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BRICS in the Post-Paris era: Perspectives from India & China

Anmol Mukhia and Xiaolong Zou

Some international political observers are hyped-up by the Doklam tension between India and China that military conflicts may occur as a result from the saber-rattling of the largest to countries in Asia. They have also ignored a BRICS conference that is taking place in Xiamen China, a platform that brings together fastest developing economic powers in the world for furthering common interests and economic cooperation. A common threat that faced by all the BRICS countries is global warming and climate change. As the top emitting countries in the world, BRICS countries take up 38 per cent of the world's GHG emission. Thus, the theme "inclusive growth, sustainable solutions" of Fortaleza summit 2014 (BRICS) was not only limited to the member countries' social policies, but also to tackle emerging challenges in the social, economic and environmental fields, and to create new opportunities for the BRICS including in the negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda.

United States under the leadership of Donald Trump, withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement has vacated space in terms of 'leadership' in climate governance as well as left challenges for developing countries with economic aid. However, the international community may expect China to play a leading role in climate governance, but, China doesn't have the full capacity to unilaterally play as climate hazard liberator. Instead, China needs to work closely with the BRICS countries, negotiating bloc, which includes Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa. This article examines the climate change position of two largest BRICS countries, India and China, to demonstrate the potential common grounds and interests that become

alternative sedatives to the escalated intention between the countries, and remind the policy makers what is more important at hand.

India's climate position in the Post-Paris era

India's long-held position in international climate negotiations was based on a mixture of principled, equity-based, and pragmatic considerations. India aims to have 40 per cent of energy from renewable sources by 2030 and has declared to be committed to the Paris Agreement. According to International Monetary Fund assessment India's GDP will continue to grow at the fastest pace amongst major economies, at 7.6 per cent in 2016-2017 with growth forecast (IMF 2016). In terms of energy, India's supply is definitely not ensured. If economic growth follows rapidly the energy demand will increase at highest level. India's consumption growth of non-renewable resources will be the most astounding by 2035 and it will surpass China as the biggest energy consumer in volume terms by 2030. Globally energy demand will increase about 30% by 2035 where natural gas consumption will faster grow in comparison to oil or coal expanding at 1.6 per cent a year (*The Economic Times* 2017).

India's energy demand is met overwhelmingly by domestic coal reserves however increasingly by oil and gas imports. Other rising developing economies are competing for the gradually expanding supplies of oil and gas which will achieve their peak in 10 years (IEA 2010). Recently, "Make in India" initiative India's energy development effects in two ways - "First, mining, oil and gas, renewable and power generation have all been identified as clusters for

industrial development, so any success will have implications for energy supply. Second, any change in the share of industry in the economy, and the materials-intensity of future economic growth, will have profound effects on the levels of energy demand" (IEA 2015: 37). Therefore, Climate friendly strategies will, therefore, is to a greater extent the byproduct of policies that guarantee India's energy security, and the development of an internationally competitive supplier industry for non-conventional energy appliances (Wheeler and Shome 2010).

India is following its INDCs and set a target of 175 GW renewable power capacity by 2022, India would like to introduce 100,000 MW of solar, 60,000 MW of wind, 10,000 MW of hydropower and 5,000 MW of biomass-based power capacity (*Press Information Bureau* 2016). Trump denial on climate change at Paris Agreement, Indian PM Narendra Modi said to German Chancellor Angela Merkel that neglecting to follow up on climate change was seen as morally or 'ethically criminal act'. Additionally, Chinese President Xi Jinping called the Paris Agreement 2015 a hard won achievement and urged diverse endorsers to stick to their guarantees rather than leaving as this is an obligation we ought to acknowledge for who and what is to come. Trump exit to Paris Climate Agreement also gives success in the agreement between the parties of negotiators.

In terms of BRICS all five members are member of G20 industrial and emerging market nations. Although the economic prospect have decline in the countries like Brazil and South Africa and also to Russia some extend with the sanction from the west. Former environment minister Jairam Ramesh stood forward to make India the world leader to fight against the common threat climate change. Moreover, Group of 77 (G77) a coalition of developing countries

was designed to promote collective economic interest since 1960s and create joint negotiating capacity in the United Nations. India has been a leader of the G77 block of developing nations, while China has provided political support and financial assistance to the G77. Therefore, there is a need for financial management for combating climate change within members which BRICS bank (New Development Bank) may lead in near future.

China's climate position in the Post-Paris era

China's position in dealing with global climate change has not only been consistent but also become incrementally stronger. Increasing energy efficiency and reducing carbon emission have been written into China's national policy development framework, known as Five-Year Plan. In the 12th FYP, there is a 16% reduction of energy intensity (energy consumed per unit of GDP) and 17% carbon intensity (carbon consumed per unit of GDP) reduction. In the following 13th FYP, the Chinese government aims to have its carbon intensity reduced further to 18% by 2020 compared to 2015 levels, and increase non-fossil energy to 15% of the total energy matrix.

Most recently, the Chinese President, Mr. Xi Jinping, proclaimed at the World Economic Forum in Davos this January that the Paris Agreement was "hard won" and would remain in force. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, in a joint press conference with his German counterpart Angela Merkel, said that tackling climate change has already become a global consensus, and China would continue to work steadfastly to implement the commitment of the Paris climate deal, by adopting a green, low-carbon and sustainable development strategy. Furthermore, China's Foreign Minister spokesperson remarked at a news briefing that China would stick to its pledges regardless of how other countries' climate policies change

(Wong).

Energy transformation from high carbon to low carbon has already proven to be beneficial for China. For instance, China's coal consumption has declined for three years in a row with 2.9% in 2014, 3.7% in 2015, and 4.7% drop in 2016 according to government statistics. Though fossil energy still makes up 62% of China's energy matrix, but renewable energy like solar and wind capacity has risen 82% and 13% respectively through to 2016. All these renewables contribute to nearly 20% of China's energy needs, and ultimately facilitate GHG emissions reductions (Jackson et al.).

Additionally, many Chinese cities are choked by some of the worst air pollution in the world. The coined word "airpocalypse" is used to describe the scale and seriousness during smog breakouts in mega-cities. In the winter of 2012 - 2013, over 70% of China's 74 largest cities saw their air pollutant (e.g. PM 2.5) levels rise out of the charts, and a thick smog breakout in the winter of 2013 was estimated to have contributed to at least 90,000 deaths and sickened hundreds of thousands more (Kintisch). It was found that the smog in the East China plains (ECP) has a positive correlation with global warming, thus reducing CO₂ could be part of the solution to the air crisis haunting many Chinese cities, and the health concerns that come with it (Zou et al.).

Therefore, China has both domestic and international interest and tangible gains by continuing its Paris pledge despite U.S. action regarding the Paris Agreement. Needless to say, if by any change, the Trump administration decides to continue with the Paris deal, the combination of the world's largest two carbon emitting countries and super economic powers would, without any doubt, contribute significantly to the global GHG emissions targets, which would eventually benefit the global community as a whole. Yet after Trump's

announcing of withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, China responded with a strong position on Paris Deal, which not only demonstrates China's determination on domestic energy and economy structure reform, but further showcases China, as the biggest carbon emitting country, shoulders its international responsibilities. To sum up, the core notion of China's climate change policy will be continuing towards transformation of economic development pattern, and under the commitment of Paris Deal, to promote its international reputation and position in the global climate governance.

Conclusion

As demonstrated by the previous analysis, both India and China have the domestic needs and long term benefits for combating climate change and global warming, same as their responsibility to the international societies. Though the historically biggest emitter, the US pulled out of the Paris deal and their commitments, the already established climate configuration won't get affected as long as the current biggest emitter China and third India join forces with other BRICS countries on climate stand. What's more, by committing to climate governance and continuing climate agreement achieved in Paris and others to come, BRICS countries could further benefit from seeking common grounds for energy innovations, political and economic cooperation under this framework, at the same time, minimizing the existing conflicts of interests like the Doklam tension between India and China now.

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