

PRINCIPAL DETERMINANT OF GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES: AN ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL INTEREST

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ABSTRACT

The developed nations by distorting and dominating the public sphere are creating hegemony over the developing countries. Through the national interest policies, they are creating a sense of deterrence and havoc among under-developed and less powerful countries and become responsible for environmental degradation. The paper tries to analyze how national interest leads to environmental destruction and the failure of environmental protocols. The study focuses on the role of developed countries, particularly the USA, in polluting global environment and their participation in environmental protocols. The study is mainly based on secondary data. The main sources of data are the Census reports, Websites, Research articles and Books. The study reveals that globally human life is suffering from various environmental issues like Ozone Layer Depletion, Global Warming, Climate change, Deforestation etc. The main cause of these environmental crises is mostly national interest and also it is the national interest that is becoming an obstacle in the way of addressing these issues through collective efforts. In case of USA, what comes first is its national interest in order to maintain its hegemony and uni-polar dominance in the world that is traced from its role in the Second World War and destruction of fauna and flora of two cities of Japan by dropping atom bombs. Further, on the name of "Global War on Terrorism" the US military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan have had a serious impact on the natural environments of these countries. The study also revealed, that in spite of being a major source of global environmental pollution such as climate change, USA has shown its back when time had come to combat these global environmental challenges, with its withdrawal from the Paris agreement 2015 on climate change mitigation before the earliest possible effective date. The motive behind the withdrawn from the agreement was to protect US from losing economic strength in the world. According to the agreement it has to provide funds and technology for global environmental protection and to reduce the emission of green house gases. Hence, consequently this burden is thrown on the shoulders of third world nations whose economic and technological strength made them incapable to combat these environmental challenges. So there is need to architect some institutional arrangements to facilitate a leap from narrowly defined national interests to a global regime and to entail distributive justice ability to pay approach for financial aids to combat climate change. The developed countries, particularly the USA, should come to front for addressing global problem of climate change.

KEYWORDS: Carbon Imperialism, Climate Change, Hegemony, National Interest and Risks

INTRODUCTION

Environment is the heritage of the whole world. Likewise, its degradation affects the entire natural world on a global scale without regard to any particular country, region, or race. The whole world is a stakeholder and this raises certain issues on who should do what to combat environmental degradation. The environment encompasses the whole life on earth and the complex interactions that link the living world with the physical world. In a more general sense, this covers everything contained within the air, land, and water. As early as 1896, the Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius had predicted that human activities would interfere with the way the sun interacts with the earth, resulting in global warming and climate change. His prediction has become true and the result is in front of us in terms of climate change disrupting global environmental stability (Khan, 2013: pp. 1-2).

Climate change is profoundly different from most other environmental problems humanity has faced. The atmosphere's planetary scale and scope make it a "global public good," prone to overexploitation and under-regulation. The inherently global nature of the problem mandates a truly global response. It affects societies, economies and the world. Without collective global action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, global temperatures are projected to increase by as much as 3 to 5°C during the 21st century (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2013). This would have significant long-term adverse effects on the global economy, societies and ecosystems. To limit warming to 2°C or less, global carbon dioxide emissions would need to be reduced to net-zero before 2100 (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014).

However, the collective action against climate change is determined by the multiplicity of causes, uncertainty of timing and effects, and significant economic costs. While historical responsibility for climate change is undoubtedly lodged with the developed countries, particularly the USA. Historical fairness would have the developed nations pay a large share of the initial climate change bill. However, the existing international institutional arrangements have no authority to impose such a norm, hence are shifting this burden to the developing nations. Moreover, vulnerability to climate change varies across different regions, with the greatest negative impacts likely to be concentrated in developing nations as these are incapable to combat it.

An attempt was made to form a consensus between North and South in order to take collective action against climate change in terms of the Paris Agreement. The Paris Agreement (the Agreement) is a multilateral treaty under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (the Convention). The Agreement was adopted on 12 December 2015 in Paris at the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21). The Agreement provides a legal framework for all countries (both developed and developing) to make commitments to take action to address climate change. The key features of the Agreement, according to the New Zealand Parliament Report (August 17, 2016), are:

National Determination of Action to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions (Mitigation): Parties are able to determine their own contributions (such as the level of their own targets), to reflect their national circumstances and capacity, and are required to account for progress towards these in accordance with any agreed rules. Countries are also expected to demonstrate progression in ambition in future contributions beyond their current contributions. This is commonly understood as communicating higher targets.

Global Goal to Adapt to the Effects of Climate Change (Adaptation): To enhance capacity to adapt to the effects of climate change, strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change, all Parties are required to engage in domestic adaptation planning processes and action (although how this is done is not prescribed by the Agreement).

Providing and Mobilizing Climate Finance: Developed countries' obligations to provide financial resources to assist developing countries' mitigation and adaptation efforts continue, with the Agreement also requiring the provision of financial resources to be 'scaled up' (i.e. increased). Developed countries are needed to continue to take a lead in mobilizing climate finance from a wide range of sources (including the private sector). These activities are to be delivered as part of a global effort to achieve the collective goal of US\$100 billion in climate finance per year by 2020.

The USA also became the signatory of the agreement on Earth Day 2016. However, latterly in June 2017 US President announced its withdrawal from the agreement before its effective withdrawal date. Being an economically and technologically dominant nation it should have played a big role in addressing global environmental issues and could have motivated other nations to do so. But instead, it created hegemony in the world and its dominance in the UNO which is an alarming threat to the planet as far as environmental issues are concerned. The way United States of America withdraws from the agreement seems a repetition of history, what she did in Kyoto protocol. The late president of USA George Washington once said, "no nation, no matter how lofty its ideals and how genuine its desire to abide by them, can base its foreign policy on consideration other than on its national interests".

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To analyze how national interest leads to a destruction of the environment.
- To highlight how national interest leads to failure of environmental protocols.

METHODOLOGY

The study is mainly based on secondary data. The main sources of data are the Census reports, Websites, Research articles and Books.

Findings of the Study

From the analysis of secondary sources of data, we found that;

- Human life globally suffers with enormous environmental issues. These issues such as: Ozone Layer Depletion, Global Warming, Climate change, Exploitation of natural resources, Acid rain and Desertification are global in nature and hence we need global effort to tackle them.
- Human-induced climate change is a global problem requiring a global response. It affects societies, economies and the world. Without collective global action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, global temperatures are projected to increase by as much as 3 to 5°C during the 21st century (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2013). This would have significant long-term adverse effects on the global economy, societies and ecosystems (New Zealand Parliament Report, August 17, 2016: p. 4)

- The main cause of these environmental issues at the global level is mostly national interest and also it is the national interest that is becoming obstacle in the way to address these issues through collective efforts. In case of USA also what comes first is its national interest in order to maintain its hegemony and uni-polar dominance in the world.
- For the decades ahead, the only sound foundation for a coherent, sustainable American foreign policy is a clear public sense of American national interests. Only a national interest-based foreign policy will provide priorities for American engagement in the world. Only a foreign policy grounded in American national interests will allow America's leaders to explain persuasively how and why specific expenditures of American treasure or blood deserve support from American citizens (Allison, et al., 1996: p. 2).
- The Commission on America's National Interests identifies five vital U.S. national interests today. These are to (1) prevent, deter, and reduce the threat of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons attacks on the United States. (2) Prevent the emergence of a hostile hegemony in Europe or Asia. (3) Prevent the emergence of a hostile major power on U.S. borders or in control of the seas; (4) prevent the catastrophic collapse of major global systems (trade, financial markets, supplies of energy, and environmental); and (5) ensure the survival of U.S. allies. For pursuing its national interest, it can go to any extent without bothering about the consequences of that of which history is a major witness.
- US is the major emitter of global greenhouse gases: According to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2015 USA is the second largest emitter of CO₂ in the world

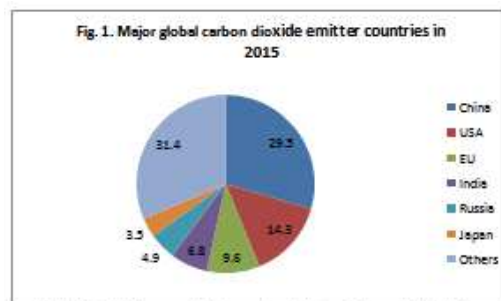


Figure 1

Source: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) report 2015

The above- cited figure shows that after China, USA is the second largest emitter of carbon dioxide to the global environment. Both of the countries contribute about nearly half of the total emission of CO₂.

In cumulative emission, also the USA is the major emitter of greenhouse gases. Cumulative emissions describe a country's total historic emissions. They are a commonly used concept for understanding responsibility for climate change since they are a proxy for current warming caused by specific countries. This measurement can vary significantly depending on the chosen start date and the inclusion of gases and sectors. This type of description is shown in the following figure

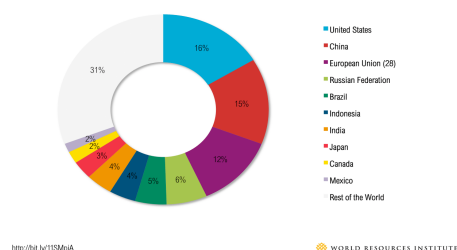


Figure 2: Cumulative GHG Emission 1990-2011 (% of World Total)

The graph below shows cumulative emissions for the top 10 emitters during the period 1990 to 2011, when complete data are available. Almost half of the emissions come from just four major powers: the United States, China, European Union and Russian Federation. Among all USA has the largest cumulative emission of CO₂ with 16%.

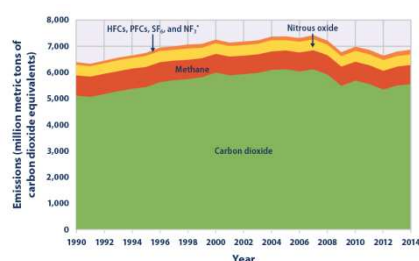


Figure 3: U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Gas, 1990-2014

Data source: U.S. EPA, 2016

HFCs are Hydro Fluorocarbons, PFCs are per Fluorocarbons, SF is Sulfur Hexafluoride, and NF is Nitrogen Tri-fluoride

This figure shows emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and several fluorinated gases in the United States from 1990 to 2014 by the USA. For consistency, an emission is expressed in million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents.

- Environmental Effects of the Atomic Bomb dropped by the USA during World War II on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- This act provides insight into the short and long-term effects of radiation and thermonuclear detonation on the environment. If such nuclear weapons were exploded on a large-scale nuclear war, it would have made large areas of the earth uninhabitable. In Hiroshima, a single, 15-kiloton bomb was detonated over the center of the city. Everything within 1 mile radius was completely destroyed. The immediate effect on the environment resulted with total devastation. The extreme heat of thermal radiation burnt everything in its path, including animals, trees, buildings and people. The nuclear radiations have penetrated the body and many of those who didn't die from radiation, latterly developed cancers.
- At Chernobyl large amounts of radioactive particles were released in the huge fire that burned for 10 days and released iodine-131 and cesium-137 into the environment. These are particularly dangerous to the human body and the environment in general. Radioactive particles from nuclear fallout also affect the animals in the environment and get into the milk supply, as well as contaminate agricultural plants, water and the food chain in environments farther away (Lemon, 2017: p. 1).

- US military intervention in different countries affects their natural environment: After the 9/11 attack, USA initiated its “Global War on Terrorism” (GWOT), first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq. Other countries, which were not faithfully obeying Washington’s directives including Iran, North Korea, Syria and Venezuela have been earmarked for possible US military intervention. The US military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan have had a serious impact on the natural environments of these countries. Military vehicles consume petroleum-based fuels at an extremely high rate, with the vehicles used in the war zones having produced many hundreds of thousands of tons of carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, hydrocarbons, and sulfur dioxide in addition to CO₂. Air pollution from military vehicles and weaponry has adversely affected public health among civilians in the war zones.
- Heavy military vehicles have raised more dust than usual, particularly in Iraq and Kuwait, and service members’ exposures to inhaled toxins from that dust have correlated with respiratory disorders that often prevent them from continuing to serve and performing everyday activities such as exercise. Destruction of military base garbage in burn pits and other military operations have exposed soldiers and civilians to dangerous levels of pollutants. The water supply in the war zones has been contaminated by oil from military vehicles and depleted uranium from ammunition. Along with the degradation of the natural resources in these countries and a radical destruction of forest cover, the animal and bird populations have also been adversely affected. Deforestation in Afghanistan as a result of illegal logging, particularly by warlords, has destroyed wildlife habitat. In Iraq, increases in cancer, birth defects, and other conditions have been associated with war-related environmental damage and toxins (Miller, & Skelton, 2015: p. 1).
- United States has withdrawn from the Paris agreement 2015 on climate change mitigation. This is a multilateral treaty under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (the Convention). The Agreement was adopted on 12 December 2015 in Paris at the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21). The Agreement provides a legal framework for all countries (both developed and developing) to make commitments to take action to address climate change. Withdrawal of the USA from the Agreement (in accordance with Article 28 of the Paris Agreement) was before the earliest possible effective withdrawal date of November 4, 2020, four years after the Agreement came into effect in the United States.
- On June 1, 2017, United States President Donald Trump announced that the U.S. would cease all participation in the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change mitigation. Trump stated that "The Paris accord will undermine (the U.S.) economy," and "puts (the U.S.) at a permanent disadvantage" (Fox News, 2017, June 1).
- In accordance with Article 28 of the Paris Agreement, the earliest possible effective withdrawal date by the United States cannot be before November 4, 2020, four years after the Agreement came into effect in the United States. (The New York Times, June 1, 2017).
- The motive behind the withdrawn from the agreement was to protect US from losing economic strength in the world. According to the agreement it has to provide funds and technology for global environmental protection and to reduce the emission of green house gases.

- Vice president Mike Pence stated that Trump administration "demonstrated real leadership" by pulling out the United States of the international accords which he called "a transfer of wealth from the most powerful economy in the world to other countries around the planet". He also stated that he doesn't understand why Democrats and liberals in the United States and the left around the world care about climate change (TPM, 2017, June 2).
- Withdrawal of the USA from the Paris Agreement 2015 received substantial criticism throughout the world from religious organizations, political leaders, environmentalists, scientists and citizens from the United States and abroad.
- Petitions were launched across states in order to persuade state governors to join the Paris Agreement or have Trump reverse the planned withdrawal, which included a " Paris My State " and a Move On petition that has received over 535,000 signatures (KTHV-TV, June 4, 2017).
- Canadian academic and environmental activist David Suzuki stated, "Trump just passed on the best deal the planet has ever seen" (The Guardian News, June 2, 2017).
- Former President Bill Clinton wrote: "Walking away from the Paris treaty is a mistake. Climate change is real. We owe our children more. Protecting our future also creates more jobs". (The Guardian News, June 2, 2017).
- Bolivia – President Evo Morales called the US one of the world's "main polluters" and at The United Nations Ocean Conference said Trump's decision is akin to "denying science, turning your backs on multilateralism and attempting to deny a future to upcoming generations", making the US the main threat to mother Earth and life itself (Al Jazeera, June 6, 2017, Huffington Post, June 6, 2017 & Townhall, June 7, 2017).
- Iran's – First Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri criticized Washington for pulling out of the Paris agreement, stressing that the US is the main culprit behind producing greenhouse gases. Trump has forgotten that the gases produced in the past few decades have endangered the life of not only the Americans but also all humankind (Fars News, June 6, 2017).
- From these negative reactions, it is clear that US withdrawal from the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change mitigation is a very big setback for a cooperative and collective move towards addressing the climate change for the sake of our future.

DISCUSSIONS

By interpreting the findings of our study we come to observe that the developed nations (particularly USA) form the responsible heads for climate change in the world. They have a major role in an emission of greenhouse gases like CO₂, methane, nitrous oxide, and several fluorinated gases in the global environment. USA alone produces about 14.3% CO₂ in the atmosphere according to UNFCCC report 2015. On the one hand it has a vast industrial setup and hence needs enormous amount of energy to run its industries and maintain its dominance over another industrialized world. To produce the desired amount of energy, fossil fuels have been utilized extensively without taking cognizance of needs of our future generation. On the other hand, in case of nuclear strength USA occupy a strategic position of superpower in the world right from the end of the 2nd World War. To maintain this status-quo with other nuclear powers, it has produced a huge quantity of nuclear weapons, for which it used a huge amount of fuel for reactors and made a large number of nuclear tests. Hence,

consequently, from both sides, whether to maintain its economic or military dominance, the global environment is becoming anyhow a victim. But this doesn't affect developed countries much, as compared to the rest of the territories of the world. This is obviously because their economic and technological strength made them enough capable to combat their local environmental challenges.

History is a witness of the fact that how the wild and brutish role of USA in the World War II has totally destroyed the two cities of Japan with nuclear atom bombs. This act consequently disrupts the whole natural environment of these territories. Moreover, the US military interventions on its initiative of "Global War on Terrorism" (GWOT) in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan have had serious implications on the natural environments of these nations. The vehicles used in the war zones having produced many hundreds of thousands of tons of carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, hydrocarbons, and sulfur dioxide in addition to CO₂. Moreover heavy weapons were used which destroyed the forest cover, animal and bird populations and added dangerous pollutants which has contaminated air, water bodies and crops in these war zones.

Taking above-mentioned facts into consideration, in spite of being a major source of global environmental issues such as climate change, USA has shown its back when the time has come to combat these global environmental challenges. Enjoying the position of a 'power elite' in the world i.e. having economic, political and military dominance, its responsibility was to take a leading role to counter such global issues. However, the world has witnessed its announcement of withdrawal from 2015- Paris Agreement on climate change mitigation on June 1, 2017. The Paris Agreement was an important step towards North- South cooperative and collaborative action to counter climate change. The importance of this Agreement for humanity is openly visualized in the worldwide substantial criticism from religious organizations, political leaders, environmentalists, scientists and citizens from the United States and abroad on the withdrawal of US from this Agreement. The motive behind the withdrawal was to secure its economy from being disadvantaged by the conditions of the agreement. According to Agreement, it has to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, to enhance capacity to adapt to the effects of climate change and to provide financial resources to assist developing countries' mitigation and adaptation efforts. But the national interest has always become its first priority. They always serve and think of their own national interests and don't bother about the sustainability of the rest.

CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that climate change is inherently global in nature and the problem mandates a truly global response. The atmosphere is indivisible and greenhouse gas concentrations have a global effect. However, the developed nations (particularly USA) form the responsible heads for climate change in the world because of their major share in the emission of greenhouse gases in order to run their industries and nuclear reactors at very high speed. Moreover, the biggest negative impacts of climate change are likely to be concentrated in developing nations as a result of economic and technological backwardness; these are incapable to combat it. In spite of being a major source of global environmental issues such as climate change and being economically and technologically dominant nation, USA has withdrawn from 2015- Paris Agreement on climate change mitigation; shifting this burden to the developing nations The Paris Agreement was an important step towards North-South cooperative and collaborative action to counter climate change. But the national interest has always become its first priority. It always serves and thinks of their own national interests, didn't bother about the

sustainability of the rest. Hence national interest is the principal determinant of global environmental issues.

Hence there is need to architect some institutional arrangements to facilitate a leap from narrowly defined national interests to a global regime and to entail distributive justice ability to pay approach for financial aids to combat climate change. The developed countries, particularly the USA, must come to front for addressing global problem of climate change. The issue now is the pace at which we are moving. The longer we wait before taking serious action, the more difficult and costly it will be to mitigate global warming. Global authority, whether for climate change or for any of the other issues affecting the world as a whole, can only be built on the recognition of planetary interdependence. Anything short of that will keep us paralyzed while the planet's challenges grow far beyond our reach.

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