**[Scorched earth](https://www.dawn.com/news/1770423/scorched-earth)**

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MORE than 60 years ago, a British sci-fi movie called The Day the Earth Caught Fire illuminated the catastrophic consequences of anthropogenic climate change.

Fossil fuels were not part of the script; some oil company executives already knew about the possible fallout, but it wasn’t public knowledge. The filmmakers focused instead on a crucial contemporary concern. The US and the USSR simultaneously conduct atmospheric nuclear tests that shift Earth’s axis by 11 degrees. As a result, the planet hurtles towards the sun and terrestrial temperatures head beyond 60 degrees Celsius amid cyclones, hurricanes, typhoons and torrential rainfall.

I haven’t watched the film and am relying here on a feature published by the BBC this week, which says the scriptwriters were aware that the science behind their conceit was dubious — unlike the scientific theories that help to explain the flames consuming terrain from Rhodes in Greece to Maui in Hawaii.

The threat of nuclear warfare has lately resurfaced in the context of the tussle over Ukraine ignited by Vladimir Putin and fuelled by Nato. Its consequences have been devastating for large numbers of Ukrainians — and to a lesser extent for Russians. Aside from the geopolitics of the conflict, the most obvious global repercussions revolve around the energy sector.

Climate apocalypse can still be averted, hopefully.

Europe’s newfound distaste for Russian gas has led to China and India becoming the biggest beneficiaries of cut-price fossil fuels from the north. For the most part, though, the West hasn’t doubled down on renewables as an energy source, but, instead, afforded its biggest polluters the opportunity to step up their operations.

In Australia, for instance, it’s not uncommon to come across the idiotic argument that digging for more gas is tantamount to aiding the struggle for democratic self-determination in Ukraine. Never mind that the International Energy Agency warned against further fossil fuel exploration years ago. The warning just last month from UN Secretary General Antonió Guterres that “the era of global boiling has arrived” goes unheeded — much like most things the UN says.

Greenwashing aside, the multinational oil and gas firms will not change their business model until it ceases to be profitable. Right now, profits are spiking, and their biggest concern is the possibility of extra taxes rather than the state of the world. That’s how capitalism works. That’s why a million dollars a week is considered low-grade pay for CEOs who fight tooth and nail against a minimum wage of $15 for their employees.

It could be argued with some justification that concerns about energy and the imperative to maintain unsustainable ‘First World’ lifestyles are the driving force behind recent decisions by the British, Australian and US governments to speed up or facilitate further fossil fuel misadventures. And right-wing think tanks in America are already drawing up agendas to thwart climate action in the event of a second Trump presidency, which is possible notwithstanding the four indictments against the ex-president.

China and India are often cited as leading culprits in intensifying coal-powered energy. Their excuse is that the nations that were able to industrialise based on relatively easy access to coal, oil and gas are ethically in no position to lecture the stragglers.

That’s a valid debating point, but its value is diminished by global exigencies — including the recent floods in Beijing and the current rains in Himachal Pradesh. To their credit, both China and India have also been making adva­n­ces in green energy. But their continued reliance on coal suggests it’s not enough. The leading responsibility for fossil fuel proliferation lies with the primary predators — both nation states and Western energy firms — but everyone needs to chip in.

July was the hottest month on Earth not only in recorded history but in scientific extrapolations reaching back thousands of years. And it is almost guaranteed that there will be worse to follow. Tragically, the reality of apocalypse now is rejected not just by the fossil fuel profiteers but also by plenty of people fooled into dismissing the science behind climate change as part of some kind of a ‘woke’ agenda or Marxist plot, notwithstanding the evidence unfolding before our eyes.

The feature film mentioned at the outset also reflects the efforts of political leaders to brush off the impending doomsday. In the end, they opt for a series of joint nuclear explosions in western Siberia in an attempt to swing the planet back into its original axis. Audiences never learn the outcome. They just get to see two newspaper front pages prepared by the film’s protagonists. One headline says ‘World Saved’, the other proclaims ‘World Doomed’.

*The latter outcome seems more likely six decades later. But it’s still not too late to aim for the former.*

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