

New winners, new losers?

As we push for the huge transitions that climate change requires, we must ensure that arguments of solidarity and cooperation prevail over those of self-interest and competition

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It took eight years for the Kyoto Protocol to enter into force in 2005. The exclusion of major developing countries from binding emissions targets, followed by the US refusal to ratify it and later Canada's withdrawal, led many to doubt the efficacy of international climate treaties.

Fast forward a decade and the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change seems to be gaining momentum. In this publication last year, we made the case that while the Agreement is far from perfect, lacking (for now at least) the ambition and robustness that we urgently need, it is nonetheless a crucial milestone, cementing the global consensus on climate change and committing – for the first time – all countries to action.

The Agreement took less than a year to enter into force. At the time of writing, it had 197 parties: every UN member state except Syria and Nicaragua, plus Palestine, Niue and the Cook Islands, as well as the European Union. 160 of them had ratified it, representing well over 80 per cent of the world's emissions. Over 150 have submitted national climate plans. There has also been movement on strengthening monitoring and transparency, with the first global stocktake due next year, alongside the adoption of a 'rulebook'.

Increased resolve

Perhaps most encouragingly, despite or – as some of our contributors argue – because

of President Trump's decision to withdraw from it, the Agreement continues to be central to the climate conversation. Indeed, it appears to have increased resolve. China and India were among the countries to re-state their commitment to Paris in response. On the basis of the myriad actions announced by American states, cities, businesses, investors, tech firms and communities, the United States may even be on course to exceed the targets envisaged by Mr Trump's predecessor, a key actor in securing the Agreement.

Critics of Mr Trump's decision have – rightly – pointed out that shying away from climate action will harm the US economy and damage the country's reputation and influence. Many have argued that by choosing to marginalise its role in the defining issue of our time, the US is hastening the end of the American century. UNA-UK too commented at the time that in diplomatic terms the US will be a smaller country, and China a larger one as a consequence of the withdrawal.

As many of our contributors note, climate action is accentuating and accelerating the shift in global power relations as the centre of gravity continues to move eastwards, southwards and downwards. Eastwards towards China, India and a slew of middle-income states that are finding newer, greener ways to pursue development. Southwards towards Africa where countries such as Ethiopia, Ghana and Morocco are finding ways to leapfrog the carbon-dependent West and move straight to a post-carbon society.



Downwards as the power of civil society, the power of the private sector, and the power of individuals grows, to the point where government is no longer leading the fight to prevent climate change, but playing catch-up to non-state actors who have more rapidly embraced the cultural and business opportunities presented by the transition to a zero-carbon economy.

Solidarity and cooperation

Cause then, for optimism, but also for realism and caution. Realism because last



◀ Using a makeshift raft to get to safety in Kurigram District, Bangladesh. Exceptionally heavy monsoon rains in the country have caused extensive flooding, affecting an estimated 3.9 million people

well humanity will adapt to a two-degree warmer world. And caution because our response risks dividing the world into climate ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. Our prevailing global system has left too many behind – and it is they who are already disproportionately affected by climate change.

Now we risk creating more categories of climate losers in our drive to increase ambition. By dialling up the self-interest argument for climate action – increased influence, economic gain and the competitive edge for countries, companies and communities – we may end up undermining what is most needed right now: solidarity and cooperation.

This means recognising the continued importance of the US and EU – key emitters, historically and going forward, and key actors in terms of innovation and finance – while embracing the need for a new, more equitable global system that sees African, Asian and Latin American countries in leading roles. It means recognising the continued utility of state-based action and agreements, even as a plethora of other actors become the lead implementers.

Perhaps most important – and challenging – will be recognising the need for solidarity in protecting the most vulnerable countries and people from the fall-out from climate change, especially more, and more intensive, conflicts, humanitarian disasters and refugee flows.

Which parts of the world are habitable and prosperous will change dramatically over the next decades. Ensuring the safe and orderly movement of many millions while maintaining their dignity and harnessing the opportunities that their arrival will bring will require the adoption of more modern and fluid definitions of identity and nationality. It will also require investment now – political and financial – in our international system.

If we don’t, we will all be losers. That is UNA-UK’s constant refrain to its partners in the UK and beyond. ●

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year, data from NASA and several climate institutions showed that the target of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C is probably no longer achievable. We also stayed above the symbolic red line of 400ppm CO₂ for the entire duration of

2016, and will likely stay above it for, at very least, the lifetimes of our readers. This puts us past the point of no return. It remains to be seen whether prompt action can limit the increase in global averages to within two degrees, and how

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