

Hurricane Nicole and the climate crisis

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Hurricane Nicole made landfall in Florida early Thursday morning as a Category 1 hurricane, later downgraded to a tropical storm by the National Hurricane Center (NHC) when it weakened upon coming ashore just south of Vero Beach, located 143 miles (230 kilometers) north of Miami.

All 67 counties in Florida are under a state of emergency, with Nicole flooding the coastal cities with rainfall averaging four inches and prompting tornado watches. As of this writing, five deaths are being attributed to the storm, four in Orange County (Orlando) and one in Port Canaveral on the middle coast.

One of the biggest impacts has been power outages, which affected approximately 300,000 homes and businesses in the state. The NHC warned of high winds on the ocean surface sending water inland, flooding low-lying areas, and strong enough to blow down trees and power lines. Authorities also warned of the damage Nicole could wreak on the beaches, with further erosion, particularly because the six-foot storm surge came at high tide, greatly intensifying its effect.

Many people uploaded to social media their footage of downed power lines setting buildings ablaze, such as one recorded by a Floridian in Boynton Beach, water rising through floorboards, vehicles stalled or swept away, or other scenes showing the storm's impact.

The storm led authorities to shut down airports and issue evacuation notices. Fifteen emergency shelters so far have opened, 20 school districts have closed, and about 1,600 utility workers were placed on standby to restore power.

The storm is expected to further disrupt the highly anticipated, yet long-delayed NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) rocket launch, with the goal of a manned mission to the Moon, 50 years after such efforts were abandoned by the US government. The Artemis 1 mission had already been

rescheduled for November 19, but there are fears that debris strewn about by the storm may pose a threat to damage the exposed rocket.

The storm is hitting the same inland area bombarded by Hurricane Ian in September, but crossing it in the opposite direction, from southeast to northwest. While far less intense than Ian, Hurricane Nichole is of huge extent geographically. As it moved north out of Florida, it passed over the Atlanta, Georgia area, and there were tornado watches ahead of it ranging from Charlotte, North Carolina to Virginia Beach.

Heavy rains were forecast in the Mid-Atlantic states on the week, with the possibility of localized flooding in Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York.

Storms of this magnitude so late in the year are exceedingly rare. For the first time since 1997, not one hurricane or tropical storm formed in the Atlantic basin this August, with Ian forming a month later, and Nicole in November. Since record-keeping began in 1853, Florida has been hit in November twice before: first in 1935 and the other in 1985.

This is one of the far-reaching consequences of climate change. According to Yale Climate Connections meteorologist Jeff Masters, Nicole gained its strength from a 2-degree Fahrenheit increase in the temperature of the Atlantic Ocean.

Masters elaborated how extreme water temperature changes are linked to climate change, saying it is strange for a storm of this magnitude to reach the east coast of Florida this time of year, pointing to the west-to-east jet stream which typically moves south this time of year, pushing such storm cells away from the Atlantic coast.

He said the shift in the jet stream is “relatively new,” and that researchers are not sure why it occurred but said climate change is the likely factor. “We’ve seen a lot of jet stream craziness the last few years,” he said. “So many things are going haywire right now in the

climate system that we can just add this to the list.”

According to a recent report by the United Nations, “the ocean generates 50 percent” of all oxygen, “absorbs 25 percent of all carbon dioxide emissions,” and “captures 90 percent of the excess heat generated by these emissions.” In other words, the oceans act as a “carbon sink,” a vital bulwark to stave off the impacts of climate change.

The oceans are central for life on this planet. They absorb global greenhouse gas emissions, stabilizing the Earth’s climate, and are the avenue for more than 90 percent of all international trade of goods.

But under the anarchic and unplanned capitalist system, the oceans’ power will wane. There are too many impacts of climate change to count, not just changes in weather as such, like the late arriving Hurricane Nichole.

For example, in early October, for the first time in history, Alaska officials canceled the winter snow crab harvest, declaring that at least 7 billion snow crabs are missing. According to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the snow crab population in Bristol Bay diminished from around 8 billion in 2018 to 1 billion in 2021.

Many theories have sought to explain this news, from cod consuming the crabs, to the crabs resorting to cannibalism due to rising temperatures affecting their metabolism.

No serious analyst doubts that these radical changes are linked to climate change. The effect of greenhouse gas emissions has greatly affected the health and overall role of the ocean. The waters are warming and acidifying, causing calamity to life under water and on land, and reducing the oceans’ ability to absorb carbon dioxide and safeguard life on the planet.

According to another report, by the Department of Energy, Boston University Professor Neta C. Crawford found that the United States military is a “major polluter,” calling attention to the fact that “war on terror” in 2001, the “military has produced more than 1.2 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases.”

From the irradiating of ocean water via underwater jet streams from the disastrous Fukushima leak off the coast of Japan to the explosions, linked to the war in Ukraine, which breached the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines in the Baltic Sea, the capitalist system threatens not only the working class and human

civilization, but the necessities for all life on this planet.



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