

COP29 Ignores Militarism, Putting Meaningful Climate Deal Out Of Reach



COP29
Baku
Azerbaijan

11-22-2024 ~ *Leaders of the world's top polluting nations skipped COP29, which also failed to address how militarism fuels emissions.*

The 2024 UN climate change conference, COP29, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, is now nearing its end and reports are that talks are deadlocked. The two biggest elephants in the room are militarism and climate financing.

Wars generate more carbon emissions than many countries, while the [U.S. military](#) is the [single largest institutional source](#) of greenhouse gas emissions, according to Brown University's Costs of War Project. The wars in Ukraine and Gaza have resulted not only in the deaths of hundreds of thousands, but have caused catastrophic damage to the environment and paved the way to hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the atmosphere. For example, it's estimated that the first two years of Russia's war on Ukraine will have generated [175 million metric tonnes](#) of carbon dioxide. This is more than the total emissions generated individually by many countries, including the Netherlands, Venezuela and Kuwait.

Meanwhile, Gaza's future habitability is very much in doubt. In just the first six weeks of the assault, Israel dropped a staggering 29,000 bombs on Gaza, with the majority of the bombs being [2,000 pounds](#) and supplied to Israel from the U.S. Emissions from just the first 120 days of Israel's war on Gaza (October 2023-February 2024) exceeded the annual emissions of 26 countries and territories, according to a [study](#) by an international team of researchers. When the war infrastructure (built primarily by Israel but also including that built by Hamas) is taken into account, the total emissions increase to more than 36 countries and territories, while the emissions associated with the rebuilding of Gaza are "projected to be higher than the annual emissions of over 135 countries,"

according to the same study.

COP29's failure to address militarism's contribution to climate change ensures any progress will be trivial. But let's look at another elephant in the room: coming to an agreement on climate finance, which is the main objective for the countries gathered at the climate summit. The annual \$100 billion target established in 2009 to support developing countries in reducing emissions and adapting to the threats of global warming was met for the first time in 2022 — two years after the initial deadline. Moreover, that figure is now recognized by the [Independent High-Level Expert Group on Climate Finance](#) as highly insufficient. Developing countries need trillions of dollars to combat climate change and address its impacts. A few countries, such as [India](#) on behalf of like-minded developing countries and [Saudi Arabia](#) on behalf of the Arab Group, have called for developed countries to provide at least \$1 trillion annually to developing countries, but this is a wishful thinking proposal. The number being floated instead in private discussions is [\\$200 billion](#), which was rejected by developing nations as totally unacceptable. In the meanwhile, the G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, ended without concrete progress on climate finance and “[only words of support for Baku](#).” It is highly doubtful that we will see a final text at COP29 with concrete numbers for the finance goal that corresponds to the actual needs of and demands from Global South. To make matters worse, the current geopolitical context, diminishing appetite for climate action among world leaders, and the fact that Donald Trump is returning to the White House do not bode well for the future of climate action in general.

There are other processes underway at COP29 that are disconcerting. Several world leaders and government officials did not even bother to travel to Baku. The absence of Europe's major leaders from the summit is especially striking. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz opted, for different reasons, not to attend COP29. The leaders of the United States, Russia, China, India and Brazil also did not go to the UN climate conference. In other words, the leaders of the world's top polluters skipped COP29.

Climate scientist [Bill Hare](#) was spot-on when he explained the absence of big name world leaders from COP29 as “symptomatic of the lack of political will to act.” Indeed, the prime minister of Papua New Guinea, one of the most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change, decided not to attend COP29 in protest

of the sincerity of developed countries to address the climate crisis, while the country's foreign affairs minister described the summit as a "[total waste of time.](#)"

Another irony about COP29 is that the host country's president has defended oil and gas, calling them a "[gift from the god.](#)" Of course, this raises the question of why COP29 is being held in Azerbaijan, a country whose exports rely almost totally on oil and gas. Or why COP28 and COP27 were held in the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, respectively, since both countries are major exporters of petroleum and thus have major vested interests in maintaining and even expanding the fossil fuel industry.

This year will surpass 2023 as the hottest year on record and will also be the first year in which the planet will be [more than 1.5 degrees Celsius](#) above the pre-industrial level. Yet the delegates at COP29 are still talking about the old climate benchmark when "1.5C has been deadlier than a doornail," according to [Zeke Hausfather](#), climate scientist at Berkeley Earth.

However, COP29 countries have taken a step toward the adoption of a global carbon market framework, that is, trading schemes in which carbon credits are sold and bought. Yet it is still unclear that carbon markets can be a reliable tool for combating climate change, as many critics contend that carbon offsets can [disincentivize decarbonization](#). This is, after all, the corporate world's go-to tool for addressing climate emissions. The European Union led the way in the creation of an international [emissions trading system](#) (ETS) in 2005, but it has been widely regarded as a failed climate solution. [China](#) created its own national ETS in 2021, but most studies reveal that its implementation has had limited to very little impact on industrial CO2 emissions.

Unfortunately, COP29, like all other UN climate change conferences preceding it, will end in disappointment. Moreover, pledges made at these global climate change conferences are voluntary and legally nonbinding. At last year's climate conference, countries promised to transition away from fossil fuels. What has been happening instead is that the burning of fossil fuels continued to rise in 2024, and [global carbon emissions](#) from fossil fuels hit a new high.

To say that time is running out to save humanity and the planet from a global climate catastrophe is an understatement. Yet, all indications are that the powers that be are bent on keeping fossil fuels around until they run out. Capitalism is of

course the main cause of global warming, and reforming capitalism in a drastic way, and as soon as possible, might be the only way to proceed with effective climate action.

Thus, there is a dual challenge ahead for climate activists: Fighting climate change while seeking simultaneously to reform capitalism. Unfortunately, we don't have the luxury to wait for the end of capitalism as time to save the planet is fast running out. All concerned citizens must demand climate action from their own governments. We need to embrace grassroots strategies and nationwide campaigns. Climate activism and organized labor must find common ground. Hence the importance of a just transition; hence also the importance of a working-class strategy for climate change.

The problem is not simply fossil capital, but all major factions of the capitalist class, especially that of finance capital. [Banks](#) have financed fossil fuels with nearly \$7 trillion since the Paris Agreement was adopted by nearly every country in 2015. Both corporate and finance capital defend neoliberalism and austerity economics, thus standing on the way to a just and much needed redistribution of wealth to build a clean energy infrastructure and thus end our reliance on energy generated from fossil fuels.

Neoliberalism and the climate crisis are interlinked. Neoliberal capitalism has commodified the planet's resources and has created a situation where short-term profit-making is being put above the livelihood of workers and the state of the environment. Corporations have free rein to deplete natural resources in the name of profit and efficiency. Banks dominate fossil fuel financing because of short-term gains and because their primary goal is maximizing profit.

As COP29 draws to a close, there is not much hope for any major breakthroughs. Preparations for COP30, which will be convened in Belem, northern Brazil, next year, are already underway, with the host country planning to present an agenda that combines biodiversity, adaptation and climate change. In the meantime, the annual global average temperature will most likely continue to rise as carbon emissions will increase, and the Trump administration will be busy undoing climate solutions.

There is a ton of work to do to save the planet from global warming. But it won't happen in global climate change conferences, and surely not without massive

pressure from civil society.

Activists must not give up fighting the good fight. We have a world to win.

Source:

<https://truthout.org/articles/cop29-ignores-militarism-putting-meaningful-climate-deal-out-of-reach/>

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*C.J. Polychroniou is a political scientist/political economist, author and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He is a columnist for *Global Policy Journal* and a regular contributor to *Truthout*. He has published scores of books, including *Marxist Perspectives on Imperialism: A Theoretical Analysis*; *Perspectives and Issues in International Political Economy* (ed.); and *Socialism: Crisis and Renewal* (ed.), and over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021); *Illegitimate Authority: Facing the Challenges of Our Time* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2023); and *A Livable Future Is Possible: Confronting the Threats to Our Survival* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2024).*