

‘The New Climate War’ exposes tactics of climate change ‘inactivists’

Climate scientist Michael Mann argues outright denialism has morphed into inactivism

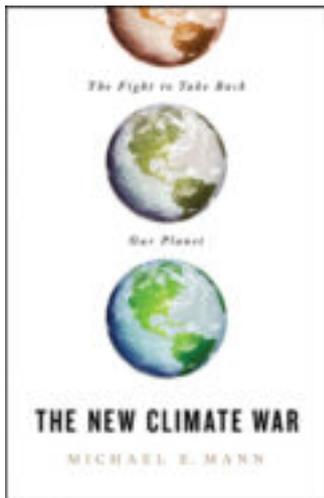


Outright denial of climate change is giving way to subtler efforts to delay action on reducing fossil fuel emissions, argues climate scientist Michael Mann. One tactic, he says, is to shift responsibility away from fossil fuel companies (a gas flare at a North Dakota oil well site, shown) and to individuals.

ANDREW BURTON/GETTY IMAGES

By [Carolyn Gramling](#)

JANUARY 15, 2021 AT 6:00 AM



[The New Climate War](#)

Michael E. Mann

Public Affairs, \$29

Sometime around the fifth century B.C., the Chinese general and military strategist Sun Tzu wrote in his highly quotable treatise *The Art of War*, “If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.”

In *The New Climate War*, climate scientist Michael Mann channels Sun Tzu to demystify the myriad tactics of “the enemy” — in this case, “the fossil fuel companies, right-wing plutocrats and oil-funded governments” and other forces standing in the way of large-scale action to combat climate change. “Any plan for victory requires recognizing and defeating the tactics now being used by inactivists as they continue to wage war,” he writes.

Mann is a veteran of the climate wars of the 1990s and early 2000s, when the scientific evidence that the climate is changing due to human emissions of greenhouse gases was under attack. Now, with [the effects of climate change all around us](#) (*SN: 12/21/20*), we are in a new phase of those wars, he argues. Outright denial has morphed into “deception, distraction and delay.”

Such tactics, he says, are direct descendants of earlier public relations battles over whether producers or consumers must bear ultimate responsibility for, say, smoking-related deaths. When it comes to the climate, Mann warns, an overemphasis on

individual actions could eclipse efforts to achieve the real prize: industrial-scale emissions reductions.

He pulls no punches, calling out sources of “friendly fire” from climate advocates who he says divide the climate community and play into the “enemy’s” hands. These advocates include climate purists who lambaste scientists for flying or eating meat; science communicators who push fatalistic visions of catastrophic futures; and idealistic technocrats who advocate for risky, pie-in-the-sky [geoengineering ideas](#). All, Mann says, distract from what we can do in the here and now: regulate emissions and invest in renewable energy.

The New Climate War’s main focus is to combat psychological warfare, and on this front, the book is fascinating and often entertaining. It’s an engrossing mix of footnoted history, acerbic political commentary and personal anecdotes. As far as what readers can do to assist in the battle, Mann advocates four strategies: Disregard the doomsayers; get inspired by youth activists like Greta Thunberg; focus on educating the people who will listen; and don’t be fooled into thinking it’s too late to take action to change the political system.

Buy [The New Climate War](#) from [Amazon.com](#). Science News is a participant in the Amazon Services LLC Associates Program. Please see our [FAQ](#) for more details.