

They're not kidding

By Constance Scrafield

The Saudi Arabian oil company, Aramco, has posted a 90% jump in profits of \$161 Billion in 2022. Benefitting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this is a significant comeback from the dip in oil profits and the resulting surge in energy prices have boosted petrostates that just a few years ago were struggling with a depressed oil market and a world transitioning to cleaner fuels, the BBC explains.

Such profits obviously expand the kind of investments the Kingdom is making. Internationally, Saudi investments are varied, but at home, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who runs the Kingdom's day-to-day affairs for his father, King Salman, is pressing on with a vast desert project to build two of the tallest buildings in the world, up to 1,600 feet and running parallel for 75 miles. Named Neom, this desert development will be the size of Massachusetts and is meant to rival the Pyramids, so the prince declares.

Here is the point: Saudi Arabia has been on track to diversify its economy with tourism and manufacturing, but with profits of this nature, it is clearly stated that oil will be the main driver of the Saudi economy for at least another decade.

In the US, Biden has approved the Willow Project drilling for oil in north west Alaska, opening the way for the years-long construction of the drilling site and eventually plunging into vulnerable ecosystems for the sake of extracting oil to pump through pipelines, the very things scientists and environmentalists are screaming must halt.

In many ways, this was surprising, considering the multi-billion dollar bill Biden passed in late 2022 to shore up environmental initiatives and encourage the move to more sustainable energy.

What about that now? However, there is, not surprisingly, a real joy and excitement on the ground in some of Alaska at the thought of all that money flooding into this state of wilderness and grizzly bears. Jobs, the ever-go-to blackmail of the oil industry, will suddenly flourish, and there will come a time when a new town and a gold-rush economy may blossom near the drill site with the workers and the good times and the whole messy business for which the industry is famous. So much for sustainability.

The current push for deep sea drilling is not about oil but about minerals in abundance on the deep sea floor, where polymetallic nodules harbour the valuable metals needed for car batteries, cell phones and the like. The dangers of this invasion into the last bastion of an untouched environment - the world's deep sea bed - are that the machinery and the invasion will take an unknown toll on that environment and flora and fauna living there.

The irony is: what wealth are we looking for? Because it is always about the bottom line. The irony of this wealth is, deep sea drilling is chasing it by extracting minerals to power electric vehicles. Right? Our so-called green vehicles need to be run by batteries which require mineral from the destructive drilling in the deep sea.

Scientifically, we do not know what is down there. Happily, so far, we have been constrained from real exploration and conclusive information about what creatures and elements are actually harboured in the ocean's depths. The sheer volume of the oceans has perhaps inhibited truly invasive exploration or, could be, the lure of the stars has been a more enticing target for the massive volume of money we are spending to reach out.

Yet, let us look at the main motive for infringing on our fellow creatures of the deep, which is once again destructive and only money-driven. There are sufficient land sources for the minerals we require for our extremely unimaginative and wasteful green modes of travel. By the millions, electric vehicles are to be made without so it seems - slowing down to re-design a way to power our need to drive without mining at all.

We keep talking about alternative sources of power with the sun's offer of free energy as the headline, followed by

still-in-development hydrogen (too much use natural gas) and fusion (not quite ready) but, always in a hurry because time is money, we rush ahead with the least green option: batteries.

We could dig and probe and learn about the oceans' depths. There will be creatures and matters we never thought of, and the biggest fear is that we will fear them and want to pre-emptively (speaking of our go-to's) confront and even destroy them. Or maybe some bright spark will want to build a ?deep sea aquarium? for a monster hotel lobby or a massive tourist attraction, and we can hunt and capture some citizens from the depths to put into this immense artificial fish bowl to entertain school children and people coming from afar.

The creature would die horribly but we would no longer need to fear it, proving yet again our ability to dominate.

And destroy.