

Opinion

How the elite add to the climate mess: Part - II

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Protesters seek to hold polluters to account on the Global Day of Action for Climate Justice in Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines, on December 9, 2023. — Reuters

The global elites tried to unleash malicious campaigns against those who pointed out the terrible effects of fossil fuel consumption. It is claimed that the fossil fuel industry also used its considerable resources to pour billions of dollars into political lobbying in the US and other countries to block unfavourable laws and to fund front organizations with neutral and scientific-sounding names, such as the Global Climate Coalition (GCC).

In 2001, the US State Department told the GCC that then-president George W Bush rejected the Kyoto Protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in part because of input from the coalition. Exxon alone funded more than 40 groups to deny climate science; this included the George C Marshall Institute.

Both oil and arms manufacturing companies are part of the global elites that are not ready to realize the damage being caused by their industries. There is also a close nexus between the two. For instance, the global militaries and defence industries are the biggest spenders of fossil fuel. The Pentagon is the largest consumer of fuel among the global defence ministries.

Wars and conflicts see an exorbitant use of fuel. For example, the F-16 Fighting Falcon, one of the most widely used fighter jets, consumes approximately 3,800 litres of fuel per hour when flying at high altitudes on routine missions. During wars and conflicts the consumption of fuel rises to a very high level because of the heavy use of vehicles and fighting agents that are employed during such times. For instance, the British Army started World War I with 250 planes, 26,000 automobiles and 827 motorcycles but they increased to 55,000 planes, 56,000 trucks, 23 automobiles and 34,000 motorcycles by the end of 1918. One could imagine the amount of fuel that would have been used during the years of the war.

In World War II, the armed forces of the US used about one gallon of fuel per soldier every day. During Operation Desert Storm (First Gulf War), fuel usage was about four gallons. By 2007, with operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, usage was up to 16 gallons, or \$3 million worth of fuel a day. It is estimated that jet fuel accounts for 71 per cent of the entire military's petroleum consumption, in part because the fighter pilots move around the majority of men and a lot of heavy equipment.

An armoured division of the army can use as much as 600,000 gallons of fuel a day. A tank like the M1 Abrams gets about 0.6 miles per gallon (mpg), and a cargo vehicle like the M-1070 semi-trailer (designed to haul tanks) gets approximately 1.2 mpg. An Army Humvee gets between 10 and 14 mpg, about the same as the commercially available Hummer. Keep this detail in view and imagine how much fuel would have been used by over 223 conflicts and wars after the end of World War II.

Supporters of fossil fuel lobbies and companies might argue that wars and conflicts are inevitable in some circumstances and nothing can be done to prevent them. Therefore, excessive use of oil during conflicts is natural. However, it is not only the unbridled use of fossil fuel during wars and conflicts that is harming the environment but global elites are harming the environment in other ways as well.

For instance, most private jets are owned by the global elites or remain under their use. Over 20,000 private jets are owned by ultra-high-net-worth individuals. Such individuals own 13392 jets in North America, 2795 in Europe, 2596 in Latin America, 1186 Asia Pacific, 523 in the Middle East and 481 in impoverished Africa. These private jets can consume 224 to 1355 litres of fuel per hour depending upon their model and capacity. A private jet owner on average flies 448 hours per year. For 20,000 jets it would be at least 896,000 hours per year. If one private jet consumes 1355 litres of fuel per hour then fuel consumption for 20,000 jets (who fly 896,000 hours per year) would be 1,214,080,000 litres in a year. In addition to that, many rich capitalists also get chartered commercial flights for their leisure or holiday trips which also consume a lot of oil.

Global wastage is yet another factor contributing to environmental degradation. For instance, according to the UN, more than a billion meals are thrown away every day, in poor countries as well as rich ones, despite more than 730 million people living in hunger around the world.

These are just some of the ways showing how the global rich contribute to environmental degradation. Now, imagine if private jets were banned altogether, the world would not have to see the reckless consumption of over a billion litres of petrol every year. Imagine if we come up with an excellent transport system that focuses on trains and buses instead of churning out cars and other vehicles. What is the logic, let us say, of permitting 50 million car owners to undertake their journeys in their cars? Why can't the world have a few thousand trains or tens of thousands of buses to accommodate more and more people?

Similarly, instead of transporting goods through trucks and trawlers, more freight trains should be used to carry out such work. If we adopt this approach we will not only be able to drastically reduce the number of cars and lorries but it will also end the congestion on roads where travelling by bus has become a time-consuming matter. Such reduction will also lead to the decline of fossil fuel use besides protecting the health of over seven people on this planet.

Wars, conflicts and defence industries should be declared the number one enemy of the environment. Arduous efforts should be made to end ongoing conflicts. Invasions and aggressions by powerful states should severely be punished. Nuclear and other weapons industries should be moulded in a way that they could be used for civilian purposes. As long as we keep on churning out weapons, wars and conflicts will keep on erupting. If there is no conflict, we will invent one.

Planning the economy is still another way to mitigate the catastrophic impacts of climate change. Large-scale mega projects should be given up and we must get rid of this insane ideology of growth. Millions of tons of steel and other products are lying unsold in the global market. Only the US produces enough wheat which can feed several countries. We prefer to indulge in the mad race of excessive production, destroying land fertility, wasting precious water, depleting marine life in seas and throwing human labour

and energies into the abyss of futility. We need to plan agriculture, fishing and industries.

Global consumption should be calculated and companies should be allowed to produce according to this calculation. But all remedial steps require sacrifices on the part of global elites that believe in extravagance, lack of planning, ruthless competition, gargantuan consumption and brutal exploitation of both nature and human beings. They are not ready to give up their destructive ideology of growth nor do they want to give up their lavish lifestyles that are harming the environment and punishing those who have no hand in its degradation. This environmental degradation cannot be stopped until the global elites are ready to make sacrifices.