# ST AFF V1

### Contention 1 – Desalination

#### The US is facing water shortages right now.

Bennet 24 [C.B. Bennet, September 17, 2024, “America is in a water crisis, but help is on the way”, <https://www.asce.org/publications-and-news/civil-engineering-source/article/2024/09/17/america-is-in-a-water-crisis-but-help-is-on-the-way/> Date Accessed 3/16/2025]//GZ

**Without drastic changes,** **the reality is** that some **sections of America could run out of clean** drinking **water** at some point. **Some communities already are.** Major rivers, such as **the Colorado River**; lakes, such as **Lake Mead; and the country’s aquifers are strained more than ever**. What’s more, **bringing in water from other places** used to be a popular short-term water shortage option for towns and municipalities, but even that **is becoming unreliable because of shortages**. It will take real, applicable solutions to help solve this water crisis. The country can’t rely on just one solution to replenish its groundwater, lakes, and rivers.

#### More Specifically,

Reinemer 24 [Michael Reinemer 2024, We’re running out of clean water: Consumption, Contamination, Costs” <https://www.iwla.org/publications/outdoor-america/articles/outdoor-america-2024-issue-2/we're-running-out-of-clean-water-consumption-contamination-costs> /Date Accessed 4/7/2025 //GZ]

The glass is half empty. Once, **clean fresh water was something we could take for granted.** **That’s no longer possible.** Clean water, essential to our survival and a basic human right, is increasingly scarce. About **one half of one percent of the water on Earth is clean and readily available**. **At our current rate of consumption**, **the world may run out of water by 2040**, says a 2023 report from the Bank of America Global Research**. A March 2024 report from the University of Miami predicts severe shortages in the decades ahead in the U.S**. We’re accustomed to hearing about the **dire shortages and water wars** in the arid regions of the West, but they are now appearing in Eastern regions as well. The good news: we have water conservation technologies, policies and practices that could preserve supplies of clean water for generations to come—if we apply them broadly across industries and our individual households

#### And, current efforts aren’t working.

Balbuena et al. 23 [[Natalie Balbuena](https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/author/natalie-balbuena/) & [Mia DiFelice](https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/author/mdifelice/), April 27, 2023, “5 reasons why desalination isn’t worth it”, <https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/2023/04/27/5-reasons-desalination> Date Accessed 3/16/2025]//GZ

In response**, governments and companies are turning to the ocean**. Drought-stricken **areas are seeing more proposals for** ocean **desalination projects**, **which** would **make ocean water drinkable** by removing the salt. **However, ocean desalination is not a solution to the threat of water shortages**. **It’s expensive** and **environmentally destructive**. Moreover, **its downsides will** — like so many other greenwashed technologies— **impact[s] already struggling communities the hardest.**

#### Thankfully, affirming solves through nuclear desalination

IAEA 20 [IAEA, updated 2020, “Nuclear Desalination”, [https://www.iaea.org/topics/non-electric-applications/nuclear-desalination](https://www.iaea.org/topics/non-electric-applications/nuclear-desalination/) Date Accessed 3/16/2025]//GZ

For more than two decades, the support for **seawater desalination using nuclear energy** (in short, called nuclear desalination) has been repeatedly stressed at the General Conference and **supported by many Member States**. Currently, with over than 200 reactor-years of operating experience gained worldwide especially in Japan, India, and Kazakhstan, **nuclear desalination has been demonstrated and eyed as a viable option to meet the growing demand for potable water** and provide hope to areas with acute water shortages in many arid and semi-arid zones. In support of Member States to assess nuclear desalination as an option, the IAEA has developed and released the Desalination Economic Evaluation Program DEEP and the DEsalination Thermodynamic Optimization Programme DE-TOP programs. These two programmes can be used to perform economic, thermodynamic, and optimization analyses of different power resources coupled to various desalination processes. The IAEA has also published several technical reports to highlight technical information on aspects of optimum coupling including some safety considerations, environmental impact assessment of nuclear desalination, and potential new technologies for seawater desalination using nuclear energy. In addition, the IAEA has developed and released the Nuclear Desalination Toolkit which provides access to all IAEA activities related to nuclear desalination including links to publications and software download.

#### And unsafe water prevents children from going to school

Water Mission 24 [Water Mission, January 24, 2024, “Safe Water Makes Education Possible for Children Around the World”, <https://watermission.org/news/impact-stories/safe-water-makes-education-possible-children-around-world#:~:text=In%20many%20countries%2C%20a%20lack,would%20otherwise%20be%20in%20school>. Date Accessed 4/1/2025 // GC]

Every child has dreams for their future. Whether they want to become a skilled laborer, a doctor, or an astronaut, they all need one thing—some form of education. But for millions of children around the world, education itself is only a dream. On this [International Day of Education](https://www.un.org/en/observances/education-day), we join with others to celebrate the power of education and raise awareness for the needs of children across the globe. In many countries, a [lack of safe water prevents kids from attending school](https://watermission.org/news/back-to-school-safe-water-means-education-and-opportunity/). It is common for women and children to have the responsibility to collect water for their families. **Collecting water can require walking long distances, consuming the time children would otherwise be in school.** Additionally, the water collected is often contaminated, causing water-related illnesses. More than [**443 million days of school**](https://watermission.org/global-water-crisis/)**are missed due to a lack of access to safe water each year**. Round trip, it takes Vanesa, age 16, and other children in Mankhaka Dwangwa, Malawi, **more** **than three hours to collect water for their families each day**. But having access to safe water nearby provides health, saves time and provides the opportunity for [children to attend school](https://watermission.org/news/safe-water-opens-doors-to-education/).   **Water Builds® Education**  Water Mission is working hard to bring safe water solutions to as many as possible around the world.   Genala, a teacher at the Primary School in Suza, Malawi, has seen how safe water has significantly impacted education in her community.  “Before Water Mission came, we had understaffing at the school,” said Genala. “Teachers would come, but without water here, they would ask to be moved to other schools. We also had low enrollment for girls because they had to wake at 1 a.m. or 2 a.m. and go to find water.” Then, Water Mission installed a safe water solution in Suza which serves more than 4,000 people as well as the school, clinic, and local churches.  “With the coming of Water Mission, we have water close to home and close to the school. We have good staff at school and are producing good, effective learners. Since Water Mission came in, both boys and girls have been in class on time. They sleep enough at night, so they perform well in school. We have been so helped by Water Mission.” Benita, age 12, who lives in Chimwenje, Malawi, can already anticipate the positive impact Water Mission’s safe water project will have on her education.   “I feel good because [safe water] means I can go to school and arrive on time,” she shared. “If I pass the Standard 8 [exams], I can go to secondary school. I want to be a police officer.”  Benita is excited to attend school regularly. According to UNICEF, only **33% of children in Malawi complete primary school.** “We are happy here, but we know that other schools don’t have this,” continued teacher Genala. “Please remember our friends in other schools who still need safe water.”  *Will you give children the opportunity to attend school by helping us provide them with safe water?*

#### Lack of education leads to generational poverty

The Matthews House 24 [The Matthews House, 2024, “Generational Poverty And Education”, <https://www.thematthewshouse.org/generational-poverty-education/> Date Accessed 4/2/2025 //GZ]

**Poverty**, or the state of being extremely poor **is a widespread issue** here in the United States. To be considered ‘living in poverty’ a household must be below a set income threshold that varies by family size. The set threshold for each family size is updated annually to reflect inflation and is consistent across the country. The Census Bureau determines poverty by family income before taxes– it does not include any government assistance such as subsidized housing, food stamps, or enrollment in programs such as Medicaid. The poverty measure also doesn’t account for cost of living variances or any other factors outside of income, often making the measure heavily skewed and inaccurate to measure who is truly impoverished. What is Generational Poverty? Generational poverty is a term to describe a family who has been considered impoverished for two or more generations**. Families stuck in the cycle of generational poverty** often **have** many commonalities that may include **illiteracy, lack of land ownership, lack of education, and lack of job stability**. How Does Poverty Affect Youth? Studies about poverty are in agreement: Poverty can have devastating impacts on our youth and their development. Multiple sources have stated children in poverty are more likely to experience hopelessness, illiteracy, behavioral/social/emotional issues, a survivalist mindset, and even poor health. **Youth in poverty are also more likely to suffer from criminality, hunger, illness and unemployment**. To top it off youth in poverty are more likely to face rough home situations which can worsen other issues. **Education** is Fundamental Education, or lack thereof, has been found to **be** both **a** leading cause of and **solution to poverty**. To begin with, **lack of early childhood education due to an inability to afford childcare or other resources can hinder a child’s cognitive development which may damage their future educational success.** **Often poverty can also lead to youth dropping out of school to help support their family by finding a job: This** may **hinder their ability to later get a job stable enough to help pull them out of poverty, thus trapping them in the cycle of poverty.** **A study of generational poverty from Yale University insists education is the answer to escaping generational poverty.** The same study noted, “Schools are really the only places where students can learn about the choices and rules of the middle class or have access to people who are willing and able to help them.” Youth in poverty lack equal access to education and resources to help pull them out of poverty, or ever learn that is a viable option for their life. Ending poverty requires educated parents to help raise educated children, and the time to step up to help is now. The Matthews House mission is to empower youth and families by building trusting relationships and providing resources to disrupt the cycles of poverty and abuse. We work toward this by walking alongside families and youth as they set goals and overcome obstacles in these main areas: education, housing, employment, well-being, and life skills.

#### And poverty causes deaths.

**Brady et al. 23** [David Brady, Ulrich Kohler, Hui Zheng, April 17, 2023, **N**ational **I**nstitutes of **H**ealth “Novel Estimates of Mortality Associated With Poverty in the US” https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10111231/ /accessed 4/9/25]//JS

Statistical analyses were conducted on February 17, 2023. We analyzed the Panel Study of Income Dynamics 1997-2019 data merged with the Cross-National Equivalent File (eTable 1 in [Supplement 1](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10111231/#note-ILD230002-1-s)).[3](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10111231/#ild230002r3),[4](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10111231/#ild230002r4) This longitudinal survey[3](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10111231/#ild230002r3) observed mortality from surviving family members and was validated with the National Death Index. Innovatively, our higher-quality household income measure included all income sources, cash and near-cash transfers, and taxes and tax credits and was adjusted for household size.[5](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10111231/#ild230002r5) With use of leading standards in international poverty research, poverty was measured relatively as less than 50% of the median income.[1](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10111231/#ild230002r1) Current poverty was observed contemporaneously in each year, and cumulative poverty was the proportion of the past 10 years. Cox hazards regression models were estimated using Stata, version 17.0 (StataCorp) for 18 995 respondents aged 15 years or older (135 790 person-years) (eAppendix 2 in [Supplement 1](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10111231/#note-ILD230002-1-s)). Analyses were robust to adjustment for self-rated health, overweight or obesity, smoking, acute health events, chronic disease, other confounders, and a wide variety of alternative details (see eTable 2 in eAppendix 2 and eFigures 1 and 2 in eAppendix 3 in [Supplement 1](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10111231/#note-ILD230002-1-s)). We used secondary unidentifiable archival data, so institutional review board approval was not needed. Current poverty is associated with a greater mortality hazard of 1.42 (95% CI, 1.26-1.60). Cumulative poverty—being always in poverty vs never in poverty in the past 10 years—is associated with a greater mortality hazard of 1.71 (95% CI, 1.45-2.02). [Figure 1](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10111231/#ild230002f1) shows that survival of individuals in poverty mainly begins to diverge from survival of individuals not in poverty at approximately 40 years of age. The gap in survival between those in poverty and those not in poverty increases until a peak near 70 years when it begins to converge. [Figure 2](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10111231/#ild230002f2) compares the number of deaths associated with poverty with other major causes and risk factors of death. In 2019, among those aged 15 years or older, 6.5% (95% CI, 4.1%-9.0%) of deaths and 183 003 deaths (95% CI, 116 173-254 507 deaths) were associated with current poverty, and 10.5% (95% CI, 6.9%-14.4%) of deaths and 295 431 deaths (95% CI, 193 652-406 007 deaths) were associated with cumulative poverty. Current poverty was associated with greater mortality than major causes, such as accidents, lower respiratory diseases, and stroke. In 2019, current poverty was also associated with greater mortality than many far more visible causes—10 times as many deaths as homicide, 4.7 times as many deaths as firearms, 3.9 times as many deaths as suicide, and 2.6 times as many deaths as drug overdose. Cumulative poverty was associated with approximately 60% greater mortality than current poverty. Hence, cumulative poverty was associated with greater mortality than even obesity and dementia. Heart disease, cancer, and smoking were the only causes or risks with greater mortality than cumulative poverty.

### Contention 2 – Climate Leadership

#### Paris withdrawal puts climate leadership up for grabs

Gibson 25 [Kalina Gibson, dual degrees in economics and environmental science and policy from the University of Maryland. 1-21-25, The Trump Administration’s Retreat From Global Climate Leadership, https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-trump-administrations-retreat-from-global-climate-leadership/]

As climate disasters grow in frequency and intensity, from devastating wildfires to relentless hurricanes to record-breaking heat waves, the Trump administration has once again taken a step that threatens to deepen the climate crisis: formally announcing the United States’ withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. In the midst of an escalating climate crisis that’s upending livelihoods and lives, this decision raises urgent questions about the future of national and global progress. Namely, what does it mean for the international climate effort to combat climate change when the world’s largest historical emitter steps away from the table? And what are the implications for Americans already grappling with the mounting costs of a warming planet? Since its adoption in 2015, the Paris Agreement has represented a historic act of global solidarity and a framework for collective accountability in addressing the climate crisis. Nearly 200 nations committed to curbing greenhouse gas emissions, bending the global emissions curve, and striving to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. While progress has been uneven and insufficient, the agreement underscores the power of collective action. At the same time, it fosters transparency and accountability, enabling nations to measure their ambition and progress against one another. This dynamic has not only spurred innovation but also inspired nations to vie for leadership in the global clean energy economy, proving that addressing climate change is both a shared responsibility and a pathway to prosperity. President Donald Trump’s decision to again withdraw does not reflect a failure of the Paris Agreement, but rather signals a profound abdication of leadership. The United States now joins Iran, Libya, and Yemen as the only countries in the entire world not party to the agreement. Other countries have already reaffirmed their commitments to the agreement by announcing their updated nationally determined contributions (NDCs) in an effort to uphold the agreement’s goal despite America’s retreat. Yet the withdrawal sends a troubling message: The United States is an unreliable partner. This is not just about one nation stepping back; it is a deliberate weakening of the multilateral system at a time when global unity has never been more critical to combat the climate crisis. In addition, it will serve to amplify the voice of China, the world’s largest greenhouse gas emitter still at the table. The question now is whether global momentum can overcome the absence of U.S. federal leadership—and what role subnational actors, international partners, and everyday citizens can play in ensuring climate progress continues, even as the clock ticks ever louder.

#### And, investment in nuclear energy is the only way to restore leadership

Pazzanese 25 [Christina Pazzanese, Master of Arts in Regional Studies, News writer at Harvard University, 1-7-25, “Nuclear has changed. Will the U.S. change with it?,” https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2025/01/nuclear-has-changed-will-the-u-s-change-with-it/]

Fueled by artificial intelligence, cloud service providers, and ambitious new climate regulations, U.S. demand for carbon-free electricity is on the rise. In response, analysts and lawmakers are taking a fresh look at a controversial energy source: nuclear power. Two new reactors in Georgia are the first in consecutive years in the U.S. since 1990. In June, Congress overwhelmingly passed the ADVANCE Act, a bipartisan bill that boosts the number of reactors coming on line. Late last year, tech giants Google, Amazon, and Microsoft all pledged to invest in small reactors to help meet their future energy needs. In this edited conversation with the Gazette, Daniel Poneman, a senior fellow at the Belfer Center, discusses the growing momentum behind nuclear power plants. Poneman served as deputy secretary of energy and chief operating officer at the U.S. Department of Energy from 2009 to 2014. From 2015 through 2023 he was CEO of Centrus Energy, a supplier of nuclear fuel to power plants around the world. Is nuclear power making a comeback? I believe the answer is yes, because we have new factors present and they’re all converging to add momentum to nuclear. For a long time, a lot of people have been worried about climate change and reducing carbon emissions. The only source of clean power that’s been proven to work — day or night, season in, season out, in any geographic location, and successfully operating at large scale — that’s nuclear. It’s just shy of 20 percent of our total electricity production and nearly half of our carbon-free electricity. On top of that is this vertiginous increase in electricity demand that’s driven by 1) the AI revolution and 2) the effort to decarbonize not only power generation, which is about one-quarter of total emissions, but also transportation and industrial processes. If you have electric vehicles and you get the power for the vehicles from coal plants, you haven’t solved the emissions problem. The last factor is the hyper scalers, which have the wherewithal and frankly the balance sheets to support these very substantial investments in nuclear. So, you have all of those market-driven factors and strong recognition by the government of the importance of nuclear. I don’t think there’s any issue that has broader or deeper bipartisan support than this one. All of these things are converging to add new momentum to American nuclear energy. Historically, opposition to nuclear power has been linked to safety and environmental concerns — including waste — and on the business side, to high costs and low profits. What’s different — is today’s nuclear power safer, cleaner, more cost-effective? In terms of security, when people were concerned after 9/11, changes were undertaken. And obviously, a lot of lessons were drawn after Fukushima. There has been a continuous set of improvements over the years. When you ask what’s different: There is a whole new generation called advanced reactors. One of the problems over the years is that large reactors got larger and larger, and each one became a bespoke project. There were too many change orders within a single reactor project, and that just kills you on budget. One thing is to go to factory-built, small reactors that can be standardized, punched out like a cookie cutter, the same design over and over. The more of these things you punch out, the cheaper it gets, and the more practice you have installing them, the cheaper it gets. If you do things like that, you can improve on safety and budget. The waste issue depends on the specific reactor technology. Some advanced reactors are based on existing Gen III designs, so their waste would be the same but with smaller quantities because the reactors are smaller. Gen IV reactors use fast neutrons, which allow a more efficient use of fuel and therefore a reduction of total volumes. Some Gen IV reactors can burn used fuel that has already been irradiated, which would have the effect of both burning out some of the minor actinides and turning what is now considered “waste” into a source of more energy. At the end of the day, all nuclear waste, whether from current generation or advanced reactors, will need to be disposed in deep geologic formations; this is a safe process with well-known technology. The Biden administration late last year announced several new U.S. nuclear benchmarks at the United Nations Climate Change Conference. Are those goals realistic? They’re ambitious, but I think they’re necessary if we’re going to reach our targets. At the Belfer Center, I’m working on a project on how to get 200 gigawatts of new nuclear built in the United States by 2050. A bunch of things have to happen right for that to be achievable. But I have great confidence that when there’s something that’s truly important, and people in the United States put their minds to it, we can do great things. But it’s going to take smart government policies. We’re going to have to have lean and effective regulations. We’ve got to figure out a way to spread the cost and risk sufficiently, so you induce people to act sooner rather than later. Government loan guarantees that reduce the cost of capital can both defray first-mover risks and also give confidence to the private sector to co-invest. If we concentrate our efforts, we have a chance to restore U.S. global leadership. What factors will determine whether those goals are reached or derailed? Government is going to have to be there in terms of smart tax policy, in terms of providing things like cost-overrun insurance. The government also can be an important source of demand, especially for small and micro reactors that have potential applications such as supporting micro grids for things that can’t afford to go dark — military bases, things of that character. If there’s a cyber threat from an enemy or from some natural event, I would recommend the government buy a bunch of these small reactors to help them get over that first-of-a-kind challenge that is so hard to overcome for private entrepreneurs who can’t wait decades for an adequate return on investment. Private capital can then take the confidence that comes from having strong co-investment and commitments from the federal side. You’re going to have to have the engineering, procurement, and construction contractors who got rusty over the last few decades get back into the game and execute well. And we’re going to have to have the talent pool grow and training programs at the university level, but also in the trades and organized labor. Many thousands and, ultimately, hundreds of thousands of jobs are needed. You’re going to need well-trained people in the supply chain manufacturing these very precise components and parts. It’s going to take a group effort. And to maintain the social license to do this, we have to bring all of civil society along with us. So far, in recent years, you see a lot of very positive movement in that direction.

#### It's specifically key to climate leadership

Baker et al 20 [James Baker III (Law degree from the university of Texas), George Schultz (PhD in industrial economics from MIT), and Ted Halstead (Masters degree from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government), May/June 2020, The Strategic Case for U.S. Climate Leadership How Americans Can Win with a Pro-Market Solution, <https://clcouncil.org/reports/Foreign-Affairs.pdf>]

Although the United States and its trading partners have a long way to go in reducing emissions, a fundamental paradigm shift is occurring. Climate action and economic growth, far from being mutually exclusive, are not only compatible but also increasingly interdependent. The U.S. economy has prospered in recent decades because the U.S. public and private sectors were the frst to embrace the communications and information technology revolutions. The transition to clean energy promises equally far-reaching economic advantages. Nextgeneration renewables and nuclear energy could substantially drive down the per unit cost of electricity, just as the digital revolution drove down costs in recent decades. That is why China is investing so heavily in these sectors. And that is why the United States could be putting its global economic leadership position at risk if it continues to ignore this transformation.

#### Ceding climate leadership opens the door to Chinese soft power in the Asia-Pacific---it collapses our alliances.

Goodman ’18 [Sherri Goodman (degrees from Harvard Law School and Harvard Kennedy School; 2x DOD medal for Distinguished Public Service); October 17; Senior Advisor for International Security at the Center for Climate and Security and a Senior Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center and CNA, former President and CEO of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership; Iris-France, “How Climate change challenges the US Department of Defense?” https://www.iris-france.org/121024-how-climate-change-challenges-the-us-department-of-defense/]

Your article on China mentions that Japan is worried that diminished US leadership in climate change can also impact on US’s influence in Asia and might also give more space for China to rise. Can you please explain this?  
  
I deeply worry about the vacuum created by the absence of climate leadership in the US right now at the highest levels of the government. There is a lot of good work going on in the defense and military departments at the working levels. But when the President declared that he is going to pull the US from the Paris agreement, President Xi Jinping of China said “we are going to be climate leaders” and now they are using that soft power to enhance their global influence, particularly in the Asia Pacific region. I think we have to be very concerned about that. China, by virtue of its position in Tibet, controls most of the headwaters of the major rivers in Asia and is in a position to monopolize that water. It has worked cooperatively with many others in the region, thus I will not say it will not continue to cooperate. However, it will cooperate from the position of strength.  
In the US we talk about utilizing all elements of national power and that includes our military forces, diplomacy, economic tools and trade. In the current era, it also includes climate leadership and diplomacy, as well as clean energy and resilience building, particularly in the Asia Pacific region where you have so many nations and people who are completely vulnerable to the effects of rising sea level and increasing extreme weather events. We should not be in a position where China is the only country that can come to rescue. We need to have a combined allied presence that we had across the Asia Pacific region for decades since World War II. Japan is our very strong ally as well as Australia. The French and the Americans have a strong partnership. Today this is a region where I think we should continue to show leadership and presence.

#### That’s needed more than ever before to prevent a nuclear South Asian water conflict.

Godara ’24 [Hari; Jyoti Pathania; Gaurav Kumar; September 1; Doctoral candidate at Jindal School of International Affairs; Professor at the School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal Global University; Graduate Student at O.P. Jindal Global University; Sage Journals, Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs, “Hydro-Political Dynamics Between China–India–Pakistan: Dams and Transboundary River Governance Amidst Geopolitical Contestations,” vol. 11]

Introduction The South Asian region, a vital hub for some of the world’s most significant transboundary rivers, finds itself at a critical juncture characterised by mounting geopolitical tensions and severe environmental concerns. This intricate interplay has propelled the issue of water security to the forefront of strategic considerations for the states bordering the Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) range. At the heart of this complex discourse lie ambitious plans to establish an extensive network of hydroelectric dams, a development characterised as an unprecedented ‘water grab’. India, with plans for nearly 292 dams in the Indian Himalayas, envisions a future in which the region’s dam density would surpass that of any other in the world. It is also important to highlight that this study involves states that have been engaged in active military conflicts on various occasions and very frequent minor border skirmishes with claims/counterclaims on one another’s territories. Varady et al. (2023) explain this dynamic, pragmatic and ever-changing transboundary relations through Kautilya’s Mandala concept: ‘one’s neighbour is one’s enemy and neighbour’s neighbour naturally becomes one’s ally’. While the New Water Justice Movements (NWJM)1 and approaches such as political ecology can provide a substantial theoretical paradigm for this study, its scope falls short in the unique cartography represented at the confluence of China, India and Pakistan, with their powerful attempt to delegitimise current hydro-political borders and to exert influence through all means available. When Foucault et al. (2008, p. 313) defined hydro-social re-patterning attempt as a coercive act by powerful water actors led by legal, economic and military compulsion backed by the government (sovereign power), no extension or application was informed about the potential use of water as a hydro-political extension for geopolitical significance among different states. Concurrently, China, already a significant player in dam construction, intends to add another hundred dams to this landscape. These concurrent efforts transcend economic endeavours, intricately intertwining with strategic imperatives that possess the potential to reshape regional power dynamics. However, this surge in dam development does not occur without consequences. While these projects yield economic advantages and bolster hydropower capacity, they necessitate a re-evaluation of geopolitical realities. China’s dominance as the ‘upstream hegemon’ in the HKH region and its substantial control over water outflow underscore the strategic leverage that water resources confer. These consequences ripple downstream, impacting states dependent on these river systems where geopolitical ally Pakistan, whose agrarian economy heavily relies on the Indus River, is centred vis-à-vis adversary India, who happens to be an upper riparian of Pakistan. Figure 1 illustrates how both Pakistan (with Chinese support) and India have intensified their bid to erect more dams and, very recently, the completion of the Shahpurkandi barrage on the Ravi River (i.e., one of the five rivers of Panjab under the Indus Water Treaty [IWT]) has stopped the flow of its water. It has brought a strong reaction from Pakistan, with it being called ‘water terrorism’, but the point of contestation remains that the Ravi River, as per the IWT, falls under Indian purview for developmental or any other use. The timing, however, brings forward a different narrative that has basically morphed this arrangement into a strong act of hydro-politics that is being viewed with Indian PM Modi’s dictum that ‘Water and blood cannot flow together’ (ET Online, 2024). The collapse of the Nova Kakhovka Dam during the Russia-Ukraine war further imposes a strong warning for many, as the possibility of military conflict or any act of terrorism targeting such structures and overwhelming destruction can certainly be guaranteed, which again can be cited on multiple instances as back or even before WWII as well. <<Figure 1 Omitted>> In this context, the governance of transboundary rivers becomes paramount, with legal frameworks such as the IWT seeking to establish an equitable distribution system. However, these legal arrangements operate under pressure within a complex geopolitical landscape where governments grapple with issues of sovereignty, territorial integrity and strategic interests. As governments navigate the notion of shared resources, the very concept of sovereignty within the context of transboundary aquifers and rivers becomes a subject of debate. The qualitative structure of this article starts with the existing frameworks governing hydro-diplomatic2 measures as well as structures, which then explains how the cleavages of these structures give way to hydro-politics and have the potential to emerge as a significant irritant for perceived state security. This article aims to dissect the multifaceted dimensions of geopolitical hydro-diplomacy, unveil the strategic imperatives underpinning the surge in dam construction, and evaluate the repercussions for regional stability and security. Contemporary Water Governance and Cooperation Structure in South Asia South and Southeast Asia’s water security heavily relies upon ‘non-binding MOUs, expert-level mechanisms, exchange of hydrological information, etc’. However, China’s dominant position as an ‘upstream hegemon’ with unsymmetrical dependence on its sovereign control over 40% of the outflow of water with just 1% inflow interacts consistently with geopolitical rivals such as India (Ho, 2020, p. 31). According to Rogers and Hall (2002), water governance encompasses ‘the variety of political, social, economic, and administrative frameworks established to advance and oversee water resource development, as well as the provision of water services, across various societal tiers’. Araral and Wang (2013), while highlighting the structural ambiguity of such a definition, point out changes inculcated in future evolvements (UNDP, 2013); however, it does not express the geopolitical configuration of regions of South and Southeast Asia with water scare developing states that operate as per ‘hegemonic theory of cooperation’ (Lowi, 1993, p. 8). In the absence of a structured basin-level transboundary governance system, China uses its unrestricted manoeuvrability to decide unstructured and loose bilateral relationships that resound more with geopolitical needs than a mere quest for governability. <<TEXT CONDENSED NONE OMITTED>> Legal scholarship extensively addresses the allocation of transboundary rivers as resources, delineating two principal categories. The Doctrine of Territorial Sovereignty first asserts a state’s sovereign right over water within its territorial boundaries. The second, the Doctrine of Natural Water Flow, designates transboundary water as a shared common resource among all riparian states (Swain, 2015, p. 446). Based upon the Roman maxim aqua currit, et debet curerer, ut solebat es juienaturae, which roughly translates to ‘let the flow of water remain in its natural state of constant flow’ (Cole, 1989). The Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses in its structure presents two major substantial principles: (a) equitable and reasonable utilisation and participation and (b) obligation not to cause significant harm principle, which translates in specific details presently in a limited scope of harm caused by riparian state’s activity (Water Convention, 1997). These two principles again have different positions in relation to each other when an inquiry is made about which one should be the preceding principle. Whether it is the principle of equitable and reasonable utilisation where informed developmental projects and projects of capacity enhancement can be undertaken by the upper riparian states with prior notification and approval. The other part is the ultimate precedence of the obligation to cause no harm, which is considered to reflect the lower riparian position, where the flow of harm is deemed to flow from the upper riparian only. Salman (2010) describes this situation where lower riparian states have unquestionable rights over development, which originates from their position while creating a case of future foreclosure for upper riparian states. Any simple observation will reflect the weak position of the lower riparian state in relation to the upper riparian state, which consolidates their support for the no-harm principle. However, in alignment with this perspective, Professor Stephen McCaffrey (2007) presented the following inquiry: ‘Should a downstream State advance its water resource development to the degree that it precludes otherwise reasonable future utilisation of the watercourse by an upstream state, could this be deemed as causing “significant harm” to the latter?’ Additionally, does the downstream state have any procedural duties towards the upstream state regarding its prospective projects? It roughly translates to the position where ‘social and economic growth of Upper Riparian newcomer’ will be heavily regulated in relation to the case of early development of lower riparian capabilities, which forecloses any future use of equitable and reasonable use for the upper riparian state (Caflisch, 1998). In realist interpretation, the ambiguity of international law, where a neutral term ‘watercourse state’ aims at inclusivity, will fluctuate and reflect the temporal position of relative capability, where a capable lower riparian state will push forward for the precedence of no harm principle and vice versa. International legal instruments such as the Water Convention have huge prerequisites as well as basic presumptions in its language of neutrality, and they are deeply embedded in the rationality of state leaders and interact incompatibly with the Law of Transboundary Aquifers through its reiteration in subsequent UNGA meetings of the acceptance of the state’s sovereignty over a territorial portion of aquifers. McCaffrey (2011) argues that the potential dangers of such acts as The article’s overlap with the 1997 United Nations Watercourses Convention, which contains an even more serious flaw: they introduce the novel and potentially dangerous concept that a state has sovereignty over the portion of a transboundary aquifer located within its territory. These legal proceedings become essential aspects of any given bilateral or multilateral transboundary governance system as they form or are supposed to be the theoretical basis of any given relationship, which is also valid for South Asia. McCaffrey (2011) builds a case against state sovereignty as the bifurcation of ‘confined groundwater’ against the backdrop of surface water of the Transboundary River curtails its scope massively. McCaffrey (2011) again cites the notion as stated: A state simply cannot have the exclusive ownership that sovereignty implies in something that is shared with another state. In fact, as discussed elsewhere, the entire concept of ‘sovereignty’ in international relations is highly questionable and tends to be used as a fig leaf to cover up ill-advised, improper, or unlawful conduct. (McCaffrey & Neville, 2010; Henkin, 1994) It is almost a paradox that if this treaty is to be bilaterally or even multilaterally decided, it will be entrenched in political issues, defeating the critical aspects and avenues of newer avenues (McCaffrey, 2011). Interstate relations are bound by a geopolitical reality where, through the realist paradigm, neighbouring states consider the relationship in its actual and relative impact as part of a zero-sum game, making it hard to cooperate in certain avenues reflected through a considerable number of regional border conflicts. The interstate relationship requires a nuanced approach to understanding significant irritants and the scope of cooperation. Marshall (2021) states in his seminal book Prisoners of Geography that China’s aim to control Tibet was fuelled by ‘Geopolitics of Fear’, where if left as it is, India would have China’s Achilles heel in its constant reach. The first is the benefit of higher ground in case of a conflict that becomes a challenging situation to deal with, and the second is the fear of losing control over three major Chinese rivers originating from Tibet: Yangtze, Mekong and Yellow River. The other aspect is that water is a scarce resource that needs to be economised for its proper allocation and protection, as reverberated in China’s Water Law, 2002, as well as the Swajaldhara scheme of India announced in 1999. This aspect aims towards negating irresponsible use of shared natural resources, which has been explained, nevertheless not without academic criticism, by what has been termed the Tragedy of Commons. However, it fails to consider geopolitical realities, especially in the case of transboundary rivers. Therefore, analysis of water scarcity follows various approaches, albeit with adequate academic criticism due to the lack of a universal framework that also accounts for what has been termed ‘Societal Adaptive Capability’ by Ohlsson (1998, 1999) in his analysis of Falkenmark’s indicator, that is, ‘Social Water Stress Index’. One other approach by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) categorises two stages of water scarcity, that is, physical and economic scarcity indicators, except in India and China (Rijsberman, 2006; Seckler et al., 1998). The two thresholds or categories, except for India and China, are (a) future adaptive capacity (b) increase in irrigation efficiency, which are self-explanatory. Amidst all these analyses, frameworks and indexes, the critical aspects can be explained through Figure 2, which highlights how adaptive capacity reacts as new hotspots of hydro-political stress. Only those states that are unable to meet water demands after the period of consideration for future adaptive capacity will be termed ‘physically water scarce’, and the states that have abundant water resources but lack the infrastructure or technological aspects fall into the category of ‘economically water scarce’. For the analysis of National Water Resource, this analysis stands accurate, accounting for multifaceted aspects and implications; however, that does not seem to be the case for transboundary water resources. China’s adaptive capacity building can be explained better with three significant projects whose transboundary or ecological impact has far-reaching consequences; however, China’s self-assumed leadership through adaptive capacity building exercises in Global South states needs further in-depth explanation with more than 380 large hydropower projects in 70 states, primarily in the Global South (Siciliano et al., 2019). The first can be called ‘virtual water’ import, where water-intensive crops can be imported rather than utilising one’s available water resources while aiming at producing water-intensive commodities (Allan, 1999; Hoekstra, 2003; Yu et al., 2016). The water import of China stood at 276.64 billion m3 in 2013 in retrospect compared to 68.55 billion m3 in 2001, and further results in the research point out at almost 11.03 billion m3 from India and heavy reliance from Pakistan as well (Yu et al., 2016). Yu et al. (2016) have categorised the states into four major types: (a) Mutual Benefit Countries, (b) Unilateral Benefit Countries, (c) Supported Countries and (d) Double Pressure Countries. India and Pakistan have been categorised as double-pressure countries under immense water scarcity pressure. The second involves projects such as the Mekong River Project with large cascade and reservoir dams that have a significant transboundary impact on the entire lower riparian ecologies. The third is China’s river interlinking projects, such as the ‘South-North Water Transfer’ project, which has a plethora of academic scholarship on its negative and positive implications. These water linkage projects are estimated to account for 25% of water withdrawal worldwide, and China aims to develop 4.48 × 10 billion cubic meters of water from the Yangtze River to water-scarce regions of North and North-West China (Yan et al., 2023). Water, being a finite resource, can be attributed to a zero-sum game while analysing the potential utilisation and management, especially as a transboundary resource. If media reports are to be retrospectively analysed in conjecture with China’s attempts at future adaptive capacity building, then the project aimed at transferring water from Tibet’s Yarlung Tsangpo River to Xinjiang’s Taklimakan Desert through 1,000-km-long tunnels appears very problematic to lower riparian states (Chen & Chen, 2017; FP Staff, 2022; GCR Staff, 2017). <<Figure 2 Omitted>> These aspects necessitate an in-depth analysis of how China regulates or views its natural resources through basin-level treaties and municipal law. The critical aspect of China’s Water Law, 2002, is that Article 26 showcases a renewed spirit towards the economisation of water through dams: the cascade and reservoir dams in a planned manner to extract hydro energy as well as hold back water. However it can be argued that Article 76 of this document supplements a realist necessity yet moral irritant. The article reads as Article 78 Where any international treaty or agreement relating to international or border rivers or lakes, concluded or acceded to by the People’s Republic of China, contains provisions differing from those in the laws of the People’s Republic of China, the provisions of the international treaty or agreement shall apply, unless the provisions are ones on which the People’s Republic of China has declared reservation. China is not a party to the Water Convention, 1997; however, neither is India nor Pakistan. This position, however, results in an uneven impact as Pakistan’s declaration on monopolising the Indus River’s water is grossly incomparable with a similar announcement by India or, in the worst-case scenario, China, based upon Hegemonic Theory of Cooperation or any other realistic explanation for an idealistic goal set by a set of principles that warrants selfless collaboration due to a lack of temporal power exuding global agency. Article 8 (1) of the Water Convention reads as follows: Watercourse States shall cooperate on the basis of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, mutual benefit and good faith in order to attain optimal utilisation and adequate protection of an international watercourse. Conca et al. (2006) argue that political and financial inequity-induced unequal distribution of resources and capabilities weaken these institutions, making them grossly ineffective. Weinthal (2002, p. 35) argues that hegemons, that is, hydrohegemons, have sufficient structural capability to coerce unsymmetric cooperation. This spirit is reflected in the entire legal scholarship in the case of international water aw, as the significant point of contestation about structural inequality, albeit natural, is masked under a language of neutrality through the use of the ‘watercourse state’ word, which is unresponsive to upper and lower riparian predicament (Salman, 2010). In continuation of previous arguments, poorly defined and overlapping laws with jurisdictional ambiguity make transboundary governance a nightmare regarding conflict resolution. Ironically, no major war has been fought on or for water; however, that does not account for continuous strains on states with huge populations, such as those in South Asia or Southeast Asia, where China is heavily invested in hydropower projects, as shown in Figure 2. China’s proposed projects on the Lancang River4 have different impacts on each Mekong River Basin (MRB) state, with ecological, social and economic impacts, among others (Ogden, 2022). The presence of about 100 ethnic groups scattered across all these states, who depend economically on the Mekong’s ecosystem, makes it difficult to maintain life, as they have known when artificial draughts threaten to uproot their balance. Ogden (2022) claims that the Chinese government has been able to project itself as an economically and technologically capable ‘preference multiplier’ of their ‘shared preferences’. The question remains whether the public or the actual stakeholder also perceives China in such an image. In 2020, what started as a meme war quickly escalated into a youth-led online movement titled ‘Milk-Tea Alliance’, a very vocal and critical stance of the younger population against China and their regimes (Godara, 2021). It must also be noted that due to Chinese projects, the Mekong River witnessed the lowest level of water, an almost draught-like situation from 2019 to 2021 in the last 60 years (Ogden, 2022). These social movements fall short of providing a clear, comprehensive picture; however, they assist greatly with what has been explained in the scientific literature and have a visible impact on a significant number of lives through such behemoth projects. Middleton and Allouche (2016) write about how MRC’s legal inadequacy with China’s unilateral control over projects on Lancang and Mekong has potential for ‘Transboundary hydropower cascade coordination’ and, more importantly, ‘Flood and Draught Hydro diplomacy’. The dam storage capacity on the Lancang-Mekong River has been estimated to increase 15-fold, from 2% in 2008 to 30% in 2030, which already has a significant impact on the ‘food pulse’ of millions of people dependent on the riverine ecosystem (Kummu et al., 2010; MRC, 2010). MRC (2010) State of the Basin Report put a number as high as 40 million people, that is, roughly two-thirds of the entire Lower Mekong Basin population, at risk due to a significant impact on their ‘food pulse’. Chinese hydro-political as well as hydro-diplomatic stances reaffirm how water has now become an extension in the pursuit of diplomacy. Both the Lancang Mekong Commission and China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson stress the importance of these ‘water facilities’ in combatting drought and flood after releasing water at Vietnam’s request. However, records show that even without official records and requests, water can be released, which is again detrimental to unsuspecting people in the Lower Basin area (Biba, 2013; Global Times, 2016; Reuters, 2016; Wangkiat, 2016). Upon analysis of China’s transboundary governance structures with its riparian neighbours based upon the Basin at Risk (BAR) event intensity scale, Ho (2020) argues that China cooperates better with some than other riparian neighbours (Wolf et al., 2003). When China chose to become a dialogue partner of the Mekong River Commission in 1988, two aspects can be deconstructed from this step: (a) To avoid legal responsibility through MRC’s strict aquatic environmental standards as well as dam building, (b) to reiterate its sole sovereign control over almost 50% of the Mekong River (known as Lancang in China). The analysis further on the BAR scale shows that China cooperates with Kazakhstan, a central Asian state adjacent to the Xinjiang region and considered (potential for future) base for rebelling Uyghur Muslims, and records a positive 5–6 and for Lower Mekong Region 1–5 (Ho, 2020). On this scale, 0 is neutral, positive 7 marks voluntary unification into one nation and negative 7 indicates war. Positive 6 falls under the scope of a major bilateral or multilateral strategic alliance; however, this same scale marks China’s interruption of blocking India’s request for a loan from the Asian Development Bank at negative 3, which translates to diplomatic-economic hostile action. Water scarcity is considered a growing limitation to ensuring food security and promoting sustainable agricultural development in Northern China (Wang, 2012). However, the same applies to India and Pakistan, which have a growing population under erratic climate conditions. China’s Geopolitical Utilisation of Transboundary Rivers: Strategic Imperatives and Implications for the Region The impact or potential impact of any such hydrological projects, rather than being superficially different from the implementation perspective, also varies in its structural coherence and consideration through language of specificity. The principles of the Water Convention,6 1997, appear to provide a generic structure that aims not to hinder existing treaties or structures of governance; however, as per Professor Lucius Caflisch, it expects a ‘harmonising’ assimilation with its ‘basic principles’ (McCaffrey, 1998). Apart from structural incoherence in these ‘basic principles’, as mentioned in the previous section, inferences from data highlight that some regions have achieved better governance through carefully drafted basin-level agreements. Pacific Institute’s Water Conflict Chronology (WCC) highlights that only 10 significant conflicts (mostly related to local resistance, especially in France) occurred in Western Europe post-1999 in comparison to 287 in South Asia with actual terrorist or state-led attacks on water infrastructure during the same period (Water Conflict Chronology, 2024). Even at the European level, we can highlight considerable disparities in the overall conflicts, which have broadly been categorised into (a) casualty, (b) trigger and (c) weapon, as Eastern Europe stands at 81 conflicts, which even includes an attack on Nova Kakhovka as well as other direct attacks on water infrastructures (category weapon and casualty) (Shumilova et al., 2023). The significant categorical difference can be explained by the need to balance sustainable means of energy generation in the EU, which led to a considerable developmental boom of dams in Southeast Europe (Danube river tributaries), with 80% of its 35,000-km-long network of rivers not facing anthropomorphic transformations, which resulted in more detailed and specific guiding principles/policy recommendations (Huđek et al., 2020). The document, named Sustainable Hydropower Development in Danube Basin, 2013, has more than a functional level of assimilation with the Danube River Protection Convention, 1994, without failing to be more reflective of ground realities as well as national policies. It must also be stressed equally that most operational dams in this region are 636, and it includes 42 large-scale (>10 MW), 72 medium-scale (1–10 MW) and 522 small-scale (<1 MW) dams, which pales in comparison to some of the operational dams such as Baglihar Dam (900 MW) or even planned projects such as Pakul Dul (1,000 MW) in India. Even the decades-long Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros Dams issue between Hungary and the Slovak Republic reached an amicable end, with Hungary choosing to abandon the Nagymaros dam project in favour of the EU 2030 Biodiversity strategy aiming at the removal of blockading structures on watercourses (Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros Project (Hungary/Slovakia), 2017). <<PARAGRAPH BREAKS CONTINUE>> As per the ancient Chinese proverb, ‘Two Tigers cannot hide in the same mountain’, and this proverb, apart from being present in Indian or even Pakistani fables, resounds closely with the intense geopolitical contestation to have a strong position in the region or beyond. China intensified its bid at the start of the year 2000 through military, political, cultural and economic tools to consolidate its position while strengthening its weaker aspects, ranging from Xinjiang Tibet to its access to sea routes (Kumar, 2019). Chinese Water Grab, with its bid to not only build dams but also projects such as the South-North Water Diversion Project and West-East Power Transfer Project, is also facilitating hydrological capability building elsewhere with sketchy contracts that reflect it being an extension of Chinese foreign policy (Donnellon-May, 2023; Ho, 2017). Donnellon-May (2023) further explains through scholarship how Indian capability building (Figure 1) can restrict Pakistan’s potential, thus strengthening its energy security, and simultaneously, Indian geopolitical analyst Brahma Chellaney explains how India also faces a challenging situation vis-à-vis China as almost half of Indian transboundary water comes from China, which further percolates to Bangladesh’s apprehension towards Indian projects (Vidal, 2013). It is also worth mentioning that these projects carry an inherent risk of being undermined due to the massive impact of ecological imbalances, as they impacted negative 15.9% hydroelectric output for China and negative 6.2 for India, directly increasing fossil fuel utilisation during these periods in early 2016 (Desk, 2023). The erratic monsoon pattern, increasing global temperature and increase in demand for fresh water under rising population might prove a more significant hurdle with the justification of these behemoth projects as a dual-edged sword. However, states bordering Asia’s HKH range—Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal and Pakistan—are collectively in the process of initiating over 500 new hydroelectric dams in the HKH region. Some describe this development as the most extensive ‘water grab’ in recorded history. According to various studies, India has ambitious plans to erect 292 dams across the Indian Himalayas in the next few decades. Should this endeavour be realised, it would result in dams being situated in 28 out of the 32 major river valleys, effectively doubling India’s existing hydropower capacity. Consequently, this would confer upon the Indian Himalayas the distinction of possessing ‘one of the highest average dam densities in the world, with one dam for every 32 km of river channel’ (Adeel & Wirsing, 2016, p. 10; Grumbine & Pandit, 2013; Vidal, 2013). China, already responsible for approximately 20% of the world’s extensive dam projects, is also poised to construct about 100 dams within the HKH region (Adeel & Wirsing, 2016). It is also essential to understand that such massive infrastructure projects are planned based on a practical estimate of the minimum water flow required for the production of hydro facilities as well as electricity. Jaitly (2008) and Ballabh (2008) argue that the water crisis can no longer be categorised as a potential threat as it has materialised when per capita water availability fell from 6,000 cubic metres to projected 1,500 cubic metres in 2025, which again is not reflective of concentration of water scarcity in specific regions or communities. Even with all the perceived sovereign control over water resources, China’s two-thirds of farmlands and almost half of its population are situated in the arid northern part of mainland China with access to only 20% of its total water resources (Araral & Wang, 2013). Even the Yellow River is considered unusable for human needs due to extensive pollution and mismanagement. Construction of dams to exploit one’s hydrological resources is constantly pursued in favour of one’s strategic allies, while, as explained earlier, constructing large dams for national use is also pursued in a very intense manner regardless of the increasing strain of water scarcity in such a volatile surrounding. Three of the four riparian states in South Asia are big military powers armed with very exclusive nuclear weapons, along with a history of various actual wars (India’s four wars with Pakistan and one with China) and the constant threat of aggravation of conflict through constant border skirmishes. Zawahri and Michel (2020) argue that water sharing in such a volatile neighbourhood can be used as a paradigm to understand some long-standing territorial disputes, such as all western tributaries majorly earmarked for Pakistan under the IWT meander through India-controlled Jammu and Kashmir. Thus, the Indus River issue is highly intertwined with the geopolitical scope of a territorial dispute that is being supervised by a bilateral treaty, suffering from timeless rigidity intensified by complex conflict resolution mechanisms.

#### Extinction.

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ABSTRACT Climate change poses grave challenges to global peace and stability. Nowhere is the relation between the climate crisis and the increased threat of nuclear war clearer than in South Asia, where approximately 700 million people in India, Pakistan, China, and Bangladesh depend on the shared waters of the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra river basins. These river systems, fed by Himalayan glaciers, are diminishing markedly due to climate change. As geopolitical tensions in the region intensify, it becomes even more crucial to address and eliminate the two intertwined existential threats of water scarcity (caused by climate change) and the risk of nuclear war. This paper analyses the Indus River conflict and the Brahmaputra conflict in turn and offers effective strategies and recommendations for dealing with the threats. In the last few years, tensions between the three nuclear-weapon states of India, China, and Pakistan have intensified, partly due to water and border issues (Johnson Citation2019). These tensions will only get worse due to two existential threats: the climate crisis, and the danger posed by nuclear weapons. This is not a new situation; the water crisis and the threats posed by weapons of mass destruction (WMD) have ranked in the top five of the World Economic Forum’s Global Risks by Impact list nearly every year since 2012. What is new is the growing realization that these threats are intertwined. Climate-triggered water scarcity is escalating the tensions between countries, especially in Asia, and consequently increasing the threat of nuclear war (Albinia Citation2020). At the same time, research over the past 10 years shows that even a so-called “limited” nuclear war involving less than 0.5 percent of the world’s nuclear weapons would cause catastrophic global climate disruption and a worldwide famine, putting up to 2 billion people at risk (Helfand Citation2013). According to the most recent research, the climatic effects of the smoke produced by an India-Pakistan nuclear war would not be confined to the subcontinent or even to Asia (Robock et al. Citation2019). These global effects are in addition to the immediate death of 50 million to 125 million people in South Asia, depending on the weapons’ yield.

#### And now is key because Beijing’s is decreasing climate commitment – so its our last chance to reverse the status quo

Moore ’23 [Scott; Erin Sikorsky; March 30; Director of the Penn Global China Program at the University of Pennsylvania; Director of the Center for Climate and Security, an institute of the Council on Strategic Risks; Foreign Policy, “The U.S. Can Steal China’s Climate Leadership Crown,” https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/03/30/us-china-climate-finance-negotiations-cop-emissions-loss-damage/]

For decades, China was a leader in international climate negotiations. But that changed at the latest United Nations climate change conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. At the November 2022 summit, known as COP27, China became the target of criticism for failing to do enough to address climate change. The disapproval came not just from other big greenhouse gas emitters but also from other developing countries: Gaston Browne, the prime minister of Antigua and Barbuda and chair of the influential Alliance of Small Island States, called China a “major polluter” that could no longer expect a “free pass” on contributing to climate finance. This shift underscores an inconvenient truth for Beijing: Given its status as the world’s largest emitter and second-largest economy, China’s climate commitments increasingly look insufficient, and even its former allies in climate negotiations want Beijing to do more. This creates major geopolitical vulnerabilities for China—and opportunities for the United States and its allies. In short, Beijing’s leadership loss on climate is Washington’s gain. China has played an essential role in climate talks since the 1990s. Beijing took part in the original negotiations that led to the main global climate agreement, the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, which then-Premier Li Peng signed in 1992. As China became the world’s largest emitter of greenhouse gasses in the early 2000s, it began to play a more prominent role in international climate policy, underscored by a 2014 U.S.-China joint announcement in which Beijing, for the first time, promised to take steps to reduce its emissions alongside similar steps pledged by Washington. In 2020, when the United States had stepped back from its climate commitments under the Trump administration, Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged to reach net-zero emissions by 2060. Despite this increasingly prominent role, the bedrock of China’s climate policy has remained the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities”—the idea that while all countries should do their part to fight climate change, wealthy industrialized nations that contributed the bulk of emissions over time should bear most of the effort and expense. This principle helps hold together the Group of 77, or G-77, a caucus of developing countries at the United Nations. Beijing has long been influential in the G-77—so much so that it is technically called the Group of 77 and China—and has coordinated its role in U.N.-sponsored climate negotiations largely through the coalition. Yet it has become increasingly difficult for China to draw a clear line between itself and the industrialized nations it argues should bear the brunt of costs in responding to climate change. When the Paris Agreement was signed in 2015, China was able to secure its status as a developing country in the world’s climate regime. But every year since then, China has been the world’s largest emitter. Though China was responsible for about 12 percent of cumulative global emissions since the start of the Industrial Revolution to 2017—compared to 25 percent for the United States and 22 percent for the European Union and United Kingdom—China now emits about a third of the world’s greenhouse gasses each year, well ahead of any other economy. Analysis suggests China could surpass the United States’ cumulative emissions around 2050. The difficulty of Beijing’s balancing act became fully apparent at COP27 when it was effectively abandoned by other developing countries as they fought to secure “loss and damage” compensation for countries heavily affected by climate change. A key sticking point in the negotiations was the United States’ and European Union’s insistence that China be ineligible to receive compensation from the fund. Initially, the G-77, leading negotiations on behalf of the developing world, balked at any effort to exclude China. Eventually, however, the coalition agreed that the landmark loss and damage fund would focus on the most vulnerable countries rather than China and other rising economies. China, for its part, conceded to the agreement, but refused to rule outpursuing future claims to compensation. Beijing’s growing isolation in international climate talks bodes ill for its overall geopolitical standing for three main reasons. First, China will be even more vulnerable to criticism for its growing environmental footprint abroad, especially in small island developing states, as its Belt and Road Initiative-linked projects damage and disrupt local ecosystems. In 2019, for example, Papua New Guinea ordered a Chinese-owned factory to close after it breached environmental laws, while a Chinese tourism development project in Antigua and Barbuda was criticized for destroying mangroves that help prevent climate-linked storm surges. This criticism may eventually make it harder for China to expand its influence and market access across the developing world. Second, Beijing’s reputation as a difficult partner in managing resources shared between countries that are threatened by climate change, such as fisheries and transboundary rivers, will only worsen. Already, dams built and financed by Chinese firms have attracted growing scrutiny for disrupting the flow of major rivers, such as the Mekong, that are shared with several neighboring countries. As the costs of climate change mount, China is likely to become a larger target for countries experiencing growing disruption to key natural resources, and it may lose out on access to those same resources. Third, China’s growing isolation in climate talks dulls Beijing’s narrative of steadily expanding global influence. Climate action is arguably the area in which Beijing has been most successful in acquiring soft power, which has helped bolster its overall standing on the world stage. Due to the sheer size of its economy and emissions, China has been treated as an equal by other major powers in climate policy, especially the United States and the European Union, since at least the 2009 U.N. climate summit in Copenhagen, in which China played a decisive role. Since then, Beijing has trumpeted its involvement in climate talks as an example of its global leadership, but that will be harder to do as fewer countries want to take China’s lead. To be sure, China’s isolation on this issue is not inevitable, and Beijing may well make an ambitious commitment to climate finance akin to its pledge to decarbonize by 2060. But a serious pledge would probably require Beijing to abandon its longstanding insistence that it has no obligation to contribute to adaptation funds due to its limited historical contribution to climate change—an unlikely scenario since China rarely makes abrupt changes in long-held diplomatic positions. Given these constraints, China will likely become increasingly politically vulnerable due to its position on climate action. If the Biden administration steps up, Beijing’s loss can be Washington’s gain. The United States should do at least three things to seize this opportunity to enhance its leadership on climate.

### Contention 3 – US Heg

#### US hegemony is on the decline

#### Pradhan 21[Rajyavishek Pradhan Senior Researcher at Xaiveir’s College, August 2021, “The Decline of US Hegemony” Talk Diplomacy, <https://www.talkdiplomacy.com/post/the-decline-of-american-hegemony> Date Accessed 3/16/2025//AT]

#### In the middle of the twenty-first century, the general argument that has been debated time and over is the decline of The US Hegemony in world politics and its impact on International Relations and Global Governance. Many renowned scholars hold the opinion that America in the twenty-first century is a declining power. Various structural, political, and systematic reasons have contributed to this ongoing decline. Generally, Hegemony can be understood as the dominance of one group over another, often supported by legitimating norms and ideas. The US Hegemony comprises structural power, hard power, and soft power. The bedrock of contemporary US power lies in the overwhelming superiority of its military and naval power. It is both relative and absolute. The power, that America projects are a combination of both persuasion and coercion. Francis Fukuyama (2021) claims that the peak of American hegemony, from the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 to about the time of the financial crisis in 2007–2009, lasted 20 years. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was the pinnacle of American hubris. The USA is a waning power and this can be traced from the examples of The Global Financial Crisis of 2008. According to reports, the crisis was one of the worst crises in nearly eight decades as it had a crippling effect on America’s domestic politics. The decline of US hegemony can be cited from its excessive military overstretch. The global image of the USA as a powerhouse began to take a sharp turn with the advent of the military expedition in Afghanistan, and the “Global War on Terror” in Syria and Iraq. Military expeditions and its role as a forceful arbitrator in The Global South and other developing and underdeveloped countries have raised eyebrows at America’s hegemony. American society is deeply polarized and this polarization has damaged America’s global influence as well as affected its foreign policy. Likewise, its humiliating retreat from Afghanistan and its failure to prevent the Russian invasion of Ukraine in recent times by the American Government only proves that America has been entangled with its internal contradictions.

#### But US can reverse that as nuclear energy is key to heg

**Office of Nuclear Energy 2024[**June 11 2024, “Advantages and Challenges of Nuclear Energy” US Department of Energy, <https://www.energy.gov/ne/articles/advantages-and-challenges-nuclear-energy#:~:text=A%20strong%20civilian%20nuclear%20sector,nuclear%20waste%20that%20is%20produced>. Date Accessed 3/16/2025//AT]

Nuclear energy protects air quality by producing massive amounts of carbon-free electricity. It powers communities in 28 U.S. states and contributes to many non-electric applications, ranging from the [medical field to space exploration](https://www.energy.gov/ne/articles/5-incredible-ways-nuclear-powers-our-lives). The Office of Nuclear Energy within the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) focuses its research primarily on maintaining the existing fleet of reactors, developing new advanced reactor technologies, and improving the nuclear fuel cycle to increase the sustainability of our energy supply and strengthen the U.S. economy. Below are some of the main advantages of nuclear energy and the challenges currently facing the industry today. Nuclear is the[largest source of clean power](https://www.energy.gov/ne/articles/3-reasons-why-nuclear-clean-and-sustainable) in the United States. It generates nearly [775 billion kilowatthours](https://www.energy.gov/ne/articles/5-fast-facts-about-nuclear-energy) of electricity each year and produces nearly half of the nation’s emissions-free electricity. This avoids more than 471 million metric tons of carbon each year, which is the equivalent of removing 100 million cars off of the road. The nuclear industry supports nearly half a million jobs in the United States. Domestic nuclear power plants can employ up to 800 workers with [salaries that are 50% higher](https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2019/02/f60/US%20Nuclear%20Jobs%20Infographic-742x960%20%20-01.zip) than those of other generation sources. They also contribute billions of dollars annually to local economies through federal and state tax revenues. **A strong civilian nuclear sector is essential to U.S. national security and energy diplomacy. The United States must maintain its global leadership in this arena to influence the peaceful use of nuclear technologies. The U.S. government works with countries in this capacity to**[**build relationships**](https://www.energy.gov/ne/articles/3-key-intangibles-us-nuclear-industry)**and develop new opportunities for the nation’s nuclear technologies.**

#### The US can only unlock its nuclear energy potentials with increased investment

**IEA 25**[International Energy Agency, Jan 16 2025, “A new era for nuclear energy beckons as projects, policies, and investment increase” IEA, <https://www.iea.org/news/a-new-era-for-nuclear-energy-beckons-as-projects-policies-and-investments-increase> Date Accessed 3/16/2025//AT]

Renewed momentum behind nuclear energy has the potential to open a new era for the secure and clean power source as demand for electricity grows strongly around the world, according to a new [IEA report](https://www.iea.org/reports/the-path-to-a-new-era-for-nuclear-energy). The report, *The Path to a New Era for Nuclear Energy*, shows the fresh impetus behind nuclear in the form of new policies, projects, investments and technological advances, such as small modular reactors (SMRs). It provides a comprehensive assessment of the current situation, identifying the major challenges that need to be addressed to build on the current momentum and enable a new era to take hold. This includes insights on how to finance new nuclear projects while ensuring reliable and diversified supply chains for building and fuelling them. “It’s clear today that the strong comeback for nuclear energy that the IEA predicted several years ago is well underway, with nuclear set to generate a record level of electricity in 2025,” said IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol. “In addition to this, more than 70 gigawatts of new nuclear capacity is under construction globally, one of the highest levels in the last 30 years, and more than 40 countries around the world have plans to expand nuclear’s role in their energy systems. SMRs in particular offer exciting growth potential. However, governments and industry must still overcome some significant hurdles on the path to a new era for nuclear energy, starting with delivering new projects on time and on budget – but also in terms of financing and supply chains.” As the world’s second-largest source of low-emissions electricity after hydropower, nuclear power today produces just under 10% of global electricity supply. The increasing use of electricity – to power everything from industry and air conditioning to electric vehicles and data centres amid the rise of artificial intelligence – is accelerating the growth in power demand, which is set to rise six times as fast as overall energy consumption in the coming decades, based on today’s policy settings. New generation capacity from a range of technologies will be needed to keep pace with the rapid demand growth, including those that can provide firm and flexible output such as nuclear. Most of the existing nuclear power fleet today is in advanced economies, but many of those plants were built decades ago. Meanwhile, the global map for nuclear is changing, with the majority of projects under construction in China, which is on course to overtake both the United States and Europe in installed nuclear capacity by 2030. Russia is also a major player in the nuclear technology landscape. Of the 52 reactors that have started construction worldwide since 2017, 25 are of Chinese design and another 23 are of Russian design. Similarly, the report shows how the production and enrichment of uranium, the fuel that goes into nuclear reactors, are highly concentrated. “Today, more than 99% of the enrichment capacity takes place in four supplier countries, with Russia accounting for 40% of global capacity, the single largest share,” Dr Birol said. “Highly concentrated markets for nuclear technologies, as well as for uranium production and enrichment, represent a risk factor for the future and underscore the need for greater diversity in supply chains.” Innovations in nuclear technologies are helping to drive momentum behind new projects, the report finds. SMRs, a type of smaller scale nuclear power plants that are quicker to build with greater scope for cost reductions, are drawing increasing interest from the private sector. The report highlights how the introduction of SMRs could lead to lower financing costs. With the right support, SMR installations could reach 80 GW by 2040, accounting for 10% of overall nuclear capacity globally. However, the success of the technology and speed of adoption will hinge on the industry’s ability to bring down costs by 2040 to a similar level to those of large-scale hydropower and offshore wind projects. **A new era for nuclear energy will require a lot of investment. In a rapid growth scenario for nuclear, annual investment would need to double to USD 120 billion** already by 2030. Given the scale of the infrastructure investment required, the rollout of new **nuclear projects cannot rely exclusively on public finances.** IEA analysis shows that ensuring the predictability of future cash flows is key to bringing down financing costs and attracting private capital to the nuclear sector. The report highlights that the private sector is increasingly viewing nuclear energy as an investible energy source with the promise of firm, competitive, clean power that can serve energy-intensive operations 24/7. Notably, big names in the technology sector are signing power purchase agreements with developers to provide electricity for data centres and artificial intelligence. **To take advantage of the opportunities that nuclear power offers, governments must be prepared to** provide the strategic vision alongside stable regulatory frameworks that will give the private sector confidence to **invest.** The report details how incentives and public finance more broadly can unlock the investment needed to deliver greater clean and reliable power from nuclear.

#### If no action is taken China pulls ahead

**Tarasov 25**[Katie Tarasov Senior Producer for CNBC, March 16 2025, “How the U.S. is losing ground to China in nuclear fusion, as AI power needs surge”CNBC, <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/03/16/the-us-is-falling-behind-china-in-nuclear-fusion-needed-to-power-ai.html> Date Accessed 3/16/2025//AT]

**China and the U.S. are in a race to create the first grid-scale nuclear fusion energy**. After decades of U.S. leadership, **China is catching up by spending twice as much and building projects at record speed.** Often called the holy grail of clean energy, nuclear fusion creates[four times more](https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/what-is-nuclear-fusion#:~:text=Fusion%20could%20generate%20four%20times%20more%20energy%20per%20kilogram%20of%20fuel%20than%20fission%20(used%20in%20nuclear%20power%20plants)%20and%20nearly%20four%20million%20times%20more%20energy%20than%20burning%20oil%20or%20coal.) energy per kilogram of fuel than traditional nuclear fission and four million times more than burning coal, with no greenhouse gasses or long-term radioactive waste. If all goes to plan, it will be at least a[$1 trillion market](https://www.scsp.ai/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Final-Fusion-Power_-Enabling-21st-Century-American-Dominance.pdf) by 2050, according to Ignition Research.There’s just one big problem. “The only working fusion power plants right now in the universe are stars,” said Dennis Whyte, professor of nuclear science and engineering at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.The U.S. was first to large-scale use of fusion with a hydrogen bomb test in 1952. In the seven decades since, scientists around the world have been struggling to harness fusion reactions for power generation.Fusion reactions occur when hydrogen atoms reach extreme enough temperatures that they fuse together, forming a super-heated gas called plasma. The mass shed during the process can, in theory, be turned into huge amounts of energy, but the plasma is hard to control. One popular method uses powerful magnets to suspend and control the plasma inside a tokamak, which is a metal donut-shaped device. Another uses high-energy lasers, pointed at a peppercorn-sized pellet of fuel, rapidly compressing and imploding it. That’s how the U.S. pulled off the historic first fusion ignition, producing net positive energy at the Lawrence Livermore National Ignition Facility, or NIF, in 2022.Here, the preamplifier module increases the laser energy as it heads toward the target chamber at the National Ignition Facitility.Since then, private investment in U.S. fusion startups has soared to more than $8 billion, up from $1.2 billion in 2021, according to the Fusion Industry Association. Of the FIA’s 40 member companies, 25 of them are based in the U.S.Traditional nuclear power, created from fission instead of fusion, has seen a [big uptick in investment](https://www.cnbc.com/2024/10/15/big-tech-turns-to-nuclear-energy-to-fuel-power-intensive-ai-ambitions.html) as Big Tech looks for ways to fill the ever-increasing power needs of AI data centers.[Amazon](https://www.cnbc.com/quotes/AMZN/),[Google](https://www.cnbc.com/quotes/GOOG/) and[Meta](https://www.cnbc.com/quotes/META/) have signed a pledge to help [triple nuclear energy](https://www.cnbc.com/2025/03/12/amazon-google-and-meta-support-tripling-nuclear-power-by-2050.html) worldwide by 2050. “If you care about AI, if you care about energy leadership … you have to make investments into fusion,” FIA CEO Andrew Holland said. “This is something that if the United States doesn’t lead on, then China will.” Money, size and speedWhile the U.S. has the most active nuclear power plants, [China is king of new projects](https://www.cnbc.com/2023/08/30/how-china-became-king-of-new-nuclear-power-how-us-could-catch-up.html). Despite breaking ground on its first reactor nearly four decades after the U.S. pioneered the tech, **China’s now building far more fission power plants than any other country .**China entered the fusionrace in the early 2000s, about 50 years after the U.S., when it joined more than 30 nations to collaborate on the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor fusion [megaproject](https://www.cnbc.com/2021/10/01/the-22-billion-iter-megaproject-aims-to-make-nuclear-fusion-a-reality.html) in France. But ITER has since hit major delays.The race is on between individual nations, but the U.S. private sector remains in the lead. Of the $8 billion in global private fusion investment, $6 billion is in the U.S., according to the FIA.Commonwealth Fusion Systems, a startup born out of MIT, has [raised the most](https://www.cnbc.com/2023/06/08/commonwealth-fusion-systems-tour-and-ceo-interview.html) money, nearly $2 billion from the likes of Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos and Google. Washington-based Helion has raised $1 billion from investors like Open AI’s Sam Altman and a [highly ambitious deal](https://www.cnbc.com/2023/05/10/microsoft-agrees-to-buy-power-from-sam-altman-backed-helion-in-2028.html) with [Microsoft](https://www.cnbc.com/quotes/MSFT/) to deliver fusion power to the grid by 2028. Google-backed [TAE Technologies](https://www.cnbc.com/2022/07/19/google-chevron-invest-in-fusion-startup-tae-technologies.html) has raised $1.2 billion.“Whoever has essentially abundant limitless energy … can impact everything you think of,” said Michl Binderbauer, CEO of TAE Technologies. “That is a scary thought if that’s in the wrong hands.” When it comes to public funding, China is way ahead.  **Beijing is putting a reported $1.5 billion annually toward the effort while U.S. federal dollars for fusion have averaged about $800 million annually the last few years**, according to the[Energy Department’s Office of Fusion Energy Sciences](https://science.osti.gov/-/media/fes/fesac/pdf/2023/FES-Vision.pdf).President Donald Trump ramped up[support for nuclear](https://www.newsweek.com/trump-nuclear-fusion-investments-1767748), including fusion, during his first term, and that continued under former President Joe Biden. It’s unclear what fusion funding will look like in Trump’s second term, amid [massive federal downsizing](https://www.cnbc.com/2025/03/10/energy-secretary-chris-wright-vows-to-reverse-biden-climate-policies-says-renewables-cant-replace-natural-gas.html). U.S. senators and fusion experts published a[report](https://www.scsp.ai/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Final-Fusion-Power_-Enabling-21st-Century-American-Dominance.pdf) in February calling for $10 billionof federal funds to help keep the U.S. from losing its lead. But the U.S. may already have lost the lead when it comes to reactor size. Generally, the bigger the footprint, the more efficiently a reactor can heat and confine the plasma, increasing the chances for net positive energy.

#### Nuclear energy is also key to Chinese heg

**NBP 24**[Nuclear Business Platform, Dec 10 2024, “China's Nuclear Power Program: A Blueprint for Global Competitiveness” NBP, <https://www.nuclearbusiness-platform.com/media/insights/chinas-nuclear-power-program-a-blueprint-for-global-competitiveness#:~:text=Nuclear%20power%20is%20critical%20to,drivers%20of%20China's%20nuclear%20strategy>. Date Accessed 3/16/2025//AT]

Government Support and Vision for the Nuclear Industry:- The Chinese government has played a crucial role in shaping the economics of the country’s nuclear sector through affordable financing and subsidies, including feed-in tariffs that reduce the cost of nuclear power. As a result, the cost of nuclear power in China is about $70 per megawatt-hour, significantly lower than in the United States ($105) and the European Union ($160). State-backed loans cover around 70 percent of the cost of Chinese reactors, with interest rates as low as 1.4 percent—far more favorable than financing terms available to nuclear companies in other countries. These financial advantages enable China to build nuclear plants at a cost of approximately $2,500 to $3,000 per kilowatt, about one-third the cost of similar projects in the U.S. and France. Looking ahead, **the Chinese government sees nuclear energy as a key export sector, particularly under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Officials aim to sell 30 nuclear reactors to BRI partner countries by 2030, generating up to 1 trillion yuan ($145.5 billion) in revenue for Chinese companies by the decade's end.** Climate Policies and Strategic Considerations Driving Nuclear Ambitions:- **China’s climate policies have been key in advancing its nuclear energy sector.** Nuclear power is critical to achieving President Xi Jinping’s goal of carbon neutrality by mid-century. In addition to environmental objectives, economic and national security concerns, such as reducing dependence on oil imports, are major drivers of China’s nuclear strategy.By 2025, China aims to generate 200 GW of nuclear power, potentially avoiding 1.5 billion tons of carbon emissions annually—more than the combined emissions of the UK, Spain, France, and Germany. Looking ahead, China plans to replace its 2,990 coal-fired power plants with clean energy sources by 2060, further emphasizing its commitment to sustainable energy transformation.

#### Chinese expansion causes escalatory great power war in several hotspots

O'Connor, 20, Tom O'Connor is an award-winning senior writer of foreign policy at Newsweek, where he specializes in the Middle East, North Korea and other areas of international affairs and conflict. He has previously written for International Business Times, the New York Post, the Daily Star (Lebanon) and Staten Island Advance. "U.S.-Aligned Countries in Asia Are Under Pressure From China," Newsweek, 6-19, https://www.newsweek.com/us-aligned-countries-pressure-china-1512226 -- Iowa

China is turning up the pressure on U.S.-aligned countries in Asia in an attempt to capitalize on Washington's triple domestic crises and Beijing's own perceived position of strength, pressing forward with a series of assertive moves across disputed territory that could reshape the region. The U.S. crises—the coronavirus pandemic, the recession sparked by the illness and the protests triggered by the police killing of George Floyd—have created unique conditions for China to take advantage of its worldwide geopolitical expansion, already accelerated by Chinese President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative. For the United States, it comes at an inopportune time, as Ali Wyne, a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and a nonresident fellow at the Modern War Institute, told Newsweek. The country's series of overlapping woes at home "blurs its strategic vision and undercuts its diplomatic bandwidth at an unusually fraught moment in Asian-Pacific geopolitics." "For the first time in its modern history, China is in a position to dictate the terms of its relationship with the rest of the world," Allen Carlson, associate professor in Cornell University's Government Department, told Newsweek. U.S. strength in Asia is fueled by robust relations with regional states as well as an unchallenged military presence spanning hundreds of bases and tens of thousands of troops. China has made vast inroads across Asia, however, establishing an increasingly competitive economic, military and cultural foundation. While the United States may not yet have lost its top spot in the international order, Carlson told Newsweek that other countries are trying out for the lead role on the world stage and "the most significant of such auditions is the one that Xi Jinping's China is making in regards to becoming a global power." "Those that accept China's emerging star turn are rewarded with economic largess and friendly relations. Those that do not endorse Xi's agenda for China are facing repercussions for such reticence," Carlson said. "The string of more assertive measures is part and parcel of this later trend. The question is how far will Xi be willing to take such an approach." This escalatory strategy can be seen in high-profile flashpoints. China has engaged in deadly clashes with Indian soldiers on the Himalayan border, taken more active measures to establish control over semi-autonomous Hong Kong and self-ruling Taiwan and ramped up confrontations with other countries, including the United States, in the South China Sea. Adam Ni, director of the China Policy Centre and editor of China Story, told Newsweek that these moves "share something in common, that is, China's increasing assertiveness due to its rising power." "China is more confident about its relative power, and thus more assertive in using its new-found power," he added. "The other thing is that the international community is more anxious about China's ambitions than one or two decades ago." In the South China Sea, the U.S. has conducted "freedom of navigation" operations in a bid to check China's sprawling claims, but the People's Liberation Army continues to militarize internationally-disputed islands and reefs with impunity. Chinese ships have attempted to interfere with operations in an increasingly contentious battle over waters holding what's estimated to be trillions of dollars worth of oil and gas reserves. China rammed a Vietnamese fishing vessel last week in the South China Sea, fueling a backlash against Beijing and Indonesia and the Philippines have also lodged protests against China's maritime claims there. A standoff between Chinese and Malaysian ships last month prompted the U.S. to send in its own forces. Xi has also flexed China's military might near Taiwan, which he vows to reunify with the mainland by diplomacy or force. As some U.S. lawmakers continue to press for greater protections for the island, Chinese warplanes have buzzed Taiwan airspace at least five times in the past two weeks. Washington has grown accustomed to acting near-freely in almost every corner of the Earth in the post-Cold War era, but Beijing has argued a far-spanning stretch of the South China Sea falls under its own exclusive rule, as does Hong Kong, which is now subject to a new national security law rejected by the U.S., United Kingdom, Canada and nearby Australia, which faces growing threats of a trade boycott over its resistance to growing Chinese influence. China has for years claimed sovereignty over Taiwan and Hong Kong, but a rising tide in nationalism has spurred calls for even more ambitious territorial designs. Articles have appeared on China's vast webscape calling for various neighboring nations and areas such as Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, parts of Nepal and India to "return to China." Claims in Kazakhstan so enraged the Central Asian country that it summoned Beijing's ambassador, prompting Chinese authorities to delete more than 150 social media accounts fueling such irredentist ideals among the country's populace. This nationalistic fervor, further stoked by what was seen at home as a relatively quick and effective response to the coronavirus outbreak, has in many ways served Xi and the ruling Chinese Communist Party well, but it also presented a threat if left unchecked. "For Xi, nationalism cuts both ways," Ni explained. "Too much popular nationalism may put pressure on foreign policy options; but it also uses nationalism to mobilize public support. It's a fine balancing act for Xi and the CCP." Wyne told Newsweek heavy-handed tactics have incurred "significant reputational damage" for Beijing as it explores more aggressive messaging toward its neighbors, and Carlson warned that "there is the potential for conflict to spiral out of control, and dragging China into outright conflict (rather than limited engagements) with its neighbors." China's gray zone strategy, employed in repeated incursions in areas like the Japan-controlled Senkaku Islands—known to China as Diaoyu, is designed to prod and creep at geopolitically sensitive areas, not to spark a major confrontation. The recent, fatal clashes between forces at the contested crossing point of China-administered Aksai Chin and India-administered Ladakh, have elicited global concerns that the world's two largest populations, already incited by nationalistic tendencies toward their respective rising nations, may be on a collision course. The China-India clashes come as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi establishes close ties with President Donald Trump. In a statement sent to Newsweek, the State Department said it offered its condolences to Indian troops killed in the latest border skirmish and said that U.S. officials "support a peaceful resolution of the current situation." Washington has also watched with dismay as burgeoning inter-Korean ties collapsed over the past week along with the Trump administration's own strategy there. After successfully courting the U.S. into direct diplomacy in 2018, the previously elusive North Korean supreme leader Kim Jong Un appeared to turn a new diplomatic leaf, embracing closer ties with both longtime rival the U.S. and longtime partner China. As the Trump administration's ties with both Beijing and Pyongyang deteriorated, however, a landmark denuclearization-for-peace process on the Korean Peninsula stalled. North Korea has severed all communications with U.S. ally South Korea, blown up their joint liaison office and declared a failing atmosphere in talks with the U.S. itself, all after Kim recently praised Xi's coronavirus response.

#### Extinction

Cribb ’23 [Julian; Distinguished science writer with more than thirty awards for journalism, was a newspaper editor, founder of the influential ScienceAlert website and author of eight books, including The Coming Famine; Cambridge University Press, “Nuclear Awakening” in How to Fix a Broken Planet: Advice for Surviving the 21st Century, p. 44-53]

Even a relatively limited nuclear conflict between the two - 100-150 warheads of Hiroshima scale - is projected to kill 100 million people directly and 1-2 billion people worldwide as the resulting ‘nuclear winter’ would cause harvests to fail and food supplies to collapse all around the planet.9 Such a disaster would almost certainly trigger further wars, some of them nuclear, as governments fail and atomic weaponry falls into the hands of political radicals, warlords, criminals, or religious extremists. A second example is acute water scarcity leading to a food crisis in northern China, spilling the local popula¬tion in all directions, including Siberian Russia: strategic think tanks fear such a development could precipitate a nuclear response. Another case is the Middle East, already the most water-starved and volatile region on Earth, where the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran could spark a regional arms race involving Israel and, potentially, Saudi Arabia.10 In all these cases, the nine catastrophic threats pave the road that leads to nuclear holocaust - and all must now be regarded as primers in the explosive chain leading to civilisational collapse and human extinction.