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Mill and power plant, Oregon City. Photo: Jeffrey St. Clair.

Climate change is a war crime.

International jurisprudence recognizes the supreme crime as the making of aggressive war. This principle formed the basis of and justification for the Nuremberg and Tokyo War Crimes Tribunals (held variously from 1945 to 1949). Aggressive war is the supreme crime because all other possible crimes can occur in parallel, in association with, and as a consequence of the making of aggressive war; the perpetrators of war having opened a Pandora's Box of

destruction, death and evil. Also, the making of aggressive war is necessarily of international scope even if the combat is confined to one nation as a “civil war,” because any war causes disruptions, displacements and involvements that affect and include other nations.

Aggressive war is a drive to power by its perpetrators to gain dominion over other lands and people, and to consolidate dictatorial power within their own countries, all for the most-desired purposes of: structuring the national economies to enrich themselves exorbitantly; to compress the free will and independent thinking in the dominated societies into a monolithic and slavish obedience to, and adoration of the egos of, the war leaders; and to be able to crush opponents without mercy and to pass judgments and issue punishments without legal restraints or personal hazard.

Throughout history there have been many individuals who have sought success by pouring themselves into warmongering activity. As with any field of endeavor, some succeed spectacularly, some only achieve partial mediocre results, and many are utter failures — in this last case fortunately for humanity. Warmongering is always an activity that is anchored in a socio-political hierarchy, which the warmongers exploit. The job-seeker flunkies, technicians, thugs and bureaucrats — the Class B war criminals, if you will — who seek places in a warmonger-leader’s ideology and hierarchical movement so as to advance their own personal circumstances and social status, form the gear-train between the leadership and the herded masses; they transform the leaders’ intent into actions and forces that compel the movements and work of the masses.

Wars can be prosecuted along many dimensions of social activity. The most obvious is the violent use of technology — guns, bombs, armaments and war vehicles — provided by war-oriented industries. Another is by economic warfare: boycotts, embargoes, sanctions, industrial and agricultural sabotage. A nation with a large, strong and diversified economy can more easily intimidate a nation with a smaller, more primitive and narrowly defined economy. Other aspects of economic warfare are currency manipulation, and the selling of indebtedness to weaker nations under stress. Our early 21st century world is one in which the technology and use of electronic telecommunications have embedded themselves into the moment-by-moment operations of: military coordination; trade and economic transactions; the diffusion of news, entertainment and propaganda; and the transmission of personal messages. Warmongers who can control, manipulate and deny the use of communications infrastructure to an enemy population will have a powerful advantage.

Any warmonger’s drive to political power will require two essential ingredients: sources of physical energy for producing chemical and electro-mechanical power, and money. The most

concentrated and transportable sources of such physical power today are fossil fuels, which are provided by petrochemical industries. Fossil fuels are the most easily used substances for powering the transport of the full spectrum of military vehicles; and petrochemicals are essential ingredients in the fabrication of explosives and propellants used in armaments. Money is essential to the schemes of a warmonger in order to purchase the hardware for prosecuting war, to buy the allegiance through employment of the lower level flunkies (patronage), and to sprinkle the herded masses with some minimal palliatives (bread and circuses).

Fossil fuels are how almost all of us acquire the external physical power we use in our daily lives. It powers our automobiles, our airplane and marine transportation; and the combustion of fossil fuels is the major source of the mechanical power used to turn the electric generators that supply our homes and businesses with electricity. It is technically possible to use solar, wind and hydro (gravity) sources of energy to crank our electric generators for civilian electrical power, but those 'green' sources are all of low concentration and require large collection areas (solar farms, windmill arrays, rivers and reservoirs and ocean tidal flows), so they are useless for mobile military purposes. Because fossil fuels — and in particular petroleum — are such potent and convenient sources of physical power, they are very highly desired worldwide, and that means that fortunes can be made by producing and selling them, and no serious war-making scheme can advance without them.

The most efficient engine of war that human ingenuity has ever devised is called capitalism. This engine is designed as an economic system that generates money — distributed hierarchically within the system to grease its own operation through cupidity — from the extraction of natural resources that are industrially processed into: fossil fuels, metals and plastics, solid state materials used in our electro-optical and telecommunications infrastructure, and industrialized agriculture. One type of industry that processes raw materials into technological products is that which supplies and maintains military forces. Politics in any society is how the economy is administered, how the costs and the benefits are distributed. Most of us will see a society as "militarist" if the military forces and their associated industries dominate the nation's politics and the national economy, paying few of the public costs and extracting huge targeted benefits. Similarly, most of us will see a society as "socialist" (or democratic socialist, or capitalist welfare state) if the public costs required and personal benefits produced by its economy are very evenly and equitably distributed throughout the population, and military forces and war industries are only as large as prudent for national self-defense, and represent only minor parts of the economy and the political power-structure.

Capitalist societies (and which ones today aren't?) that are misshaped to fit the schemes of warmongering elites will be those seeking "to gain dominion over other lands and people and to consolidate dictatorial power within their own countries." This is aggressive war by a

combination of military force, economic intimidation and cyber warfare, as described earlier. These aggressive wars — against the international public — are fossil-fueled, and are the primary sources of the CO₂, methane (and hydrocarbon) and NO_x emissions that cause global warming (climate change). Now, the globally accepted euphemisms for categorizing these wars are “competitiveness” and “economic competition.” The idea here is that “our” efforts to gain economic and physical advantages (money, resource extraction and privileged use of territory) over “them” is part of an economic-sport competition (“trade,” “free market,” “world market,” “the great game”). But in this arena of competition “it’s not how you play the game, but whether you win or lose,” and “nice guys finish last,” are the attitudes of choice. This is unregulated capitalism, it is war, and this is the source of global warming and its associated environmental degradation.

Therefore, since war in all its forms against the international public interest is always a crime: climate change is a war crime.

The ending of today’s many climate change-producing wars will require — as with so many earlier wars — an international alliance of the “regular people” outside the warmongering political-economic elites, in this case to support each other’s efforts to gain domestic political power to green-socialize their national economies, and to bring to justice in national and international tribunals the leading militarists, industrialists, bankers-financiers and authoritarian politicians whose supremely egotistical drives to power and wealth are withering the humanity, spirits and intellects of the societies they exploitatively herd, and are poisoning the habitability of Planet Earth.

I realize that this monumental task of popular revolutionary transformation will seem politically impossible to most “rational” people. But isn’t the achievement of a just management of national and international economics on an environmentally revitalized Planet Earth with sustainable energy production and use, with less exacerbation of global warming, with internationally cooperative forms of ameliorating the unavoidable effects of advancing localized changes of climate, and with no aggressive wars — both bloody and of “economic competition” — a vision worth investing political activity towards? Such political activity can gain some passion with the realization that: climate change is a war crime.

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