

# [***Why the World Has Never Ended Before and What's Changed | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BCR-TVJ1-JBR6-9542-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** The Earth is on an elevator to hell, and someone removed the emergency stop button

**Body**

The world is on an elevator to hell, and someone removed the emergency stop button. Standing at the top of the shaft is a demon named Greed with a large pair of clippers and a grin on its face to speed the plunge along.

And it's not just avarice that's put us in this situation. It's not one action or one group of people—everyone helped to press the button, whether by buying the wrong car; failing to sort the trash; supporting the wrong candidate; hopping on a plane; being a bystander to evil when action was needed.

And no culture is exempt—certainly not the much-maligned West, but the East and South are no better. When given the chance, every nation emits as much carbon as possible. In fact, the Global South has been complaining mainly that they're not getting their proper turn before the dance must stop. They want compensation for environmental disasters, sure, but they also want to the chance to create their own.

It's time to face up to where we are and count the costs. And no, my depression is well treated.

Feeling good about global warming or war? Please stop. There have been [*articles*](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/26/opinion/polycrisis-doom-extinction-humanity.html) trying to point out that history is "merely" repeating itself. That in the 1910s and 1920s and 1930s, people were also feeling that the end of the world was upon them. And, see, it didn't happen then, so it can't possibly happen now.

A few points:

The world didn't end a century ago, but a century ago humanity didn't have the executioner's tools that sit on our workbench now. There weren't even 2 billion people in 1920, while we're now quickly heading toward 8 billion. There's only so much global warming that 2 billion people can create in a world that was far less developed than today.

But boy, did they try. They built factories as fast as possible. They pumped out cars that polluted in ways we can hardly imagine now unless you're one of those horrible people who "rolls coal." They dumped their trash with little thought to what would happen next and who would have to clean it up. Industries were lightly regulated (if at all) and unsurprisingly everyone polluted as much as they could to speed things along.

They didn't have global warming, not because of virtue, but because of circumstance. We haven't become different people than we were a century ago, we've just added a century of sins to our tally.

People a century ago also thought that war might somehow end the world. After World War I—the War to End All Wars—it was clear that humanity's vindictiveness toward itself was without limit.

But again, humanity tried its hardest. Along with the First World War and the hundreds of small, tribal wars, there were dozens of wars in a million places across the globe as colonizer and colonized fought for blood and treasure.

Phew, the world didn't end. But imagine what would have happened if nuclear weapons were available in World War I. This was the war where they pulled out all the stops and introduced gas as a method of mass killing. This was Total War by doctrine. Homefront and frontlines, together fighting to the last man and last potato. Would the nukes have stayed in the silos?

When nuclear weapons were invented, they were used. Only two bombs were dropped, but only because they only wanted to test two kinds of bomb, and otherwise the war was already won.

Would Hitler have hesitated if nukes had been available to him in 1939? Would Stalin? Would Emperor Hirohito and Hideki Tojo?

Would the United States have stopped if the war continued to drag on, but we were alone in our atomic dominance?

Of course not. The only reason the world didn't end a century ago was because it couldn't.

Now, we do have nukes. We have 8 billion people. We have global warming that has already [*crossed the magic 1.5 degrees of increase*](https://www.vox.com/23969523/climate-change-cop28-paris-1-5-c-uae-2023-record-warm) we could stand before we are promised disaster. And it's not that we've done nothing, we just [*haven't done very much*](https://www.newsweek.com/cop-out-wrapping-pathetic-climate-summit-that-should-fool-nobody-opinion-1853526?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), let alone enough.

And the future doesn't promise better. Other than climate summits that barely acknowledge that fossil fuels just might be a problem, the market is coming to save no one as electric car (themselves largely shifting problems upstream and creating whole new industries of problems) sales are slipping to such a point that major manufacturers, including GM and [*Ford*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/ford?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), are [*going back on their green promises*](https://www.autonews.com/manufacturing/gm-ford-delay-some-ev-investments-citing-slowing-demand-growth).

Conflicts, of course, are exacerbated by climate change, but put that aside as a factor and concentrate on this week's flash points and how the world is addressing them:

In the Middle East, the United States is actively shooting at people in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Jordan, while being committed to help Israel shoot at people in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, sometimes Syria, and elsewhere as necessary. Iran is backing people who are shooting or trying to shoot at Israel, the United States and allied shipping. Russia, China, and others have ties to Iran and love it when the U.S.'s nose is bloody.

BTW, Israel has nuclear weapons and Iran will [*within weeks*](https://www.iranwatch.org/our-publications/articles-reports/irans-nuclear-timetable-weapon-potential) of deciding it wants them.

In Europe, some of our readers will have heard of the war in Ukraine. Ukraine is backed by the West. Russia, far from isolated, is backed by China, Iran, and North Korea. The situation is becoming more dire for Ukraine for reasons of [*internal* ***politics***](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/02/08/valery-zaluzhny-commander-ukraine-removed/), [*U.S.* ***politics***](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/08/us/politics/ukraine-israel-aid-bill-senate.html), and [*battlefield conditions*](https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-politics-government-d1c0957d5dddd106dbb5eca7c6521e1a). Every major player in this drama has nuclear weapons, except for Ukraine itself.

The situation between China and Taiwan is growing ever more tense, with Taiwanese elections leaning toward the more independence-minded party. China seems to feel it has [*something to prove with Taiwan*](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/17/opinion/taiwan-china-election-war.html), and Chinese leader [*Xi Jinping*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/xi-jinping?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) has decided his nation needs more nukes—[*a lot more nukes*](https://www.npr.org/2023/10/19/1207156597/new-pentagon-report-claims-china-now-has-over-500-operational-nuclear-warheads#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20China%20started%20intensifying,nuclear%20weapons%2C%22%20says%20M.)—as what one hopes is a deterrent. The U.S. has [*ever-less ambiguous*](https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2023/01/strategic-ambiguity-may-have-us-and-taiwan-trapped.html#:~:text=Or%20should%20Washington%20publicly%20commit,would%20intervene%20in%20a%20war.) commitments to Taiwan, of course.

India and Pakistan still hate each other, both sides have nuclear weapons—and Iran just attacked inside of Pakistan, though both sides tried [*to make nice after*](https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-iran-airstrikes-militants-tensions-israel-hamas-war-palestinians-db154c92bb423936237f48996e237d26).

Each and every one of these problems presents an opportunity for someone—[*arms dealers*](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https:/www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/2303_at_fact_sheet_2022_v2.pdf), oil companies, mining concerns, and people looking to exploit the resources of the less developed Global South ([*which has its own problems*](https://www.google.com/search?q=global+south+problems&oq=global+south+problems&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOdIBCDM4NzZqMGo0qAIAsAIA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)).

But capital, as it always seems to be, is a short-term master. In the end, nuclear war benefits no one, and global warming won't either.

Wake up! It's time for us, as a species, to start to think long-term and with each other in mind, it doesn't matter how well you're doing today, or the killing you'll make in the next quarter.

However deep your bunker, it sure sounds like a lonely place to spend eternity.

*Jason Fields is a deputy opinion editor at Newsweek.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2352096/against-armed-iran.jpg)

**Graphic**

Against an Armed Iran

TOBIAS SCHWARZ/AFP via Getty Images

Demonstrators hold Iranian flags and a huge inflated figure representing Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei holding a nuclear bomb as they protest against the Iranian regime, on Feb. 16, at Odeonsplatz square in Munich.

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