

Can the CIA weaponise the weather?

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A leading climate-change scientist has warned that the US secret service's interest in geoengineering technology may not be benign. But it's not the first time a government has tried to control weather patterns

by Patrick Barkham ([Guardian](#))



Using the weather as a weapon to subjugate the globe sounds like the modus operandi of a James Bond villain, but a senior climate scientist has expressed concern over the US intelligence services' apparent interest in geoengineering.

Geoengineering seeks to combat climate change by removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere or by increasing the reflectivity of the earth – with clouds or even space dust – to reduce the sun's warmth.

It is criticised by many environmental activists, including Naomi Klein, for suggesting that a simple techno-fix for global warming is just around the corner but geoengineering may have a more sinister side.

Alan Robock, who studied the potential impact of a nuclear winter in the 1980s, raised alarm over CIA's part-funding of a National Academy of Sciences report on different approaches to combating climate change, and the fact that the CIA hasn't explained its interest in geoengineering.

Weaponising the weather is nothing new. UK government documents showed that, 99 years ago, one of six trials at the experimental military station of Orford Ness in Suffolk sought to produce artificial clouds, which, it was hoped would bamboozle German flying machines during the first world war.

Like so many military experiments, these trials failed but cloud seeding became a reality in 1967/8 when the US's Operation Popeye increased rainfall by an estimated 30% over parts of Vietnam in an attempt to reduce the movement of soldiers and resources into South Vietnam.

In recent years, the US military's HAARP research programme has sown a blizzard of theories about how this secretive Alaskan facility has manipulated weather patterns with its investigation of the ionosphere. If HAARP really was so successful, it would probably not be closing this year.

The argument that if we grasped how to control the climate then evildoers would already be doing it doesn't hold water with conspiratorial thought, however. Some believe the weather is already being shaped by "chemtrails" - aeroplane contrails deliberately laced with toxic chemicals - and mysterious weather warmongers are, for reasons unknown, making the eastern US unbearably chilly and California stricken by drought. Climate scientists dismiss such theories and evidence such as the long list of patents for climate-altering tools tends to demonstrate the boundless scope of the human imagination rather than the more limited reach of operational technology.

Robock is right to raise concerns over who will control any climate-shaping technologies that are proven to work but the omens from James Bond are good. Filming of the new Bond, Spectre, was disrupted earlier this month by strong winds in snowy Austria.

If there is a weather god, we aren't it, yet.