



CLIMATE**FOCUS**

# The Changing Geopolitics of Climate Change

A Special Issue of  
Climate Policy

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# Geopolitical Context

- Geopolitics of the 20s Century.
  - Pivotal developments technology (railway, steam engine).
  - Land-based powers on the rise, sea-powers in decline (*Mackinder 1904*).
  
- Geopolitics of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
  - Increasing competition for resources (land, food and fuel).
  - “Race over the the available carbon space” (*Hallding et al. 2013*).



## The Special Issue “Changing Geopolitics of Climate Change”

- The idea of a joint management of global commons has been replaced by a more realistic view of national self interest.
- Socializing great powers into international regimes is challenging.
- The ‘ossification’ of climate negotiations represents part of a larger disagreement on how to shape key understandings of a new international order.
- The problem lies not simply in the climate regime itself, but rather in the broader contestation and recontestation of powers in which it is located.

### **Assumptions of the Special Issue:**

**The nation state continues to matter. All nations matter, but great powers may matter a bit more**



## Universality vs Selective Action

- “The **attempts at ‘universality’** built into the structure of the [UNFCCC] negotiation from the start **were always unrealistic**, and undoubtedly contributed to the much remarked confusedness and inefficiency of the negotiation process itself.” (*Brenton*)
- The multiple power centers “making it less possible for nations to act confidently together without **stable reference points** and the platform of trust that the **multilateral system provides.**” “The path forward is the result of concurrent, mutually reinforcing effort across **three pillars of climate response: the international process, national policy, and private sector action.**” (*Figueres*)



## Challenges for formulating a global climate regime

- Any environmentally robust climate treaty will have to consider mitigation action by *all* major emitters.
- The challenges to reconcile economic and human development with mitigation of GHG emissions are considerable.

### Need for a global partnership. However....

- Lack of leadership from developed countries, lack of willingness to accept responsibility from all states.
- Objections by the United States to submit to deepening global governance regulations further compound the problem.



# 1994 Yesterday's World

Post-cold war. Still largely characterized by a North-South, East-West divide.

Old powers shaped international politics: U.S., Europe, Russia.

Climate change was perceived as mainly environmental problem.

Effects on society and costs were unclear.

Efforts were led by Ministries of Environment.

# 2013 Today's World

Globalized world, characterized by an increase of powers and variety of influences.

Rise of middle-income countries. New powers: China, India, Brazil in particular.

The effects of climate change increasingly visible.

Acknowledgement of need for massive socio-economic transformation. High cost of action, even higher costs of inaction.

President-level attention. Need for a broad economic and social compact.

## Where do we stand?





## What does that mean for the climate regime?

- Addressing climate change is a common responsibility of all states, calling for ‘their participation in an effective and appropriate international response’ (UNFCCC, 1992: Preamble), arguably under a common legal framework.
- States’ responsibilities must be differentiated.
- Capacity differentials matter, so that developed or developing country status will continue to be relevant but will neither be the only ground for differentiation nor insulate states against responsibility to act.
- The objective of the UNFCCC, which is to avert dangerous human interference with the climate system (UNFCCC, 1992: Article 2), frames all states’ collective responsibility under the treaty and is part of the context of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), such that current emissions and projected emissions trends are relevant to each state’s responsibilities.



## Common but differentiated responsibilities & res capacities

### Persist

- Responsibility for climate finance (establishment of GCF)
- Continuation of the Kyoto Protocol

### But change

- How to share the mitigation burden?
- What are national circumstances?
- Defining mitigation along groups of countries increasingly unlikely. Heading towards self-selected differentiation?

**But: How to guarantee a level of ambition in line with the overall goal of the Convention to avert dangerous climate change?**



## Concluding thoughts....

- Regime level negotiations bound should go hand in hand with a broader policy dialog among the old and new powers.
- Considering the global nature of the problem, climate change demands a global solution.
- The expectation and role of the UNFCCC may have to be reconsidered. The Convention cannot solve the climate problem.
- It can however facilitate transparency, dialogue and effective finance for climate mitigation and adaptation in countries with less resources and capacities.
- At the same time it may consider a policy-by-policy approach complementing (or replacing) the idea of targets



Questions or suggestions?

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