

Committee: Environmental Committee

Issue: Re-evaluation of the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement on climate change in a shifting political landscape

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Introduction

“Climate change does not respect border, it does not respect who you are –rich and poor, small and big. Therefore this is what we call global challenges which require global solidarity.”¹

– Ban Ki-moon

Over the past decades, the distinction between national and international issues has become increasingly blurred. As a result parties have interacted across national borders at a vastly accelerated pace so as to address an expanding range of matters that pose a threat to the survival or the prosperity of humans around the globe. At present, environmental problems, the most pressing one among them being anthropogenically induced climate change, have become a topic of major concern to governments, various organizations and civilians all over the world. Climate change is an issue with grave implications for international politics that calls for immediate concerted action. Since the international community became aware of the matter, it attempted to figure out ways to deal with the problems emerging from the degradation of the environment and reach relevant agreements. Some agreements were made going over well-trodden territory



Figure 1 Leaders of the Paris Climate Change Conference talks celebrate after an international agreement was reached on 12th December 2015.

¹ Ban, Ki-moon. "Remarks at "Momentum for Change" Initiative." Durban. 6 Dec. 2011. *United Nations*. Web. 25 June 2017. <<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2011-12-06/remarks-momentum-change-initiative>>.

employing existing approaches in international negotiation or political governance, while some others were based on innovative thinking and went off the beaten track. However, in the light of recent fluctuation in the international political landscape, the future of the said agreements appears to be unclear.

Definition of Key-Terms

Climate Change

Climate change refers to a change in the state of the climate that is characterized by alterations in the mean or the variability of its properties, such as temperature, precipitation or wind patterns, and persists for an extended period of time, typically decades or longer. Climate change may be caused by natural internal processes or external forcings, or by persistent anthropogenic changes in the composition of the atmosphere or in land use.

Occasionally, particularly in the context of environmental policy, the term “climate change” is used to describe merely the phenomenon of anthropogenic global warming.

Greenhouse gases

Greenhouse gases (GHGs) are a group of numerous gaseous compounds that absorb infrared radiation, trap heat in the atmosphere and subsequently lead to climate change. The most common ones include water vapor, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and ozone. They are emitted during the combustion of fossil fuels, solid waste, trees and wood products as well as during various agricultural and industrial activities.

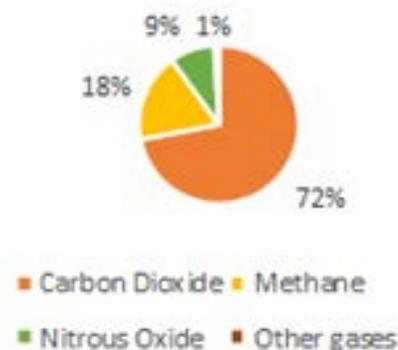


Figure 2 Global emissions of GHGs

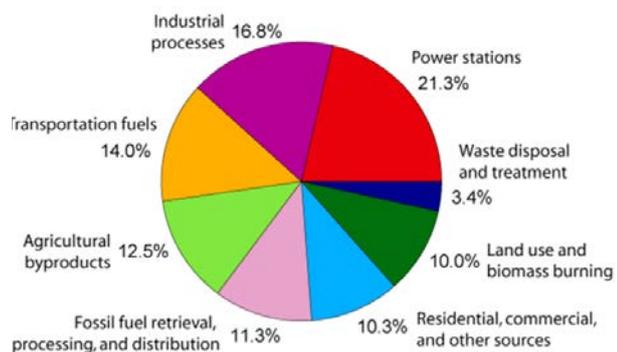


Figure 3 Global emissions of GHGs by sector

Background Information

Climate Change

The consumption of fossil fuels and the industrial procedures needed for their function give off GHGs into the atmosphere. The discharge of GHGs is almost as old as Earth itself but the industrial and population advances since the beginning of the industrial revolution have increased the level of discharge enormously. Looking at emissions around the world, the pattern has changed considerably in the past two decades. Up to then most emissions originated from the United States (USA) and Europe.

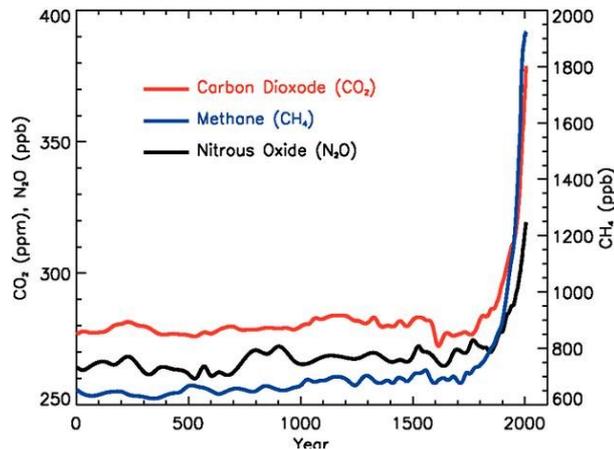


Figure 4 Atmospheric concentrations of GHGs over the last 2,000 years.

More recently, however, it is the less developed countries that have become the primary source of increased emissions. This has occurred due to the industrialization and modernization of these countries, particularly China and India. A significant amount of these gases is retained in the atmosphere because the ability of nature to cleanse the atmosphere through plant photosynthesis and other processes has declined.

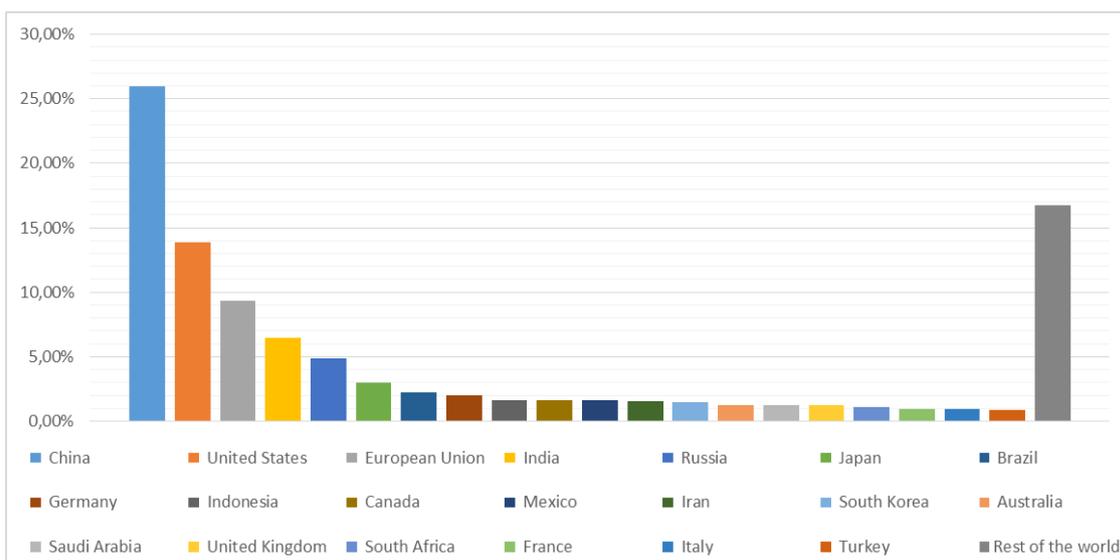


Figure 5 GHG emissions by country as a percentage of global total

Most scientists take the view that human-generated emissions have at least accelerated global warming. The reason, they contend, is the greenhouse effect. As GHGs accumulate in the upper atmosphere, they create a blanket effect, trapping heat and creating the nightly cooling of the Earth. Some believe that the current warming would be underway, at least to some degree, regardless of human activity. Over the Earth's history there have been cycles of rising and declining temperature, each of which has lasted 150,000 years or so. The last high peak was about 125,000 years ago; the following low was about 10,000 years ago, after which temperatures began to rise again. Some argue that the current global warming trend is partly an extension of this long-term trend. What is clear is that since the late 19th century the planet's average surface temperature has risen by 1.1 degrees Celsius and the year 2016 was the warmest one ever recorded globally².

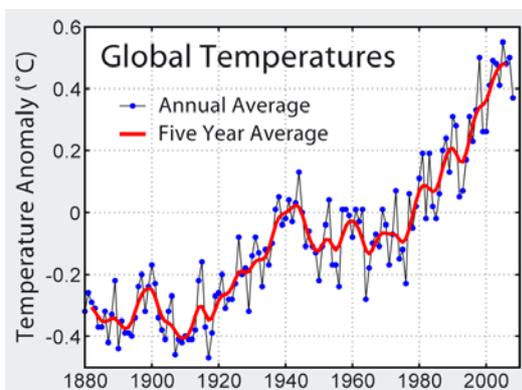


Figure 6 Global average temperatures (The “zero” on this graph corresponds to the mean temperature from 1961-1990, as directed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)

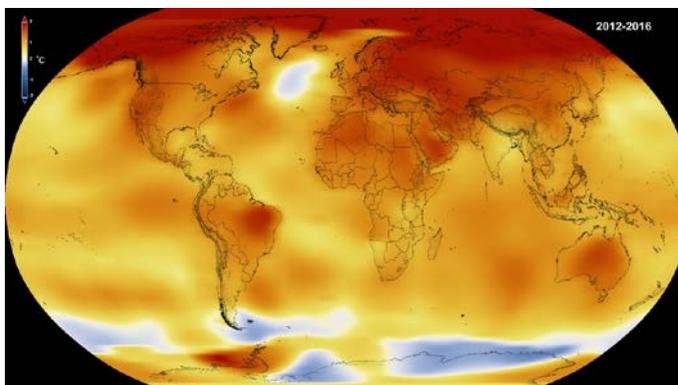


Figure 7 NASA's analysis of 2016 Global Temperature

Most scientists also believe that climate change will have a dramatic and in some cases catastrophic impact on rainfall, wind currents and other climatic patterns. Among other impacts, the polar ice caps are already melting more quickly. As a result, sea levels will rise displacing hundreds of millions of people on the continents' coasts during the coming century. Some weather experts also project an increase in the number and intensity of hurricanes and other catastrophic weather events, even droughts that will dry once fertile lands. It is evident that problems of social, political and economic nature might also emerge from climate change.

International action on climate change

Getting the entire world to work toward a single direction is a very complex feat to achieve. While the concept behind it may be quite straightforward, its

² National Aeronautics and Space Administration National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). *NASA, NOAA Data Show 2016 Warmest Year on Record Globally*. N.p., 18 Jan. 2017. Web. 27 June 2017. <<https://www.nasa.gov/press-release/nasa-noaa-data-show-2016-warmest-year-on-record-globally>>.

implementation is anything but simple. At present, there are already multiple international agreements seeking to limit the further expansion of climate change and its detrimental effects. The main initiating force of this ongoing process was the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Since its establishment the international community has managed to reach several other agreements on the matter, the most important ones being the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

The [UNFCCC](#), adopted in 1992, eventually entered into force on 21 March 1994. Currently, it has nearly universal membership, since it has been ratified by 196 countries and the European Union (EU).

The Convention was a notable step for its time because it acknowledged that there was a problem and it compelled member states to act in the interests of human safety even in the face of scientific uncertainty. It set an ambitious but palpable objective to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations "at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system."³ It indicated that developed countries have the responsibility to lead the way while developing countries are to be provided with funds for their climate change activities. The Parties to the Convention, notably the industrialized countries, are obliged to report regularly on their climate change policies and measures and submit an inventory of their greenhouse gas emissions. Developing countries report in more general terms on their actions both to address climate change and to adapt to its impacts. Moreover, the Convention sought to help countries limit emissions in ways that will not hinder their economic progress.

The UNFCCC's principal decision-making body is the Conference of the Parties (COP), which takes place annually. All Parties to the Convention have the right to participate while representatives of business, international organizations, interest groups and associations are granted observer status.

Kyoto Protocol

The [Kyoto Protocol](#) is an international agreement extending the UNFCCC, which obligates its Parties to meet certain internationally binding emission reduction

³ "Article 2." *The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. (n.d.): n. pag. Web. 21 July 2017.

<<https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf><https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>>.

targets. It was adopted in Kyoto, Japan, on 11 December 1997 and officially entered into force on 16 February 2005. Its first commitment period started in 2008 and ended in 2012, while the second commitment period is from 2013-2020.

The Protocol currently has 192 parties, namely the vast majority of United Nations (UN) Member States, the European Union, Cook Islands and Niue. The only United Nations Member States that are not parties to the Protocol are Andorra, South Sudan, the United States and Canada. Canada initially ratified the Protocol but withdrew from it in 2012 while the United States has signed the Protocol but declined to ratify it.

The obligations of the Parties are common yet differentiated since industrial activities in developed countries are primarily accountable for the elevated levels of GHGs emissions in the atmosphere. During the first commitment period, the industrialized countries, also known as Annex I parties, committed to reduce GHG emissions to an average of five percent against 1990 levels. During the second commitment period, they committed to reduce GHG emissions by at least 18 percent below 1990 levels.

Under the Protocol, countries must reach their targets principally through measures taken at a national level. However, the Protocol provides them with supplementary methods to meet their targets. More specifically, three market-based mechanisms are made available to the parties, namely International Emissions Trading (IET), the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and Joint Implementation (JI). Emissions trading give parties the chance to buy and sell permits for emissions or credits for reductions in emissions of GHGs. The Clean Development Mechanism allows the crediting of emission reductions from GHG abatement projects in developing countries. Industrialized countries can buy emission reduction credits, called Certified Emissions Reductions, instead of reducing their own emissions. CDM seeks to assist the former to achieve sustainable development and help the latter to reduce the costs of greenhouse gas abatement. Joint implementation allows industrialized countries to cover a part of their required reductions in GHG emissions by financially supporting projects that minimize emissions in other industrialized countries. All three mechanisms help to stimulate green investment and help parties meet their emission targets in a cost-effective way.

Paris Agreement

At the Paris Climate Conference (COP21), a universal, legally binding global climate deal was adopted. The [Paris Agreement](#) sets out a global action plan to put the world on track to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming.

Parties endorsed the long-term goal of keeping the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. Ideally, the international community aims to limit the increase to only 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, since this would considerably minimize risks and ease the impacts of climate change.

The contributions that each state must make so as to accomplish the worldwide objective, often referred to as nationally determined contributions (NDCs), are decided upon by each country separately every five years. NDCs need to be ambitious and show a progression over time. Nevertheless, the contributions are not binding as a matter of international law, as they lack the specificity, normative character, or obligatory language necessary to create binding norms. Moreover, there is no mechanism to force a country to establish a target in their NDC and no enforcement if a set target in an NDC is not met.

The parties are obliged to report to each other and the public on their progress on implementing their targets in addition to monitoring progression towards the long-term goal through a reliable transparency and accountability system.

Moreover, the Agreement encourages societies to strengthen their ability to handle the adverse effects of climate change. It recognizes the significance of preventing, diminishing and addressing loss and damage in various human activities, which is associated with climate change while it acknowledges the need to collaborate and improve the understanding, action and support in various domains internationally.

The agreement recognizes the role of non-Party stakeholders in addressing climate change, such as but not limited to cities, other subnational authorities and the private sector. They can play a significant part in reaching the agreement's objective primarily by maximizing their efforts and actively supporting initiatives to reduce GHG emissions. Their role is also critical in building resilience and decreasing vulnerability to the adverse effects of climate change as well as upholding and promoting regional and international cooperation on the matter.

The Paris Agreement was adopted on 12 December 2015 and it entered into force on 4 November 2016. At present, 195 UNFCCC members have signed the agreement, 152 of which have ratified it. The only UN Member States that have not signed the agreement are Nicaragua and the Syrian Arab Republic. On June 2017, it was announced that the United States would withdraw from the Paris Agreement. The earliest possible effective withdrawal date for the United States is 4 November 2020.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

China

China is the world's largest emitter of GHGs. At the same time, it is facing the repercussions of climate change in multiple fields, while its economy is at stake. China is not among the Annex I countries and thus, is under no legal obligation to abide by the Kyoto Protocol. Nonetheless, it has shown commitment to the Paris Agreement and it has submitted satisfactory NDCs. The government doesn't appear negatively inclined to the possibility of further international cooperation on the matter, while they have taken some relevant measures at a domestic level.

European Union

The EU has traditionally been at the forefront of international efforts towards a global climate deal. All member states are Annex I parties with binding targets in both commitment periods of the Kyoto Protocol. Furthermore, the EU is a staunch supporter of the Paris Agreement. Many European countries have adopted national programmes aimed at reducing GHG emissions and combating climate change. Similar policies and measures have been implemented at a European level.

India

India is one of the primary emitters of GHGs globally. However, it is prone to the impacts of climate change environmentally and economically. It is a non-Annex I country and thus the Kyoto Protocol is not considered binding. India has been actively involved in the Paris agreement and appears to consent to relevant international initiatives. Progress has been made at a national level notably concerning GHG emissions.

Russian Federation

Russia is dealing with the matter of climate change internally, having made no binding pledges to reduce GHG emissions but seeking to avoid further increase. Being an Annex I country in the Kyoto Protocol, it took on binding targets only during the first commitment period and declined to take on any during the second one. Russia has not ratified the Paris Agreement yet, however, it has affirmed its support to the agreement and it has voiced its condemnation of the United States' decision to withdraw from it.

United States of America

The US has always been among the primary GHG emitters. Climate change has been a controversial matter domestically and governments have been reluctant towards any relevant international agreement over the years. The US is the only

signatory of the Kyoto Protocol that never ratified it. It initially signed and ratified the Paris Agreement, which was highly appreciated at the time. However, on June 2017 President Donald Trump made a statement declaring that the US was officially withdrawing from the Agreement, following through on a campaign promise of his. The decision triggered a sharp backlash from the rest of the world.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

The IPCC is an international body fostered by the UN. It was set up in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It is responsible for regularly drawing up and making available to the public and policymakers assessments of the scientific basis of climate change, its effects, potential risks in the future and options for adaptation and mitigation.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1988	UN General Assembly declares climate change to be a major concern for humanity.
	The IPCC is established.
1992	The UNFCCC is adopted.
1994	The UNFCCC is ratified.
1997	The Kyoto Protocol is adopted.
2005	The Kyoto protocol is ratified.
2012	The first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol expires.
	Canada withdraws from the Kyoto Protocol.
2015	The Paris Agreement is adopted.
2016	The Paris Agreement enters into effect.
	This is the warmest year ever recorded.
2017	The US announces its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement
2020	The second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol expires.

Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

Relevant UN treaties, resolutions and events other than the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement that have been previously covered:

General Assembly Resolution A/RES/71/228

This [resolution](#) was adopted by the General Assembly on 21 December 2016. It is the most recent document in a series of several resolutions under the title “Protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind”. It covers a wide range of dimensions of the issue of climate change itself, while it provides thorough information on the attempts of the UN and the international community to address the matter.

General Assembly Resolution A/RES/63/281

This [resolution](#) of 11 June 2009 bears the title “Climate change and its possible security implications”. It invites UN organs to regard the matter of climate change within their mandates.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The Conferences of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC constitute the main organ where representatives from the Parties have the chance to meet, exchange views, settle differences and eventually take action concerning climate change. The Kyoto Protocol was adopted at COP 3 (1997) in Kyoto, Japan and the Paris Agreement at COP 21 (2015) in Paris, France. COP 23 is expected to be held on November 2017 in Bonn, Germany.

However, multiple other entities including, but not limited to the IPCC, the EU, the African Union (AU), the Group of Eight (G8), the Group of Twenty (G20), the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate Change (MEF), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the International Energy Agency (IEA) have taken initiatives to combat climate change, mainly by minimizing GHG emissions, while they stress the importance of a robust concerted global approach on the matter. For instance, the EU has established the European Union Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), while the OECD has undertaken the task of assisting countries to integrate mitigation and adaptation to climate change into all relevant sectors and policy areas in a cost-effective manner. The G8 and G20 have voiced their firm support to international climate agreements.

Possible Solutions

The global community is affected by multiple pressing social, political and economic issues that could potentially overshadow efforts to combat climate change. In fact, they have undermined the effectiveness of relevant international attempts over the years and so has the intransigence among the parties to negotiations. It is clear that climate change needs to be addressed at a global level so as to avert the deterioration of the situation and minimize its impacts.

First of all, it is important for states to respect the existing international framework on climate change. Initiatives that promote global collaboration on the matter should not be rejected by national governments. The latter should rather engage in talks with receptiveness and genuine willingness to foster international efforts. Moreover, scientific research on the topic is a matter of primary significance since citizens and policymakers need to have adequate and accurate data at their disposal.

Needless to say, any future negotiations either on the implementation and re-evaluation of existing international agreements, such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Accord, or on the creation of new ones, should take place considering the weaknesses that kept past actions fruitless. For instance, a state may avoid putting an agreement into practice due to the lack of binding enforcement mechanisms, while a country may be discouraged due to any potential economic loss. Another aspect that has been handled in an insufficient manner in the past is the distribution of the burden among nations, given their varying economic development. In order to keep track of such weaknesses and fix them, it is essential to establish a scheme of systematic assessment of international agreements.

Another matter that needs to be examined is the role of international and regional intergovernmental or non-governmental organizations, regional authorities, as well as civilians and corporations in large-scale climate agreements.

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