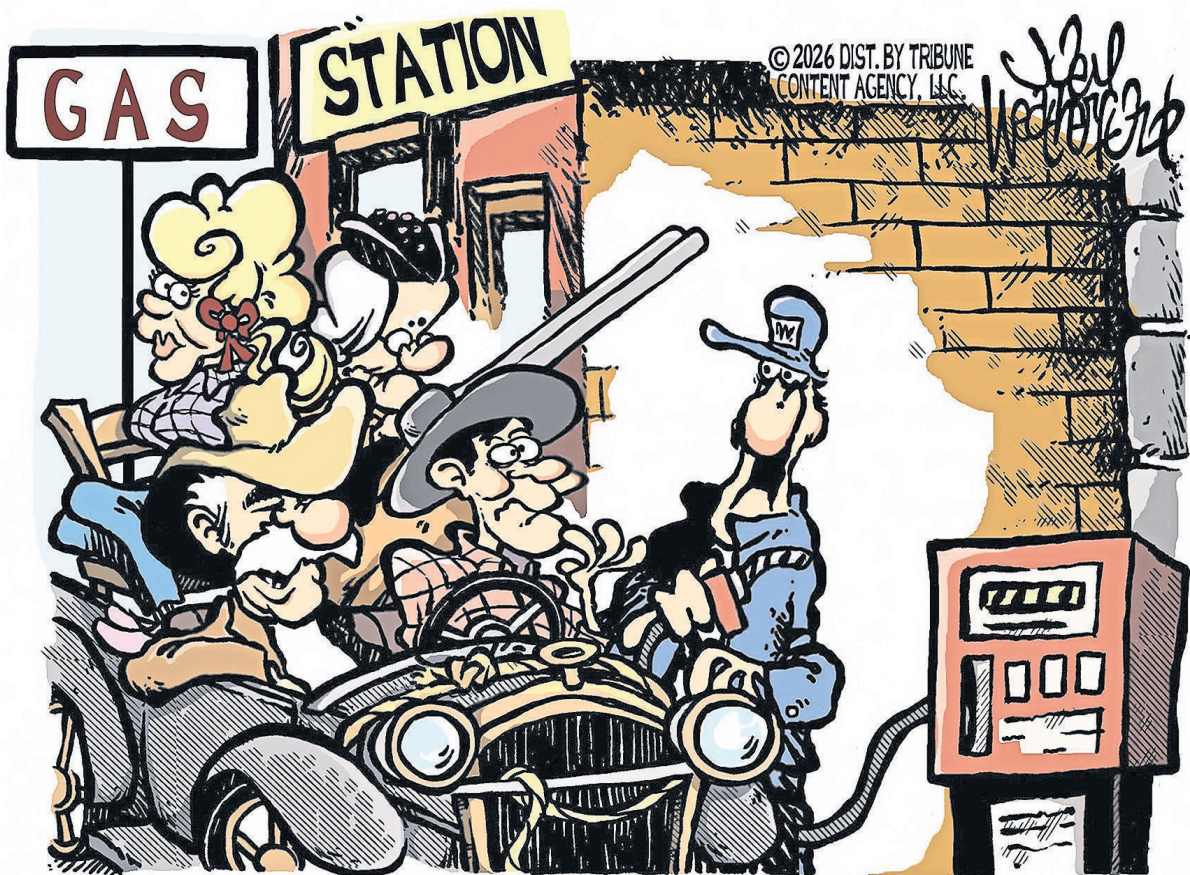




NO, THESE ARE NOT JUST BEVERLY HILLS PRICES NOW... GAS IS EXPENSIVE ALL OVER THE COUNTRY

Private jets have a free-rider problem

If you try to take a free ride on, say, public transit in New York City, you'll get in trouble with the law. If your mode of transportation is a private jet, on the other hand, there's a high risk you'll be offered champagne.

Private jets are far from free, of course; the average hourly charter rate for a midsize jet is \$12,730, according to an index maintained by the charter company Jetly. But relative to their impact on the climate and the millions of the rest of us who fly commercial, private jets don't cost nearly enough.

You could call private jets an example of what economists call a free-rider problem: They crowd and pollute the airspace and environment that belongs to everyone without paying an appropriate cost. They also offer a clue as to why controlling global heating is such a challenge.

A mere 256,000 people, or the top 0.003% of the global population, use private jets, according to a new report from the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), a non-profit research and advocacy group. About half of their flights are for leisure travel, including delivering their kids to summer camps, the report notes. Each of those flyers produces between 10 and 14 times more greenhouse gas than the typical commercial passenger, the report estimates.

So, for example, a private jet from Teterboro, New Jersey, just outside of New York, to Dulles International in Washington produces 538.5 kilograms of carbon-dioxide equivalent per passenger, compared with 44.38 kg of CO2 for each of the poor souls on a Delta Air Lines Inc. flight from LaGuardia Airport to Reagan National.

Private-aviation back-

ers will point out that many more people are packed into our hypothetical Delta flight than on that Gulfstream. The

wide gap in passenger volumes explains why, at about 20 million tons of CO2 per year, private jets make up just 2% of all aviation emissions. And those make up maybe 3% of

total global emissions. If private jets were outlawed tomorrow, you might save the equivalent of, say, Tanzania's annual carbon pollution.

But the problem is growing. Private air travel hit a record of nearly 3.9 million flights last year, up 34% from 2019, according to data provider WingX. Jet sales have jumped 24% since 2021 to \$40.3 billion in 2025, according to data from the jet-financing firm Global Jet Capital. Order backlogs at big manufacturers such as Gulfstream and Bombardier Inc. were up 20% in the second quarter of 2026 from a year earlier, to \$66.8 billion. The bulk of these jets, 69% of the world's total, end up in the U.S., according to the IPS report.

More important, the private-jet problem speaks to a broader, more consequential issue in the fight to avoid the worst effects of global heating: a vast and growing inequality that worsens climate change's effects and makes addressing it much harder.

The world's wealthiest people and nations generate the most greenhouse gases, while the poorest barely generate any. Each of the 73 million people living in Tanzania is responsible for about a quarter ton of CO2 per year, on average. One executive in a private jet has already spewed that much by the time she's halfway from Teterboro to Dulles.

Yet poorer nations are suffering far more than richer ones from the consequences of the 1.3 degrees Celsius (2.3 degrees Fahrenheit) that the planet has already warmed above preindustrial averages. Tanzania, while only the world's 91st-worst carbon polluter, according to the 2025 Global Carbon Budget, was the 47th most vulnerable nation to climate change and 150th in its ability to cope. The East African nation is already experiencing the extreme floods and droughts a hotter planet brings, effects that will intensify with every extra tenth of a degree of heating.

And even if rich nations miraculously erased their emissions overnight, poor ones would still suffer for decades afterward, according to a new study by researchers at the University of Melbourne published in the journal Environmental Research Letters.

But the unfairness hits even closer to home than that. U.S. commercial airline passengers pay all kinds of extra charges for the privilege of being crammed into routinely delayed tubes. Along with fees for checked bags, carry-ons and decent seats, they also pay a 7.5% transportation tax and random line items with cryptic names like "passenger facility charge" and "flight segment tax." Private-jet passengers pay only a federal jet-fuel tax of 21.9 cents a gallon, the IPS report notes.

It's little wonder, then, that private jets account for 16% of the Federal Aviation Administration's operations but contribute just 0.6% of the taxes that fund it, the IPS report notes. Does that mean we should raise private jet taxes 25-fold to make up the difference? Why, yes, in fact. The median wealth of a private-jet owner is \$190 million, according to the report. Jets are luxury goods used by a wealthy few

that spoil the environment and bring economic damage to the rest of us. They should be priced as such.

Instead, we subsidize these things and not just in the FAA budget. President Donald Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act turned a temporary ability to speed up depreciation for private jets into a forever perk. That means owners can write down the full amount of their planes in the first year. Florida, the busiest state in the country for private jets with 12% of U.S. flights, levies neither fuel nor sales taxes on them.

And now, making the concept of a free ride even more literal and obnoxious, the House version of the ALERT act, meant to improve air safety after the deadly collision of a commercial jet and military helicopter over the Potomac River, includes several more giveaways to private-jet travelers.

Stripping away these unnecessary perks, ostensibly meant to help businesses but instead mostly making luxury travel cheaper, would be a good start. Imposing a luxury tax should be the next step. Governments could raise \$3 billion a year with just a 10% tax on used jets and a 5% tax on new ones, the IPS report suggests. That's not much, but every bit helps when you're trying to keep planes from crashing into one another and the planet from overheating.

Economists consider free riders a market failure. But our world is full of them, including the fossil-fuel companies, which get \$7 trillion a year in explicit and implicit government subsidies while also being the primary source of the greenhouse-gas emissions cooking the planet — after lying to the public for decades about their products' effects. Until we turn this perverse math on its head, progress will be elusive. Private jets could be a good start.

Make threats of annihilation taboo again

Visiting mixed villages in former Yugoslavia before it careened toward its violent breakup in 1992, I spoke to neighbors who dismissed the idea of a coming war as simply unimaginable.

But as each tuned in to the increasingly nationalistic TV stations of their respective Serbian or Croatian capitals, they were bombarded by commentary posing as news that recalled historical wrongs and alleged plots for coming atrocities.

Steeped in these bilious alternative realities, the neighbors stopped talking. Soon, they were killing one another, each convinced they were acting in self-defense.

I was reminded of this while listening to President Donald Trump's address to the United Nations General Assembly, when he said he was deciding whether to make a deal with Iran or to "annihilate the Islamic Republic and do it quickly, never giving them a chance to kill and destroy people and countries again."

It's tempting to say, "Well, that's just Trump." This is a man who made a career in real estate and showbiz by blowing smoke. I don't believe he has the slightest intention of killing 90 million-plus Iranians.

But for the record, threatening countries or peoples with extermination is not normal, not since the genocidal conflict that was World War II, and especially not for nations with the nuclear arsenals to do it.

Beyond one somewhat cryptic "We will bury you!" from Nikita Khrushchev in 1956, Soviet and prior U.S. leaders never publicly threatened to annihilate anyone, even if that extremity underpinned the entire policy of Mutual Assured Destruction that governed their Cold War standoff.

The more worrying part about such threats today is that Trump is not alone in making them. Iran's president, Masoud Pezeshkian, may have had a strong point when he told the UN on Wednesday that his country was a victim of U.S. aggression, but until 2015 the Islamic Republic was singled out for containment by the entire UN Security Council, precisely because it routinely called for the annihilation of another state (Israel) while simultaneously running a covert nuclear program.

Russia's Vladimir Putin talks about annihilation a little differently. He has hinted that he's ready to deliver a nuclear strike against any country that pushes back against his invasion of Ukraine.

To underscore the point, he has changed his nation's security doctrine to lower the threat-threshold required. And he has worked assiduously to persuade his own people of the falsehood that they are not invading a neighbor, but rather acting in self-defense against an aggressive Europe that's returning to its fascist past.

A 2025 study of 261 conflicts from 1508 to 1941 by academics from the Netherlands, Switzerland and Germany found that leaders planning wars of aggression falsely claimed the need for self-defense 64% of the time.

They did so because, by and large, populations — like those Yugoslav neighbors — won't choose the sacrifice and slaughter that comes with war unless they've no choice. The same rule applies when it comes to breaking the nuclear taboo.

On this, Putin has left the heavy lifting to others. The shock jocks who run the

main news talk shows on Russia's state-controlled TV channels make frequent threats to annihilate London or sink the UK as a whole, sometimes with images of nuclear mushroom clouds as a backdrop.

Dmitry Medvedev, the former Russian president who now heads Putin's National Security Council, has threatened both Lithuania and Ukraine with annihilation.

Sergei Karaganov, who advised Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin as well as

Putin on nuclear policy, has said repeatedly since the start of the Ukraine war that Russia should use a nuclear strike to end it.

In June he spelled out how that should work: Moscow would first hit European targets with conventional missiles to restore the continent's "fear of hell." Then, should there be any response, Russia would escalate to nuclear strikes on Romania, Poland and Germany. And were Germany to even think of getting its own nuclear arsenal to deter such an attack, the country that gave us Goethe and Beethoven, as well as the fascist Third Reich, should be "evaporated."

Underlying all this is the belief that in the event that Russia should wipe out a target in Europe, the threat of a U.S. nuclear counterstrike no longer exists. So whereas Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan jointly stated in 1985 that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought, Russian officials now believe they just need to avoid targeting the U.S. "A nuclear war is winnable," Karaganov said.

As with Trump, it's easy to dismiss Karaganov, a known hawk. And there remains a strong suspicion that Putin's goal is less to risk the fallout from becoming the first leader in history to use nuclear weapons for a war of aggression than to let the threat do the work for him.

All he needs is for enough Europeans to believe they face the prospect of a nuclear Armageddon, and he can win without having to push the button.

As was the case in the former Yugoslavia, language can normalize the unthinkable, and that makes such reckless talk of annihilation too great a risk to take in the nuclear age.

"We see how state propaganda is preparing people to think that nuclear war isn't a bad thing," the Russian journalist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dmitry Muratov said of Putin's war, as early as 2023. "On TV channels here, nuclear war and nuclear weapons are promoted as if they're advertising pet food."

This is a period of extreme change and dislocation. Old certainties are vanishing almost by the day, made all the more unpredictable and disorienting by the speed of technological change allowing for the advent of drones on the battlefield or the rise of agentic AI.

Some taboos, like assassinating other world leaders, are already being broken openly. Now we are normalizing the treatment of genocide and nuclear weapons as common instruments of war.

I'm not sure this is a genie that can be put back in its bottle, but all world leaders need to condemn talk of annihilation whenever and from whomever they hear it. That's a huge ask, because these are demagogues in charge of great powers and there are few available tools to rein them in.

It is a combination that has never ended well when left unchecked.



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