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Is Multilateralism the only solution to Climate Challenge?

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Is Multilateralism the only solution to Climate Challenge?

The Climate Crisis has already been solved.
We already have the facts and solutions.
All we have to do is wake up & change.
- Greta Thunberg

Last year pandemic was wrecking havoc on the whole human populace. Until, global action was taken millions of lives were lost. If same mistake is repeated regarding climate change, consequences would be devastating. History is filled with examples showing that selfishness in state matters does not bode well. Homo sapiens have always solved a problem when they have acted together. Climate Change is no different, humans have the ability and capacity to deal with it. Although, there are certain challenges in the way of a collective action, but they can be tackled if timely action is taken. Therefore, if Climate Change was something

limited to any single ~~sitnyte~~ state, then multilat
won't be the only solution. But, as evident
from empirical data, it is a threat to
whole humanity and transcends territorial borders
~~therefore~~ hence, it is the only solution.

Now, before delving into the whole how(s)
and why(s) of the essay topic, we must
have a basic understanding of the keywords,
which are Climate Change and Multilateralism.
Starting with the Climate Change, it is
the global phenomenon of climate transformation
characterized by the changes in the usual climate
of the planet (regarding temp, precipitation & wind)
that are especially caused by human activities.
It started with industrial revolution and it is
~~taking~~ picking pace since then. The goal is to keep the
atmosphere temp at 1.5°C at the end of
this century, but with current rate of carbon emission,
scientists have concluded that if concrete
actions aren't taken we will reach 1.5°
mark at the end of this decade. One
may ask why is it so important to

control of the temp?. The answer is provided by scientists in various researches which shows all the effects of climate change on the planet. As a result of unbalancing the weather of Earth, the sustainability of the planet's ecosystem is under threat, as well as future of the humankind and the stability of the global economy.

The second major keyword is Multilateralism. It is pertinent to understand multilateralism before explaining how it will solve the climate challenge. In International Relations, multilateralism refers to an alliance of multiple countries pursuing a common goal. The scope and scale of multilateralism was first enlarged with the establishment of the UN after WWII. The UN became the home of Multilateralism by enabling cooperation on development, trade, human rights, education, etc. Environment subjects, however, remain absent in the discourse, until the UN Stockholm Conf in 1972 established the UN Environment Programme and laid the foundations of what

is now an elaborate architecture of global environment governance.

Prior to arguing that multilateralism is the only solution to climate challenge, let us see first what multilateralism has contributed until how to tackle the climate challenge.

Starting with Montreal Protocol (1987), a historic environmental accord that became a model for future diplomacy on the issue. The goal was to stop producing substances that damage the ozone layer, such as CFCs. ~~The~~ Every country in the world ratified the treaty and the protocol has succeeded in eliminating nearly 99 percent of these ozone-depleting substances.

Next imp multilateral agreement is Kyoto Protocol (1997) which entered into force in 2005. It was the first legally binding climate treaty. It required developed countries to reduce emissions by an average of 5 percent below 1990s level, and established a system to monitor countries' progress.

But the treaty became victim of political interests of countries, as China and India, major carbon emitters didn't take any action and US signed the agreement but never ratified it.

Third in Paris Agreement 2015, the most significant global climate agreement to date. Its goal is to prevent the global average temperature from rising 2°C above preindustrial levels and pursuing efforts to keep it below 1.5°C. Every five years, countries are supposed to assess their progress toward implementing the agreement. However, a major drawback is that countries set their own targets, and there are no enforcement mechanisms to ensure they meet them. The US, the world's second-largest emitter, was the only country to withdraw from the accord under President Trump. However, under President Biden the US re-entered into the agreement. The role of US Presidents mixed climate policies will be discussed later and how they have put a blow to climate activism.

European Green deal is another imp multilateral agreement to solve climate challenge. As Europe's new growth strategy it aims to transition to a more resource-efficient, competitive economy. Ultimately the goal is to achieve net-zero GHG emissions by 2050. Until now, we have discussed what role multilateralism has played in reining in countries to tackle climate change, but as portrayed in empirical data we are far behind our goals. Following are some of the actions which can be taken to speed up our fight against Climate Change.

As discussed above, Europe is on its way to achieve net-zero GHG by 2050; but that won't be possible if Europeans don't take rest of the world into account. The EU represents the less than 10% of the global emissions, so European action alone won't be enough to slow global warming. What the world need today is a Global Green Deal. To this end, three

steps are crucial from the investment point of view. First, we need to ensure that most advanced clean technologies are embraced everywhere. Although there is good progress on renewable-energy deployment, 40% of the world energy is still generated by coal, the dirtiest energy source.

Secondly, we have to invest in green technologies like never before. Such research and development is both necessary and enormous market opportunity. Finally we need to embrace the 'idea of 'circular economy'. We need to invest in circular technologies that reuse resources, rather than constantly producing or importing new goods and extracting ever more raw materials.

Apart from making new commitments we also have to fulfill our previous ones. There is no point of meetings and pledges unless a concrete action is taken to fulfill our commitments. For this, countries must include climate related legislations into their municipal law. This will be a splendid

check on their performance as municipal law is binding.

The world today of ours is characterized by a geopolitical competition. Countries are majorly big powers are engaged to increase their spheres of influence. In such a world, image matters alot or as Joseph Nye likes to call it 'soft power' of the country. Geopolitical competition can become as a driver behind major powers actions to increase their soft power by portraying themselves as Climate activists. Particularly China and US, already engaged in a geopolitical competition, can use their enormous wealth and clout to increase the speed of green transition in their spheres of influence. It can be seen as a Space Race of Cold War era between Soviet Union and US, insted this Climate Race will bring benefits to the whole world. It is important to mention here that

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geopolitical competition is also a major hurdle in solving climate challenge and it will be discussed in our challenges to multilateral approach portion.

There are two main approaches which world leaders can take to avoid the threat of catastrophic harm to human welfare posed by climate change. One, using innovative technologies as advocated by Bill Gates. Two, raising awareness through global activists like Greta Thunberg who advocate radically changing our behaviour. Let's discuss Gates' approach first.

Bill Gates, a philanthropist and a billionaire climate activist, in his recent book 'How to avoid a climate disaster' gives a very rational approach. If our leaders take a joint approach on his suggestion, we can get to zero emissions by 2050. Gates emphasizes to compare the cost per unit of the current way of doing it a task to the

approach that creates no emission. The difference between the costs can be called as 'green premium.' For example a Jet fuel extracted from carbon costs us $2 per gallon and biofuel generated from a bio-waste cost $5 per gallon, there's a $3 premium. This green premium makes it easy for us to determine where we have to invest our resources to bring it down. The higher the green premium, higher shall be our investment in that particular area for a green transition. Bringing premium to zero will lead us to this 2050 goal of zero emissions.

While rapid technological progress is our best long-term hope for mitigating climate change, Thunberg is partly right today. Living standards in rich countries have contributed alot in carbon emissions. We should fly less, get on our bikes and more importantly we need to halt deforestation before its too late. Global activists

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like Thunberg should be given plat-form worldwide to spread awareness among comity of nations. World leaders themselves will have to use 'language of tragedy' to pursue their nations to radically change their behaviour and leave a lessor amount of carbon footprint, a term used to define amount of carbon emitted in an atmosphere by an individual.

Another very imp step which govts will have to take is a joint-front against anti-Environmentalists, majorly Timber Mafia and fossil fuel industries. Starting with Timber Mafia, it is a Mafia which is globally connected in the smuggling of wood. Other than damaging the economy, this mafia is also responsible for the rapid deforestation. For instance, consider the example of Pakistan. There are reports that the dense forests of North and South Waziristan are being fast stripped of trees, by the timber mafia. The timber and charcoal are

much in demand in neighbouring provinces of Afghanistan. Sometimes govts themselves are involved in promoting deforestation. Consider, for instance, the far-right Bolsonaro govt in Brazil is criticized for encouraging destruction of the rainforests in Amazon to boost agriculture. But, Brazil itself is not only contributing in deforestation, all other countries which are trading with it are also a part of it. For example, despite being so vocal in terms of criticizing Brazil for deforestation, the EU remains largest trading partner of Brazil. It is not only Europe but also other powerful countries like Australia, the US and China which are fueling supply-chain exploitation. Therefore, a joint action is necessary among states to put an end to deforestation.

Similarly, a joint action against fossil fuel industries is imperative but it is the most difficult task as of now. Because of free-market liberalization and immense

support from the West after the fall of Berlin Wall for capitalism, MNCs today have become a major actor in international relations. It is known that the major reason behind climate change has been rapid industrialization but still nothing was done to stop or transit fossil fuel industries to green. This is because of enormous wealth and influence of these industries on the world economy. They have also used their wealth to fund research, which is contrary to popular belief that fossil fuels damage our environment. ExxonMobil, one of the biggest oil giants knew as early as 1970s that using of fossil fuels is damaging the environment. Yet, they funded research which denied such knowledge. Fossil fuel industries collectively own crude oil reserves underground, the market value of which is estimated to be about $3 trillion. They are not going to give up on that wealth so easily. To rein

in these industries is not upto developing countries as they are too economically weak. The only way forward is that developed countries give incentives to both developing countries to not let MNCs use their territory to damage environment, and to MNCs for green transitions. Then and only then we will be able to reach our carbon-neutral goal.

Aforementioned are all those suggestions which are based on a multilateral approach to solve a climate challenge. Now let us consider that going solo is an option? What will be the outcome if each state is having its own climate policy irrespective of other states?

Consider a scenario where all developed countries have invested highly in green transition. Each country has ~~his~~ its own Green Deal, but will they be carbon-neutral providing that developing countries are still emitting high amounts

of carbon in the atmosphere as they didn't had enough resources to make a green transition and they are still burning fossil fuels? In a single word, No! As research has shown carbon emitted in one place doesn't just remain there, insted it moves upward and gets trap in the atmosphere which eventually becomes the reason behind climate change. It is true that in result of green transformation, millions of jobs would be created, but millions would be lost too. The developing countries cannot take this risk unless they are provided with financial support from developed countries. On the other hand, when developing countries won't pursue green transformation, effects of climate change will become more severe. For example, severe droughts and the wreckage they will create can become a cause for political instability which can result as an additional

threat to world security.

Now let us discuss the challenges which are in the way of a multilateral approach to solve climate challenge.

First and foremost is Geopolitical competition and security dilemma among states. Take Russia for example, phasing out energy imports will reduce the income and geopolitical power of countries like Russia, which currently relies heavily on the EU market. The US has also tussled with EU over Nord Stream 2, a pipeline that will deliver Russian natural gas directly to Germany, bypassing (and thus weakening) Ukraine. Of course, loss of this key source of Russian revenue, could lead to instability in the near term. Same goes for the Gulf kingdoms, their enormous wealth is will be in danger, if the world moves towards green technologies. As a result of economic loss, uprisings can also begin

depicting the memories of Arab Spring. This security dilemma on national and international level is the major hurdle behind a multilateral approach.

Second, which is very important factor, is the current political tensions between the China and US. Many analysts have termed it as start of a new Cold War. In such an atmosphere collaboration is very difficult. China and US are now in an open competition for the seat of a global power and in such a scenario, mutual trust is rare to find. But as seen from the Cold War's Cuban Missile Crisis, when leaders realize the severity of consequences, they act rationally. Both China and US have to realize that their geopolitical competition shall not disrupt them in joining hands against an enemy which is far superior and they won't be able to fight with it alone.

And that enemy is none other than Climate Change.

Third, important challenge is the repeatedly changing US administration's climate policies. Climate Change has become a political topic for country's conservatives and liberals or more specifically ~~Democrats~~ Republicans and Democratic Party. Democrats have leaned towards science in understanding Climate Change and taking necessary steps starting from Jimmy Carter's installation of solar panels on the White House, Clinton signing Kyoto Protocol, Obama entering Paris agreement and now Biden's climate summit. On the other hand, Republicans have related science to appease their voters since Reagan, as he removed these solar panels from the White House installed by Carter, Bush withdrew from Kyoto Protocol and lately Trump's exit

From Paris agreement prove this point. US is the global hegemon since 90s, its actions have effects on the whole world. When the ~~world~~ US ofteny revisits its climate policy, it loses its credibility among comity of nations. So, it would be imperative that whether a Republican or Democrat enters the Oval office, he or she remains commited with a multilateral approach to solve the climate challenge.

Fourth major challenge is the burden sharing debate between developed and developing countries. Developed countries argue that each country should similar actions in combating climate change why we should be the one to make more contributions? To that developing countries reply that major emittors have been industrialist states, developed countries of today have become developed after burning fossil fuels for decades

and now when we are on our way to industrialization growth they want us to shift to green economy so they can have monopoly over us as we don't have enough resources to make a transition without their support and their support usually comes with political goals.

Now before concluding it is necessary to suggest a way forward to bridge these differences among states. As mentioned earlier in debate about burden-sharing, developing countries have a valid point. So instead of bilateral aid which usually comes with political goals, a multilateral framework will be a better option. Scientists have given us the list of most impacted countries and they update each year, maybe it can become a criterion for investment in green technologies. The country

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which is getting most affected by Climate Change gets the most aid. Secondly to diminish security dilemma, we have to make international institutions strong. Since their founding, West has been using these institutions as a political tool, this has to stop. West has to accept other system of governance, other than Democracy. On the other hand authoritarian states have to build up their credibility by increasing transparency and respecting human rights. Unless and Until a joint action is taken on purely merit basis, institution can never be strong. You cannot reserve opprobrium for geopolitical opponents and treat your allies with kid-gloves. Build Back Better World (B3W) is although a geopolitical tool but since its goals incorporate green technologies, it must be lauded. Moreover, BRI should now also move towards environment

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friendly projects. This type of competition doesn't harm anyone instead benefits the whole humanity. Lastly and most importantly using media global awareness is required such that nations themselves pressurize their govts to collaborate in solving this international emergency.

To sum it all up, climate change is a reality, it isn't a myth anymore and it isn't restricted to any single state. Therefore, multilateral approach to tackle it is the only way forward, going solo one will get ~~one~~ short-term benefits, but in long-term its consequences would be devastating. There are no doubts that there are challenges to multilateral approach but none of them aren't such which cannot be resolved. Security dilemma can be diminished by making institutions stronger, fair investment in developing countries can reduce their grievances and positive competition

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can put an end to Cold-war mentality. As Thunberg has said that this issue is already solved, but are world leaders willing to change and collaborate with each other? That is yet to be seen.