



## Environmental Regime and Conventional Security Issues in the US Politics

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### **Abstract**

Historically, environmentalism has not served the US long-term objectives and goals to advance its influence and hegemony in the world. From the Post-cold war period onwards, US politics took war interventions as a top security issue and denied the non-traditional threats such as climate change to be a part of its national security agenda. On the other hand, many countries have included the threat of climate change in their national security domain. Meanwhile, in the US, climate action has never been a central part of its national security and foreign policy objective. The first section of this paper aims to critically evaluate the US domestic policies and foreign policy from the Nixon administration to Trump's administration. It shows that the US has a promising start in addressing nontraditional threats but soon became a laggard in the subsequent years. Secondly, this paper tries to answer a very pertinent question that why does the US remain a laggard to consider environmentalism to be part of its national security agenda?

**Keywords:** *Environmentalism; Post-Cold War; Non-Traditional Threats; Climate Action; National Security Agenda*

### **Introduction**

The issue of Climate change has emerged as a potential threat in the modern world. IR experts and scholars generated the discourse which supported the inclusion of climate change in the National security domain. The Catastrophic impacts of climate change have already been started and environmental disruptions became a threat to 'human life'. Now the world knows that this environmental degradation is the product of human activities. The scientific publications by the intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC) generate awareness among the masses. The second section of this paper will highlight the US environmental policy with the relationship to its Grand strategy and war-oriented foreign policy. It answers some very pertinent questions about the security issues in US politics. For instance, why 'war' was a security threat for the US national security strategy but not the issue of climate change. The US has advanced its hegemonic role in the world through widening its economic ideology, energy

supremacy, and spreading the neo-liberal ideology. Liberal institutionalism has dominated the post-cold war periods and the Bush Senior advocated this new world order. This new ideology was more hospitable towards the issues of climate change.

### **Global Environmentalism and the USA**

The year 1960 gave birth to the environmental movement in international relations when anthropogenic climate change was declared a threat to humans and ecosystems. Industrial production and consumption grew at an unprecedented level after the second world war. Conventional use of energy resources created severe ecological problems like global warming and climate change. During this time there was a rise in environmental lawmaking and multilateralism. When new discourses like sustainable development, climate justice, and environmental security were emerging. A new set of responsibilities and burdens have been posted on the developed and developing world for mitigation and adaptation. Being a technologically advanced and rich state, the US played the role of leader at the start. The US had the biggest ecological footprint on a per capita level. But after 1990 when the carbon emissions grew at an unprecedented level as compared to the preindustrial level, the world needed the most effective measures to stop that. The US has been less interested in resolving this issue. As history shows, the US environmental foreign policy has been influenced by its domestic political culture and economic system. Its domestic political and economic system is mainly dependent on the principle of economic maximization and the ideology of economic rationalism. The US had a history of not involving in any multilateral agreement or treaty which does not serve its economic interests or hurt its market competitiveness. US domestic moral and liberal values are the important constituent of its foreign policy. The promotion and expansion of its domestic economic and liberal values reflect its foreign policy goals. In the post-cold war period, the US grand strategy proved to be a major constraint on its effective policymaking and actions on environmental issues. The understanding of the historical position of the US on environmental issues is very pertinent to understanding why and how the US securitized one issue over another (Policy, 2012).

### **Nixon Administration**

The first Earth summit in 1972 at Stockholm began the official environmental law to be followed in international relations. Richard Nixon was the president at that time and played a proactive role in the Stockholm summit. He was regarded as the best environmental lawmaker and policymaker in the US. He initiated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and through this US-built its green reputation. Stockholm conference gave birth to many international NGOs for environmental protection with the governments. There were two major contributions to the US at the Stockholm conference. At first, the US supported the inception of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and committed to voluntarily giving 100 million dollars fund for the UNEP. Despite this step, the US rejected and took a concrete position to oppose the funding for sustainable development to meet the environmental goals and targets for poor countries. This stance of the USA got severe criticism from the rest of the world. Along with this, the USA faced criticism during the Vietnam war because of the use of agent orange through military and atomic testing. Therefore, the Nixon administration used Stockholm conference initiatives to cover its face in the eye of the public and the international community (Harris P. G., 2001).

### **Carter Administration**

President Jimmy Carter seemed to be more modest than Nixon on environmental policies. But Carter failed to play any leadership role because of the ongoing energy crisis and security situation with Iran. He proposed an energy bill to introduce synthetic fuels which were later dismantled by Regan. On the foreign policy level, he banned toxic waste export to other countries and supported climate change

research by the government. He questioned American oil dependency and wanted to promote renewable energy resources. Despite this, Carter saw the Persian Gulf oil as a potential interest of the US. He created a military strategy and a special command unit to pursue US oil interests in the Gulf through foreign policy practice. Later, his US command unit served as a Country's central command in the region.

### **Regan Administration**

Soon after joining the office, President Ronald Regan expressed his anti-environmental agenda explicitly. Many environmental regulations which have been made during the previous decade were dismantled by Carter and he removed taxation incentives for renewable energy and cut down the budgets for environmental programs. Carter did not take any advice from CEQ and EPA in energy policy formation throughout his whole period serving the office. On the foreign policy end, he did not put his government in any multilateral agreement on the environment. Because he believed that those agreements were hurting American market competitiveness and a constraint to economic benefits and maximization. During his second term, when scientists found a hole in the ozone layer the US played a leadership role in ozone diplomacy worldwide. The global community gathered the resolving the issue and many agreements like the Vienna Convention for the protection of the ozone layer have been signed and enforced. Chlorofluorocarbons (CFC<sub>s</sub>) release was the major cause of ozone layer depletion, and this substance was used mainly in aerosols. US played a major role to negotiate the alternative for CFC with the whole world. Two big US-based industries Dupont and Allied chemicals started producing alternatives or substitutes for CFC<sub>s</sub> and started selling to the whole world. Through Montreal protocol 1987, compliance was ensured. The Regan administration's leadership role in ozone diplomacy was advantageous to the global environment but solely to the US economy. They played an active role in ozone diplomacy because they favored US economic competitiveness (Eckersley, 2012).

### **Bush Senior Administration**

The strong criticism by the US public of the anti-environmental agenda of Reagan made Bush label himself as a 'green president'. But soon after his promising green regulations, he failed to sustain its position. George Bush served as a vice president in Reagan's administration and deregulated many environmental laws. Bush contributed to the 1992 earth summit on one condition that the US does not have to limit its Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as settled in the United Nations framework convention on climate change (UNFCCC) if it is unfavorable to the US economy. Along with this, the Bush administration refused to sign the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Moreover, President Bush promoted US economic ideology at the foreign policy end and American market competitiveness over compliance with environmental regulations.

### **Clinton Administration**

President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore had a good reputation for environmentalism in the history of US politics. Soon after joining the office, Clinton signed the CBD and started the movement to reduce the GHG emissions to return to 1990s levels. The dominant discourses such as 'environment vs economy' were challenged by this government by showing the economic advantages of substituting for green technologies. The most renowned green vice president Al Gore was a great advocate of climate security to be included in the national security domain. In 1992, Clinton faced a failure in accepting the tax bill on fuels by congress because, in elections, both houses were under the republicans. The tax proposal was the original scheme to reduce the GHG emissions to the 1990 levels but unfortunately, the US has failed to achieve it. Senate was dominated by Republicans who strongly opposed the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 because of the ban on coal production. American private fossil fuel industry invested 13 million dollars in a campaign to build public opinion against the Kyoto protocol by showing the economic disadvantages of the agreement to the individual level. The US was concerned about the differentiation of

burdens shared by the developed and developing states. They advocated that an equal share of the burden must be put on both sides. Developing states had so much less ecological footprint per capita basis and they were mostly not even industrialized. However, Al Gore negotiated with both parties on this matter and made America's commitment that it will cut down its emissions by 7 percent by 2008-12. Kyoto mechanisms such as clean development mechanism (CDM), Joint Implementation (JI), and carbon trading have largely been compromised which gave the US great leverage to achieve its GHG goals. On the foreign policy front, the Clinton administration had failed to achieve any progress on climate control and failed to achieve ratification for the Kyoto protocol and CBD during its tenure. This is because of the strong opposition of the fossil fuel industry and hostile congress. (paterson, 2009)

## **Bush Junior Administration**

President Bush joined the office with the pure business and economic maximization agenda by any means and rolled back many environmental regulations while starting his presidential journey. He strongly rejected the climate alliances and denies the ratification of the Kyoto protocol. The Bush administration was also the worst denier of climate science and global warming and rejected emissions reductions, carbon trading schemes, carbon taxes, and targets for renewable energy. Through its climate policies, he rosed the 7 percent carbon cut allocation to 18 percent by 2012, though, it was never achieved. By incorporating the energy policy act, the Bush administration provided subsidies to oil and gas drilling and cut down the previous regulations on drilling limits and prevention. 56 percent of the US oil supply was coming from the Middle East. To secure the oil supply from that region, the US required a strategic presence in that region. The Bush administration was overwhelmingly involved in the war on terror and the Iraq war. In 2006, the cost of the Iraq war was much more than the cost needed for compliance with the Kyoto protocol. US economy and military infrastructure are highly dependent on the foreign supply of oil, so the military presence in the Persian Gulf which is oil-rich served the US oil interests in that era. Despite investing in renewables, the US was investing in wars in the name of spreading democracy, peace, and liberal values in authoritarian regimes. The Bush-Cheney foreign policy served the US oil addiction and rejected the use of renewable sources. They denied that oil was the motive or US interest behind the Iraq war, but they got access to Iraq's oil fields. They have spent huge money on the Iraq war, what they have gotten from the war if not for access to the oil fields? (Hale, 2010)

## **Obama Administration**

President Obama included climate change as a prior issue and allocated a budget for renewables at the domestic level. On the advice of EPA, he once again declared GHG as a pollutant and took the initiative to control its emissions. Because of the failure of gaining support from the senate, the cap-and-trade bill was not passed. The Global financial crisis (GFC) caused a high unemployment rate in the US which led to the movement against climate change regulations and energy bills. At the international level, Obama committed to cutting down US emissions to 80 percent by 2050. There was an IPCC report which strictly warned the international community to cut down emissions to 25 to 40 by 2020 or else get ready for the devastating effects of climate change in the near 2050. A congressional bill in 2009, committed to cutting down its emissions by only around 3 to 4 percent. Since the industrial revolution, the US had the largest carbon footprint as it emitted around 30 percent of the whole world's carbon and is the biggest per capita emitter. As compared to China, the US was four to five-time larger. Obama's predecessor rejected the common but differentiated responsibilities, which Obama has accepted rhetorically but in the mitigation process, they adopted those mechanisms which favored their domestic economy rather than the environment. Obama used the rhetoric of climate leadership of the US, but the administration continued not to pursue effective actions on the issue and was involved in the military interventions and continuity through foreign policy. A huge amount of money was spent on the war on terror. (Harris P. G., 2009)

## **Trump Administration**

Donald Trump came to office with a complete and clear anti-environmental agenda and he was the worst denier of climate science and scientific projections regarding it. He generated discourses like ‘climate change is fake’, and ‘prophets of doom’, and made identities of others by using discourses like ‘climate change hoaxsters’ etc. He made major catastrophic changes in environmental regulations within his first 18 months. He appointed the best climate change deniers to the key positions such as he appointed Scot Pruitt as the head of EPA and annulled the climate action plan. The administration allowed fossil fuel combustion such as oil, which is a major source of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and declared that the ‘war on coal is over. They allowed offshore water for the drilling of oil and reduced the standards for automobile fuel efficiency. Soon after joining the office, Trump cut down the budget of EPA by one-third, funding for IPCC, and fund for developing states to meet their green targets. Withdrawal of the Paris agreement made the US, the only state who is against or an enemy of the environmental regime. The two most dangerous hurricanes gave a trillion dollars loss to the American economy and a huge infrastructure loss. But still, the Trump administration removed climate change from national security issues. (Antonella Napolitano, 2019)

## **Climate Discourses under Trump Administration**

The Obama administration generated a flow of information regarding climate projections on official websites like EPA. But in the Trump era, the same platforms were showing a different kind of information with a skeptical view of climate change and global warming. Trump expressed his skeptical concerns about climate change even before getting elected. For instance, he said climate change is a ‘hoax’ in more than 100 posts on Twitter. Scientific knowledge regarding climate projections on the most visited website EPA has been changed, reproduced, and represented in such a way that a new manipulative narrative must be built for justification of actions taken by this government. The public engages with EPA websites to get environmental reports, laws, scientific information, and government strategies to tackle the issue of climate change. At first, very limited reports and data were published on the website regarding climate change. Secondly, in the Trump era, the EPA website does not show climate change on the tabs of main environmental issues. Moreover, in the Obama era, the climate section was showing the internationally reviewed research but under the Trump era, all the important scientific research has been removed. It is a fact, as presented by IPCC and various scientists to achieve sustainable development goals, and to stop climate change, an active level of human participation is required from the private and public levels. But on the new EPA website, it was represented that there is no need for active participation from the public, but it is an issue that must be resolved by governments (Antonella Napolitano, 2019).

Considering the above discussion, it can be concluded that the role of US foreign policy in global environmentalism is very limited and more alarming. The US leadership did not take the issues of the environment as a threat to global security instead, they have protected their economic competitiveness and secured their hegemonic role in the world through making military presence everywhere. The domestic political culture of the US had a tremendous influence on its environmental policy. For instance, the Republican-controlled congress rejected to ratification of many key agreements on the environment such as the Kyoto protocol and Cartagena protocol. In the post-cold war period, the US strategy was to protect its material interest and preserve its hegemonic status through foreign policy practice rather than playing a proactive role in environmentalism. The US spent huge money on interventions such as the war on terror and the Iraq war. While on the other hand, the US rejected the funding and budgets to tackle climate change. Then there is a critical question is rising why does the US consider war a security threat and rejected climate change mitigation and adaptation?

## Constraints of the US Environmental Foreign Policy

The above debate and overview of the historic position of the US on environmental foreign policy depict that the US presidents does not have the ultimate authority to make direct decisions on foreign policy. The state department of the US, EPA, and most importantly, Congress is playing a pertinent role in building the environmental foreign policy of the US. Ratification of any treaty cannot be achieved without the senate. It has the power to accept or reject any legislation bill, tax initiatives, energy policies, and budget spending. The domestic institutions of US politics serve the ideology of economic rationalism rather than climate justice; therefore, it is very difficult that a pro-environmental agenda came out of the US. Secondly, the American culture and values are not favorable to addressing the environmental issue in a way that they are reluctant to change the dominant economic structures they got from the ideology of capitalism. Which are based on the industrial economy which again is a big source of GHG emissions and exploitation of nature. Different interest groups and lobbyists are working in the US to protect the oil and coal industry which contributes billions and billions of dollars to the US economy. These interest groups do not want renewables or any kind of substitutes. These key interests' groups influence the policymaking on international agreements on the environment because they have the largest share in the economy and would stop economic activities if their interests are not served. Finally, US Foreign policy on the environment cannot be isolated from the strategic and economic interests of the state. Nixon has shown a leadership role in the first Earth summit which is deeply connected to the Vietnam war as they must save their face from criticism. President Bush's environmental agenda cannot be separated from the war on terror and the energy strategies of the US because of the high dependency on energy resources. In the Obama era, there was a global financial crisis that influenced his foreign policy on climate change (Harris, 2000).

All the above arguments built a historical background of the reason behind the anti-environmental foreign policymaking. This discussion will now further be elaborated in the following section within the post-cold war context. The end of the cold war was a turning point in global politics and for the world order. Post-cold war global politics changed the environmental regime. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US became the sole superpower and extended its zone of influence in changing geopolitical situations. The US took full advantage of its hegemonic position to shape environmental diplomacy through American exceptionalism. Throughout the history of the environmental regime, the US engaged itself in environmental multilateralism when there are no constraints to its economic and military interests. They ratified those agreements which they suspected a benefit or less threat to their economic superiority such as ozone diplomacy, creation of UNEP, protection of whales, oceans, toxic wastes, etc. But after the cold war when greenhouse gas concentrations grew unprecedentedly and the world needs more concrete and effective steps for mitigation and adaptation, the US opposed the key environmental agreements such as Kyoto and Cartagena. On the other hand, the US was proactively pursuing its foreign policy to make sure its military presence in the Middle East, Africa, Gulf seas, and Asia through intervention in many states by declaring a direct security threat to the American people. US politics considered war as a security threat and legitimized its right to intervene but how they are doing to make it look legal? (paterson, 2009)

In the coming section, the reason will be briefly explained why the US has chosen War as a top security issue and neglected global and transboundary environmental issues. Which have the potential to cause more deaths and more destruction of infrastructure and economies throughout the world. Eventually, it will cost more to rebuild, resettle, and cost millions of lives as compared to the war on terror or other military interventions under the name of promoting peace. Which issue should be considered as a security threat or which issue is a direct threat to the American economy, infrastructure, and people; climate change, or 'the war on terror'?

The reason behind the prioritization of war or considering it as a top security issue with the non-inclusion of climate change in the national security domain will be explained in the light of long-term objectives and strategies of US foreign policy.

### **US Economic Ideology, Hegemony, Oil, and Climate Change**

The US's long-term objectives, goals, and strategies of foreign policy are to create a world order which is favorable to its ideological and economic supremacy. Most importantly to play a world hegemon by promoting its moral, liberal, cultural, and economic values across the globe. Unfortunately, US environmental policy does not serve any part to achieve it. Robert Falkner an associate professor of IR in LSE in his book 'International Environmental Politics' stated that "unlike, trade and monetary policy, environmental policy has never been central to US effort to create international order". After the cold war, the emerging environmental regime became a limit or constraint to the US foreign policy objectives. Moreover, it raises the question that in the post-cold war period why climate change does not become a security threat to the US, and why the US did not go for alternative renewable energy resources? US economic system is based on energy-intensive mechanisms and its economic neoliberal model was a major hurdle for environmental regulations. From the cold war till now, the US foreign policy goal was to create military and economic hegemony, expand capitalism, and economic neoliberalism with the installation of pro-democratic governments, especially in the Middle East and Africa. Unluckily, environmentalism was the least concern of US foreign policy (Falkner, 2008).

At first, addressing the issue of climate change requires the integration of environmental laws and regulations in every sphere of policymaking and decision-making. The US has failed to achieve it because of several reasons which were discussed before. One of the pertinent reasons is the following: the capitalist system is based on the ideology of neoliberalism which advocates the systematic use of resources and energy but conventional energy resources such as oil and coal are increasing the number of greenhouse gases per unit of GDP. The planted ideology of the neo-liberal economy after the second world war and especially in the post-cold war era strongly rejected ecological sustainability and climate justice. The other reason is the privatization of sources of production that entrepreneurs are free to use as many resources as they want. The strong interest groups interfere in environmental policymaking and oppose the alternatives for conventional energy resources. The American lifestyle which is highly dependent on technological production and consumption has never been compromised for the sake of the sustainability of climate.

### **Neo-Liberal International Relations and Ecology**

The global economy's working is based on the liberal international relations which have shaped the material and natural basis of economies. The material conditions which generated the decision-making through institutions about nature largely neglected the structure of human societies and especially the structure provided by the neo-liberal economy such as capitalism. Realists tried to explain this structure concerning state power on a material basis. They have argued that the state has every right to exploit nature if the resources backing the state's military strengths and soft power. Liberal thinkers and theorists explained that there is a material interdependence among states and viewed the relationship only through an economic lens in which natural resources are declared abundant. Constructivists and poststructuralists took the discourses and ideas in manufacturing the state's interests and took discourses in constructing reality. For instance, it is through the discourses that 'materialism' penetrated international politics and the global economy which led to the exploitation of nature at an unprecedented level. Many scholars believe that it was the discourses of liberalism that resulted in the exploitation of natural resources and nature. Similarly, the discourses would lead to adopting policies and practices with a change in material conditions which would cause the management of nature in a more appropriate way or in a way that is not harmful to human lives. (ovadio, 2016)

## Oil and Blood

Secondly, at the domestic level, the US has coal reserves in twenty-six states. Fifty-six senators came from those states who are responsible for the employment and good lifestyle of their people. Therefore, they directly influence energy policies. The US economy runs on industrialization and a major part of its dollars are coming from the military-industrial complex. The foreign policy goal of the US was to get cheaper fossil fuels as they are the input for such an economy and MIC. Hence, they must sustain or build the military hegemony in the potential regions (Harris P. G., 2001). On the foreign policy front, the objectives of the US were to get access to the cheaper oil fields because oil is the major source of growth for the American economy and hegemony. Oil is the basic source of the US military apparatus and during the cold war, oil was a major strategic resource for the success of the containment policy against the Soviets. Robert Keohane stated that “In a material sense, oil was at the center of the redistributive system of the American hegemony”. This all makes sense for the presence of American troops and military interventions in the Middle East during the cold war and post-cold war periods. American’s offered strategic support to Saudi Arabia in exchange for access to the oil reserves of Saudi. The oil industry of the US has been integrated or become a strong component of the US hegemonic role in the Middle East (Bromley, 1991). Oil serves the US Petro-military industrial complex which generates wars and sells weapons to the states who are fighting the war. The market is being through because most of the efficient weaponry is coming out of the US. Through war interventions, the US intended to change the regimes which they declared ‘evil or ‘rouge’ or threat to the democratic world. The authoritarian regimes or any other form of government except the pro-democratic government cannot serve its neoliberal economic agenda. Eventually, creating a democratic world community is preserving moral and economic superiority. Similarly, military interventions like the Iraq war were not justified based on the removal of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) but the purpose was to get access to the oil field Of Iraq. In the post 9/11 scenario, the emerging threat perception of terrorists has extended the role of the US in eliminating terrorism, establishing a pro-democratic regime, and the spread of capitalism. Along with the oil opportunity in the Middle East once again. President Bush’s junior’ administration gave the reason for American intervention in Iraq that, the US was going for the removal of the ‘evil’ Saddam regime, and terrorists possessed the weapons of mass destruction which is a direct threat to the US. So, there is an immediate need to eliminate the threat of the invasion of Iraq. The invasion also puts Americans in the restructuring of Iraq’s oil industry which had been nationalized because of the OPEC oil crisis. Restructuring of Iraq’s oil industry gave access to US-based multinational corporations in the field. (Bromley, 1991)

## Conclusion

If there is something to be learned from the US environmental foreign policy and its history of foreign interventions then it is that US domestic political culture, its values, norms, and neo-liberal ideology as the spread of capitalism are the considerable elements in the understanding of foreign policy behaviors. The US foreign policy practice protected its hegemony, economic ideology, and petroleum dependency while negating environmentalism and substitutes for conventional energy generations. Notwithstanding, these continuities and changes in the US foreign policy make such an analysis: US foreign policy objectives are committed to the expansion of economic neo-liberalism. The US uses oil to sustain its economic competitiveness and the military-industrial complex. To fulfill such a foreign policy goal, the US took War as a top security issue with the help of the construction of favorable discourses. The US has used oil as a strategic commodity to sustain its hegemonic role in the world (klare, 2004). The US role in environmental multilateralism cannot be analyzed without considering the role of the domestic legislative body such as congress and domestic economic policies. The other finding is that in the post-cold war period, the environmental threats remained a constraint on the US grand strategy. Furthermore, the US should move toward renewable sources for the energy generations and leave behind its ‘carboniferous’ economy.

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