



Pedestrians pass New York's One World Trade Center with the background of acrid smoke from wildfires in Quebec, Canada. PHOTO: AFP

We are approaching a tectonic moment for our planet



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At the 21st Conference of Parties (COP-21) held in Paris, 196 nations agreed to keep the rise in the average global temperature to 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels while endeavouring to limit it to 1.5 degrees by the year 2100. After adoption of the agreement on December 12, 2015, the then Secretary General of the UN Ban Ki Moon said, “Today’s Summit has shown that we can rise to the climate challenge.”

Did we really “rise to the climate challenge?” No, we did not because the promises made by the participating nations at COP-21 exist mostly on paper. In the meantime, our planet is continuing to warm at an “unprecedented rate” without showing any signs of abating. The concentration of planet-warming carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is on the rise and have reached an all-time high this year, representing an accumulation “not seen for millions of years.” As of June 8, 2023, the concentration was 423.62 parts per million, a 5.7 percent increase over the 2015 level.

Today, Siberia, once a relatively cooler part of our planet, is sweltering with temperatures close to 40 degrees. Several countries in Asia, including Bangladesh, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam have already seen record-shattering temperatures between 40 and 45 degrees. The noxious smoke from the out-of-control forest fires in Québec – an upshot of global warming – choked people living in and around New York City, which is about 500 km away, with an Air Quality Index in the hazardous zone, surpassing 300 (on a 500-point scale) on June 7.

While these and other extreme weather-related events are wreaking havoc worldwide, “climate politicians” are busy preparing the agenda for the next annual road show, COP-28, to be held in December of this year in Dubai. Will the attending heads of governments or their representatives again make empty promises and lull us with false hopes? We hope not, although in all the previous conferences, world leaders, save a few, agreed on the science of climate change, yet failed to develop a collective approach to tackle the problem.

And now the bombshell news. According to a report by the World Meteorological Organization published on June 7, 2023, we are facing the harsh reality that there is a 66 percent likelihood of

global temperatures breaching the 1.5-degree threshold set at COP-21 for the first time by 2027. Yes, 2027, not 2100, as agreed upon in 2015. However, as the breach will be boosted by a transition to an El Niño climate pattern, the rise is expected to be temporary, but with increasing frequency.

Nevertheless, will our planet be doomed if the temperature rises by 1.5 degrees? Besides an utter failure of the binding treaty hammered out at COP-21, breaching 1.5 degrees will be a tectonic moment for the planet with far-reaching repercussions for its inhabitants.

So far, a change of 1.1 degree in average global temperature since 1880 has inflicted irreversible damage to our environment. It

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has jeopardised our health, our economy, our agriculture, our food and energy security, among other things. More importantly, it is threatening our civilisation and the future of our children. Hence, a 1.5-degree rise will cause even more damage and push our planet into a new, more dangerous climate domain.

The effects will not be uniform across the planet. Some regions will heat up faster than other regions. Due to an accelerated positive feedback loop known as Arctic Amplification, polar regions will experience warming at a much faster rate than other regions. In a study published in the journal Communications

Earth & Environment, researchers report that the Arctic is heating up roughly four times faster than the entire planet.

Hotter polar regions will mean more melting of ice sheets, resulting in greater habitat loss for polar bears, whales, seals and other cold weather animals. Moreover, loss of ice will exacerbate the rate at which sea levels are rising.

More permafrost and glaciers, holding and keeping deadly bacteria frozen, will melt. Once the hibernating bacteria come to life, they will attack humans with vengeance. This will lead to increased disease and potentially more pandemics.

A 1.5-degree of warming will be disastrous for coastal and small island nations. Because of rising sea levels, coastal communities will lose their homes and habitats. Even cities away from the coasts will see frequent flooding. We have already seen thousand-year flooding events around the world in recent years.

Both days and nights will be unusually hot. Heat waves will be longer, more intense and air will be unbreathable, thereby posing a serious threat to survival, particularly for people living along the tropics, as well as in areas arching across the equator.

Deserts will grow in size and become hotter. Many nations, otherwise drought-free, will become more prone to droughts and water shortages. Consequently, crop yields will be lower, leading to famine. Furthermore, the vicious cycle of heating and deforestation will turn regions with rainforests into Savannah-like regions.

Frequency and magnitude of extreme weather events, such as raging storms – latest one is cyclone Biporjoy, devastating floods and ferocious wildfires will increase. More water will evaporate from the oceans, which in turn will make the heaviest rains and snowfalls even heavier in many parts of the world.

Higher temperatures will cause many species to become extinct. Triggered by temperature-induced bleaching, almost all tropical coral reefs, which act as nurseries for many fish, will be severely degraded.

These are some out of the many dire climate-related consequences that will adversely affect our planet if the temperature rises by 1.5 degrees. It is beyond the scope of this article to mention all of the consequences.

Finally, to hold the rise of global temperature to a safer limit, preferably below 1.5 degrees, we have to act with great urgency. Voluntary measures alone by concerned individuals will not save us. We need swift, robust actions instead of political dithering by countries that are largely responsible for global warming. Otherwise, the writing on the wall is clear. Catastrophe is looming on the horizon.

Reflections on America’s marketing of war



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During the mid-1980s, I was an MBA student at George Washington University. I used to take a transfer bus at a stop next to the White House to go to school. Lafayette Park, opposite the White House, was an open free speech area for demonstrators and protestors. It was also the residence of a few homeless inhabitants. The security perimeter of the White House was much smaller; and it was not as strict as it is now. It is still a free speech area.

War was not a serious issue at that time. A middle-aged lady used to sit there every day with placards seeking world peace and protesting against war. She was kind of a landmark in the park. No one bothered her and she bothered nobody. Despite the shabby looks of the park, the atmosphere was admirable. It was an attestation to the coexistence of diverse views, a testimony to America’s freedom.

As a hegemonic superpower, America’s primary concern has been its leadership position in the world; especially, economic leadership in global trade and investment. During the mid-1980s, when trade deficit with Japan increased to \$60 billion, Americans were troubled. Japan bashing was common in popular press, very similar to what China is experiencing now. Japan was also praised for its system of governance, economic competitiveness, Confucian ethics, respect for hierarchy, and collectivism.

Historically, we have observed that in order to: (a) protect the empire, (b) retain economic competence, and (c) preserve territorial gains, hegemonic powers have maintained strong militaries. Paul Kennedy underscores this relationship in his *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987). America is pursuing what empires have done traditionally. It is maintaining a presence in 750 military facilities in 80 countries/territories of the world. Foreign military bases are one of the pillars of the “American War Industry” (often described as the military-industrial-complex) whose size and power are unmatched by any other country. Comparatively, Russia has 21 and China has only one military base outside their countries.

The US war industry relies on a large number of private enterprises mostly funded by public money. It thrives on conflicts. Peace is an anti-thesis to war. Since World War II, America has fought quite a few wars in various parts of the world. None of these wars were fought on American soil. Foreign bases have provided strategic and tactical support to those international engagements. During the past three decades, it fought three major wars in Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Ukraine is its latest engagement. Let us examine how the principles of marketing were applied to sell wars to the American public.

From a marketing perspective, a war must have a value-proposition, a principal argument backed by moral reasoning, teleological or utilitarian.

Citizens must be convinced that war is necessary and beneficial to the nation. A tangible product benefit, an observable material outcome, helps the persuasion process. In my opinion, this was missing in the Vietnam war.

The fight for democracy or anti-communist arguments did not sell very well. The engagement was long drawn; there was no end in sight; cost was very high; and the number of body bags made the situation worse. Pictures of death, destruction, and suffering in the media undermined the government’s moral reasoning. The naked girl (she lives in Canada now) running away from the American napalm bomb was hard to accept. The nation was divided. The US government was fighting two wars, one in Vietnam and the other at home against the protesters that included many returning soldiers.

Perhaps, the American government and the war industry learned their lesson in Vietnam. The Kuwait war was packaged. The government of Kuwait hired marketing/public relation companies to build support. Kuwait

disembodied human corpses that accompanied the bombing would have been horrific. They were sanitised in the media. American army had a walk-over with low casualty. Today, Iraq is barely functioning as a nation state with three autonomous regions. America has control over the Iraqi oil (again, a tangible outcome). America has built a large military base near Baghdad to keep control.

The Afghan war was a little complex. When the Russians (Soviet Union) left, the Western media was in full praise of the Mujahedeen. The Afghans were also very thankful to the West. A post-war US reconstruction programme (a miniscule Marshall Plan) could have saved the nation and America could have gotten a great ally in the region. That did not happen. The withdrawal of the West created a vacuum. Slowly, the country slipped into a state of lawlessness. Later, the western intervention made the situation worse. Helpless Afghans returned to their faith, this time fighting against the Americans. Faith gave them the moral reasoning needed to continue the war. They controlled the countryside and had the determination (“will to fight”, a critical component in war) to win. Geography and terrain were helpful. I think the West should take this new Afghanistan favourably and not fall into the same trap.

No one knows how and when the Ukraine war is going to end. On June 2, 2023, in Helsinki City Hall,



Smoke covers the presidential palace compound in Baghdad on March 21, 2003 during a massive US-led air raid on the Iraqi capital. PHOTO: AFP

and the Gulf States shared the cost of war. US media gave favourable coverage. It was a short, decisive war. US casualty was low. There was voluntary and involuntary media control; we did not see Vietnam-style media coverage. Kuwait was liberated. America regained control over Kuwaiti oil. American public could see a tangible utilitarian outcome of the war. President Bush (41st) kept his promise (a limited objective), he did not remove Saddam Hussein. His post-war approval rating was 91 percent.

The Iraq war was marketed with a “weapons of mass destruction (WMD)” argument with Saddam Hussein portrayed as the villain. When WMD was not found, the narrative changed – “the world is better off without Saddam Hussein” was sold. America won the war with a “shock and awe” bombing campaign. American public did not see the evaporation of Iraqi neighbourhoods. Pictures of burnt,

Anthony Blinken, US Secretary of State stated that, “Russia is estimated to have suffered more than 100,000 casualties in the last six months alone, as Putin sends wave after wave of Russians into a meat grinder of his own making.” Numbers could differ, but one could make the same argument against the Ukrainian government. Both governments are feeding the so-called meat grinder and the US government is allowing it to continue.

Are we observing a repetition of Vietnam in Ukraine? The value proposition of the war is not well defined; death and destruction are hard to take; there is no end in sight; and the cost is staggering. Funding a stalemate can only benefit the war industry. Without serious protest in the US, this war is not going to end. It may even result in a nuclear war. Lafayette Park will have to play its historic role with loud protests. That may advance diplomacy to the forefront.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

6 Party dips

11 Like gymnasts

12 Court event

13 Dialing

15 Cain's mother

16 Decline

17 “— a Small World”

18 Make good as new

20 Take a load off

21 Sphere

22 “— Lisa”

23 Suit pieces

26 Worker with a pick

27 Swiss peaks

28 Grumpy friend

29 Horse-shoe shape

30 Instruments made from gourds

34 Director DuVernay

35 Termite's kin

36 Carnival city

37 Faking being knocked out

40 Piano piece

41 Dike's kin

42 Train stop

43 Garden starters

DOWN

1 Arcade patron

2 Tequila source

3 Is fond of

4 Quarterback

5 Security system parts

6 Theater fixture

7 Pendulum path

8 Intermediary

9 Soup cracker

10 Elite athlete

14 Attire

19 Young ones

22 Layered mineral

23 Cleared out

24 Raise

25 Get louder

26 Human beings

28 “Rats!”

30 Painter Edouard

31 Want badly

32 Felt unwell

33 Shoe parts

38 Courtroom vow

39 Fixed charge

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7-12

11	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13					14				
15					16			17	
18				19				20	
23	24	25			26				
27					28				
29				30			31	32	33
34				35				36	
37				38			39		
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42						43			

YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS

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