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GEOPOLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

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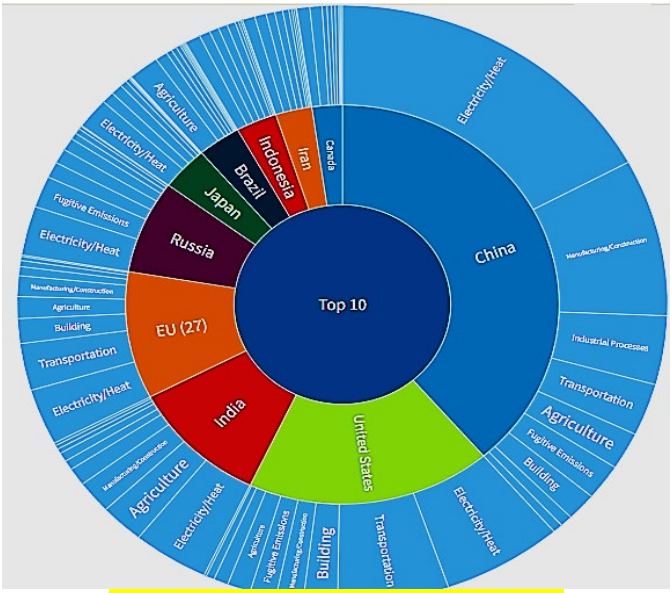
Barry Buzan in his sectoral approach to security has identified environmental degradation as a separate threat to mankind. With no specific boundaries and a shift in ecological patterns, Climate Change has been identified as the biggest threat to human race and is therefore being given a renewed importance in the realm of national security.

There are two broad perspectives surrounding the debate on changing climate. Liberalists propagate the success of climate agreements, where rich countries finance climate projects in developing countries, thus bolstering success of UN Climate change regime. Realist perspective on the other hand proposes that technical, political and financial aspects need to be given thorough consideration before compliance to climate commitments, as regardless of the agreements, natural disasters will remain preventable and global temperature will continue to rise. It can therefore be deduced that developing states need to decrease their reliance on foreign intervention while focusing more on adaptation strategies.



Source 1: World Resource Institute-2019

Statistics show that the world's 30% richest states are in control of 70% of the global resources and are therefore primarily responsible for the degradation of environment. Since 1750s, USA has been the top emitter, responsible for 25% of historical emissions, twice higher than China.[1] The top 10 GHG emitters contribute over 2/3rd of global emissions, with China, United states and India contributing 42.6% of the total emissions.[2] At present, China is the largest carbon emitter in the world, with 11.680 GT, i-e around 32% and US around 12.6% (4.535GT) of the world's total in 2020.[3] Globally, energy sector is the biggest GHG emitter and Chinese energy reliance on coal is estimated to be around 67% in its overall energy mix.[4] Unfortunately, most of the literature available on Climate risk has been prepared by organizations under the influence of West and therefore use it as a tool to further vested interests, thus diminishing the magnanimity of threat the world faces.

This is evident from the fact that all the states marked as the most vulnerable countries by the Climate Risk Index and are under heavy Chinese influence and investment and are located in Asia, North America, and Africa.[5] Most reports have conveniently ignored US' contribution to ecological damage and labelled China and Russia as "Climate Evils". There exists a probability that the Global North could utilize commitments to address climate change as a geopolitical tool against rival nations in a similar manner as they have employed human rights and terrorism since last couple of decades for their political gains.

The current geopolitical tools have interlinked Climate Change, energy and geopolitics. Firstly, global emission commitments for developing countries can potentially be weaponized, where rich countries can

potentially be weaponized, where rich countries can impose mandatory emission reductions on underdeveloped nations, thus limiting their survival and economic growth. Secondly, higher tariffs on non-green products will increase the market barriers and make it difficult to meet commitments. The underlying intention is therefore to forcefully penalize poorer nations, let developing countries bear cost of emissions while the developed world continues to attain competitive advantage for their domestic products. Thirdly, the developed countries from the Western bloc have been using climate negotiating platforms to further their interests and have been forcing underdeveloped countries into emission reduction and other climate commitments.

Climate Change has the potential of being used as a geopolitical tool, and its implications are as evident as its causative factors.

Climate Change can alter the balance of power when it comes to energy mix. The gradual shift to cleaner energy resources suggests that Natural gas is the future. In this regard, Central Asian States, with abundant natural gas resources will potentially be attaining a powerful status. Russia aims at the establishment of OPEC style organization of natural gas exporting countries including Iran, Qatar, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan,[6] and growing ties between Iran and Russia suggest that Moscow will counter western sanctions through Tehran, creating new Natural Gas hub.[7] Thus, Climate Change may change the status of traditional petroleum exporting powers.

As clean and green technological superpowers are emerging, the monopolization of technological innovation is considered a power booster. At present, China is the largest producer and exporter of green energy products and clean energy technology. Chinese firms offer infusion of new technologies to upgrade traditional energy plants to cleaner ones. To counter increasing Chinese influence in the green market, US administration has signed Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The project has incurred a cost of $369 billion with the aim to develop domestic clean energy sector and decrease global dependence on China.[8] This will intensify the rivalry between the two powers. With such interlinked environmental and commercial interests at stake, US might use its global dominance to impede Chinese interests by coercing developing and underdeveloped countries to abide by Climate laws.

The changing climate has led to physical geographical changes as well. According to NASA, Arctic ice is melting at a rate of 12.6% per decade due to global warming,[9] such ice melting in the Arctic has opened window of opportunity for frozen Northern countries like China, Russia and the US. Arctic accounts for 30% undiscovered gas resources, while melting of ice sheets have opened sea ways for longer duration.[10] With US exiting the purchase plan of Green Land, the region is now open for Russia to increase its influence. Moscow has previously conducted major military exercises, with advanced warheads in the Arctic as an expression of consolidating Russian influence in the region.[11] Commercially, Russia seeks to attract cargo ships away from Suez Canal and provide alternate passage to ships through Northern Sea routes, although such a plan would bear higher cost but will consolidate Russian hegemony in Arctic.[12] [13] Additionally, by investing in Russian LNG projects, China is furthering Russian claim in the region. China describes itself as a "Near Arctic State". The Chinese Polar Silk route passing through the Northern region and Chinese infrastructural development, can help Beijing use the region for commercial and military purposes, thus leading to greater contestation.[14] One can therefore conclude that Climate Change has geopolitical implications while the international climate initiatives have been heavily politicized.

Therefore, given the deepening US-China rivalry and its spillover effects on Climate commitments, it can be asserted that developing states are more likely to experience its effects at geophysical, diplomatic and economic fronts. If climate change were to be weaponized, then nations aligned with China may face more rigorous commitments, predominantly driven by the West. Such a scenario proposes decreasing reliance on international climate assistance and alternate development of domestic and regional resilience. Along with repercussions of being directly pawned into US-China rivalry, states are equally subjected to climate litigation at domestic and international forums, where non-governmental organizations and certain pressure groups can be used to spur geopolitical motives. This situation is illustrated in the complaint lodged with the European Ombudsman regarding the European Union's importation of Russian oil and gas, contending that it will impact both human rights associated with war in Ukraine and GHG emissions.[15] In a recent development, the UN has asked international court of justice (ICJ) to provide advisory opinion on legal consequences for states in case of noncompliance to climate commitments. Although ICJ will enjoy advisory jurisdiction, but stringent actions taken by UN Security Council and General Assembly can be weaponized to further interests of global north.[16] Based on the aforementioned assessment of the global green regime, the prospects of its success appear bleak, and only time will ultimately provide a definitive answer.

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