel-2 mission on 16 September 2022. CREDIT: [Contains modified Copernicus Sentinel \(2022\) data, processed by ESA. CC BY-SA 3.0 IGO](#)

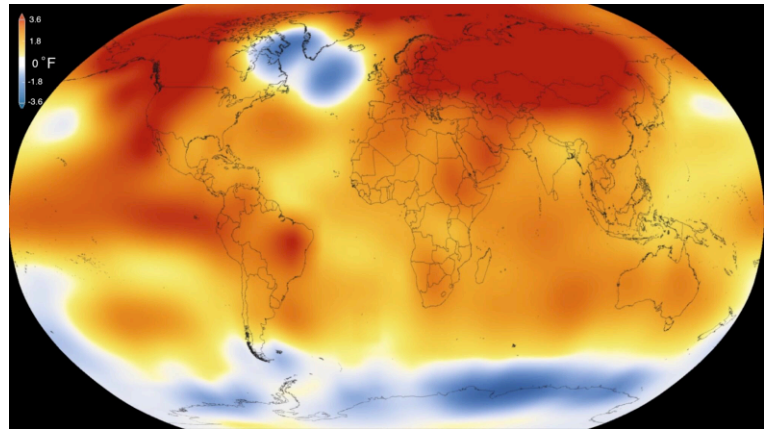
The Progressive Party-led government has begun to assess what research is needed to address this threat and what disaster preparedness policies the new climate reality demands. 'Our resilience is at stake,' admitted minister Johann Pall Johannsson in making the announcement. His portfolio includes [a paper](#) on the consequences and impacts of halting the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), which, according to all scientific evidence, is slowing down due to global warming.

"This could mean significant local cooling in Iceland and northern Europe, which would threaten our living conditions, while most of the planet would become much warmer. Of course, there is great uncertainty about how likely such a scenario is to materialise, but it would certainly be a very serious threat to us Icelanders," the internal report notes.

What is known about the possible collapse of AMOC? [Stefan Rahmstorf](#), a leading German oceanographer and climatologist and one of the scientists who has extensively studied the state and projection of the ocean current, explains that its weakening is 'irrefutable evidence' and its possible collapse 'a possibility' not so far away.

Rahmstorf gave a master class on this subject at the Autonomous University of Madrid (IFIMAC-UAM) in May. 'My conclusion is that the AMOC is weakening, that it is a tipping point in the climate system that we do not know when it will collapse, but that the latest studies tell us that it could happen in this century,' he summarised in that lecture.

If this collapse were to occur, northern Europe would experience a strong cooling, while other regions of the planet, including the south of the continent (Spain), would become warmer: "But I think what is relatively clear is that, in general, northern Europe will tend to cool. And southern Europe will warm, meaning the temperature gap across Europe will be much larger.



Global temperature anomalies in 2015, with the 'cold spot' over the North Atlantic. Image: NASA/NOAA

What is certain, said the scientist during his visit to Madrid, is that a collapse of this current 'will lead to unprecedented extreme weather events in Europe', with devastating impacts on the food chain, especially on agriculture and livestock.

The weakening of the AMOC

This current system is crucial for the climate because it effectively transports heat and nutrients (salt) across the global ocean. 'It is an important factor in past and most likely future climate change,' explains Rahmstorf.

The AMOC went from a very weak state to its current state with the end of the last ice age 12,000 years ago. The expansion and development of humanity is partly due to the reactivation of this current.

One piece of evidence of the weakening of this current is the only 'cold spot' on a world map that has not stopped warming in recent decades. While the coasts of North America are suffering from excessive warming, a band stretching from south of Greenland and Iceland to about the latitude of the northern Iberian Peninsula, off the Canadian coast, continues to cool.

What is the explanation? Due to its weakening, the AMOC is bringing less heat to the North Atlantic. The scientist explained that the main cause of this slowdown, currently around 15%, is due to increased precipitation in parts of this region and melting ice in Greenland and the Arctic. Freshwater reduces the salinity - the density of water - at the ocean surface. This means that less surface water sinks, which slows current flow. "The lowest sea surface salinity in less than

Nothing drastically happens immediately. What we know is that the AMOC is doomed and will slowly die," Rahmstorf.

20 years is another strong indication of the slowdown of the AMOC. Nothing drastically happens immediately. What we know is that the AMOC is doomed and will slowly die," Rahmstorf says.

Scientific concern after COP30

With the (new) [victory of fossil capital](#) at the climate summit in Belém - a declaration without any mention of

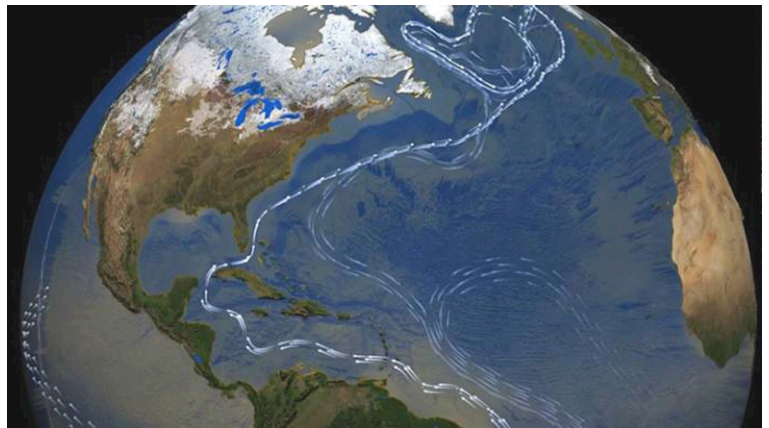
The 'new reality' brings with it another danger: the tipping points of the Earth's major regulating systems, such as the AMOC, the Amazon rainforest, and the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets, among others.

eliminating the fuels that are warming the planet - Johan Rockström, director of the Potsdam Institute, and James Dyke, deputy director of the Global Systems Institute at the University of Exeter, two other internationally renowned scientists, wrote an article

entitled 'The world lost the climate gamble: it now faces a new and dangerous reality'.

To limit average global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, the extreme weather events we are already experiencing, such as droughts, floods, fires, and heat waves, will increase in frequency and severity. Adaptation to these events is now a central focus of all countries' climate policies.

However, the 'new reality' brings with it another danger: the tipping points of the Earth's major regulating systems, such as the AMOC, the Amazon rainforest, and the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets, among others. "This translates into existential risks for billions of people. Not in the distant future, but in the coming years in the case of extreme events, and decades in the case of tipping points," warn the two researchers.



Graphic showing the path of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Current (AMOC). Photo: NASA/NOAA

This 'environmental change' and its associated feedbacks - the accelerated disappearance of tropical rainforests would release billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide and raise temperatures further - will require drastic and radical adaptation, though not without much suffering. Iceland, already preparing for a possible collapse of the AMOC, is showing the way.

This '[Greenhouse Earth](#)' scenario, a term these scientists have dubbed to describe a completely destabilised world, is still avoidable. But it requires immediate action on a global scale, a roadmap that, as COP30 has shown, capitalism is unwilling to implement. 'The extent of the suffering is still very much up to us,' Rockström and Dyke conclude.

The fossil nation that is already suffering from climate chaos

In Tehran, Iran's capital, climate suffering is already happening. The city is enduring a near-chronic drought, one of the worst in living memory. The lack of rain - five years without rainfall - is not only ruining agriculture and causing a food crisis. It is creating a humanitarian catastrophe on such a scale that the country's president, Masoud Pezeshkian, is considering evacuating the metropolis.

In Iran, the intention is for the southern coastal region of Makran to take on this role, which could 'alleviate overpopulation, energy shortages and water stress in Tehran', according to Pezeshkian.

the worst in living memory. The lack of rain - five years without rainfall - is not only ruining agriculture and causing a food crisis. It is creating a humanitarian catastrophe on such a scale that the country's president, Masoud Pezeshkian, is considering

With this measure - the displacement of 10 million people - ruled out, Pezeshkian wants Tehran to cease to be the capital. The intention is for the southern coastal region of Makran to take on this role, which could 'alleviate overpopulation, energy shortages and water stress in Tehran', according to Pezeshkian.

The 'environmental catastrophe' is already happening, the president lamented. Tehran's land is sinking, and the water supply is diminishing by the day. Faced with this situation, Pezeshkian called for the cooperation of all political parties to avoid a 'bleak future'. "Protecting the environment is no joke. Ignoring it can be the cause of our own destruction".

Iran has been suffering from extreme drought for five years due to rising temperatures. Autumn is usually rainy, but not a single drop has fallen in Tehran in recent months. Rainfall in the capital reached its lowest level in a century in 2025.

The main dam on the Karaj River, one of five reservoirs supplying the capital, is running dry. According to local authorities, it holds only 14 million cubic metres, a figure that is critical. During the same period last year, the reservoir held 86 million cubic metres. It now holds only enough to keep the Tehran region supplied for less than two weeks.

'There are many factors that have left the city unprepared for the current drought, including population growth, poor water management and



Rest area on a highway near Tehran. [Álvaro Minguito](#)

Pezeshkian issued this warning, Shina Ansari, his vice-president, agreed from Belém, along with other oil-producing countries, on a strategy of boycotting the gradual phase-out of fossil fuels.

sanctions, but rapid climate warming only exacerbates its problems,' explains Robert Rohde, a Berkeley Earth scientist. His tweet carries a graph showing Iran's temperature rise, which is already more than 2°C above pre-industrial times.

In his latest public statement, the president acknowledged that if the drought lasts beyond the end of the year, Tehran will have to 'ration water', a measure that may not be enough. 'Even if we ration it and it still doesn't rain

by then, we will run out of water. As Pezeshkian issued this warning, Shina Ansari, his vice-president, agreed from Belém, along with other oil-producing countries, on a strategy of boycotting the gradual phase-out of fossil fuels.

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❖ **About the author:** Andrés Actis is a journalist with a degree in Social Communication (UNR-Argentina).



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