

Hurricane Gustav: National Emergency Environment Sets the Stage for the McCain Election Campaign

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Update: The opening of the RNC has been characterised by a mass protest movement directed against the Bush administration, the candidacy of John McCain and more generally the Republican party.

The presence of thousands of demonstrators in St-Paul Minneapolis has been a major factor in the Republican Party's decision to change the program of the RNC, using Hurricane Gustav as a pretext.

The Republican Party has decided to scrap the first day of its National Convention, prior to an impending humanitarian and environmental disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.

"The program for the first day of the Republican National Convention has been canceled in the wake of Hurricane Gustav, the first dramatic change as planners scrambled to cope with political and practical implications of the mammoth storm."

No political speeches are scheduled on the first day of the Convention. Both Bush and Cheney have called off appearances scheduled for Monday in St. Paul, Minn.

The initial political speeches of the National Convention have been replaced by the flow of TV network interviews, from the theater of national emergency operations, in Southern Louisiana, Texas and Alabama.

The Republicans are intent on using the hurricane as a public relations stunt to boost the waning image of Republican candidate John McCain.

John McCain, in a statement on Sunday underscored his intent to contribute to emergency relief operations:

"As you well know, I, uh we are facing a great, uh, national challenge and the possibility of a great national natural disaster. ... I'm happy to report to you that the coordination and the work that's being done at all levels appears to me to be excellent. ...

So of course this is a time when we have to do away with our party politics and we have to act as Americans. We have to join with 3 million other Americans on behalf of our fellow citizens. It's a time for actions. So we're gonna suspend most of our activities tomorrow except for those absolutely necessary.

So ahead of time I wanna thank all of my fellow Republicans as we take off our Republican hats and put on our American hats and we say "America, we're with you. America, we're going to care for these people in their time of need" and we're gonna display it in every possible way as Americans always have and Americans always will."

Reports suggest a major catastrophe characterized by the flooding of major urban and suburban areas, particularly in Southern Louisiana.

Mass evacuations are already underway, with close to 2 million people fleeing the disaster area, according to reports.

CNN has predicted a 29 billion dollar damage resulting from the hurricane.

Election Campaign

The Republican election campaign in all likelihood will plug into focusing on the central role of a national emergency.

John McCain and his wife, Cindy, together with vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin will be in the disaster area. The National Emergency environment has in a sense launched the presidential race between Obama and McCain.

John McCain will be speaking to the American people from the disaster area. In a statement on Sunday, during a visit to the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency at Jackson, McCain said he would change the Republican National Convention from a "celebratory event" to a "call to the nation for action." On Monday morning, September 1st, McCain and his running mate, Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, toured the disaster operation center with Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour.

The first day of the Republican National Convention (RNC) is cancelled. The speeches in the subsequent days, including John McCain's nomination speech will be revamped, focusing on the role and responsibilities of the next American President under a National Emergency.

What is unfolding is a Republican campaign, reporting in real time from a militarized disaster area, with prime time TV cameras riveted not only on the events but on the interplay of political personalities, who are touring the disaster area.

John McCain will be visiting the various emergency relief operations. An army of TV cameras and reporters will follow on his trail.

McCain's campaign script will be carefully redrafted, focusing on issues of Law and Order under a National Emergency, including the role of the Military.

The "War on Terrorism" and the "Defense of the Homeland" will also be highlighted because the procedures and institutions involved in the case of a natural disaster are identical to those pertaining to a terrorist attack.

The Militarization of Emergency Relief

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) led by Michael Chertoff, the Federal

Emergency Management Authority (FEMA) under the jurisdiction of the DHS and US Northern Command under the authority of the Defense Department, are the key institutions, working with local and state officials.

Given the gravity of the natural disaster, a Martial Law situation suspending normal functions of civilian administration could be adopted in the affected area.

In an August 30 release, U.S. Northern Command confirmed the deployment by the Department of Defense of equipment and military personnel, overshadowing in some regards, the civilian conduct of emergency procedures by State and local officials.

The National Guard and the Military are already deployed in the disaster area. Through the Emergency Management Assistance Compacts, National Guard members from across America are being deployed "in the path of Tropical Storm Gustav".

U.S. Northern Command, which has a mandate to defend the Homeland, plays a central role in emergency procedures. Northcom is "the joint combatant command formed in the wake of the Sept.11, 2001 terrorist attacks to provide homeland defense and defense support of civil authorities." One of Northcom's core responsibilities is to "oversee the Military's response to Natural Disasters". This overseeing of a National disaster is conducted as a military operation with civilian authorities potentially playing a subordinate role.

"The command is responsible for the operational control of all active-duty military responses to a disaster when requested by the state and ordered by the president and the secretary of defense."

([USNORTHCOM, August 30 2008 Report](#))

Defense coordinating officers have been detached by Northcom, assigned to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FISA) in Atlanta and in Denton, Texas. These military officers are "serving as liaisons with state, local and other federal responders to ensure a quick response", according to Northcom.

U.S. Northern Command has set up a command post at England Airpark, Alexandria, Louisiana. Military bases in the region are actively involved including Fort Rucker, Alabama; Fort Benning, Georgia; Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama; Columbus Air Force Base, Mississippi; and Naval Air Station Meridian, Mississippi. ([Wired News](#))

US Navy Ships are also slated to play an active role. The USS Bataan "has been ordered to sea in case the ship gets orders to provide support for Hurricane Gustav victims....

There are reports that private security companies have also being deployed. Blackwater, the private military contractor involved in Iraq has been enlisted in the recruitment of private security personnel to be deployed to the affected disaster areas. Blackwater is seeking to enlist "law enforcement officers and armed security officers who already have the credentials to work in such an environment, including those with arrest powers." (Associated Press Report, August 31, 2008). Another company involved is Global Security Associates LLC, a protection security firm.

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