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## **From Rio to Paris: India in Global Climate Politics**

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# From Rio to Paris: India in Global Climate Politics

## ABSTRACT

This paper analyses India's participation in more than two decades of global climate politics. India has transitioned from a protest voice on the fringes of global climate policy to one that is actively shaping international efforts to combat climate change. Analysis of the drivers behind India's negotiating positions on climate change thus far has focused on the competing motives of equity and co-benefits, which has however been insufficient to explain some of India's recent actions in global climate governance. There is a gap in the literature with regards to the analysis of Indian climate policy as situated in its larger foreign policy agenda and objectives. This paper studies the evolution of India's climate policy through the perspective of its broader foreign policy strategy, arguing that India's engagement with international climate politics can be better understood by locating its climate policy as a subset of its foreign policy agenda. Shifts in India's climate change negotiation stance in the past decade have been but a part of its overall foreign policy adjustments in favour of greater responsibility in management of the global commons. Going forward, tracking Indian foreign policy objectives will yield vital clues towards India's role in global climate action.

## INTRODUCTION

The first global conference on the environment was held in Stockholm in 1972, which kickstarted a series of negotiations and discussions over international environmental agreements. Twenty years later, at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, countries got together to agree on the United Nations Framework Conventions on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Summit also led to the creation of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. These agreements form the basis of current international cooperation on environmental issues. Earlier, in 1989, the Montreal Protocol also entered into force which has led to a phasing out of substances that deplete the Ozone layer.

This paper will analyse India's role in global environmental governance through analysis of its participation in more than two decades of global climate politics. Climate policy has become the locus of current global environmental governance efforts. The issue of climate change continues to be politically charged compared to other environmental challenges and most environmental challenges including loss of biodiversity and desertification, are linked to the problem of climate change. India has transitioned from a protest voice on the fringes of global environmental policy to one that is actively shaping global environmental efforts (Michaelowa & Michaelowa 2012). While there is significant analysis of the climate narratives in India and India's shifts in negotiating position, there is little analysis of the motives behind this shift. India's role in the successful negotiations for the Paris Agreement was praised by other countries but criticised and questioned in India, as it ran contrary to the founding intellectual beliefs of Indian climate policy.

The paper is structured as follows: first, it traces the history of India's participation in global climate politics from the establishment of the UNFCCC in Rio, 1992 to Conference of Parties (COP) 21 in Paris, 2015, noting the main narratives that have driven Indian climate policy and the shifts in India's negotiating position along the years. It then analyses the evolution of Indian climate policy through the perspective of its overarching foreign policy approach and objectives. Through the lens of India's transformations in foreign policy, the paper examines the motives behind India's shifts in climate negotiations and its successful leadership towards the Paris Agreement. A short discussion of the main constellation of actors involved in shaping both Indian foreign policy and climate policy lends further credence to the arguments developed in the paper. Finally, the article ends with some implications of the paper's conclusions, for global environmental governance going forward.

## **HISTORY OF INDIAN CLIMATE POLICY**

### **Road to Rio & the Kyoto Protocol**

At the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's speech initiated an intellectual tradition in Indian climate policy that pits socio-economic development against environmental protection and accuses the developed countries of the North for causing global environmental problems (Vihma 2011). In the build up to the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the ideological foundations of India's climate policy were further laid down in an influential report by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), called 'Global Warming in an Unequal World', which accused developed countries of "carbon colonialism" (Agarwal & Narain 1991). The report argued that developed countries bear the bulk

of the responsibility for climate change given their historical emissions and that per capita allocation of emissions should be the metric for dividing responsibility for climate mitigation (Agarwal & Narain 1991).

It is important at this point to provide some numbers which set India's position in appropriate scientific context. If climate change is considered a problem of stock of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, i.e. the total emissions built up over time which has a finite ceiling to limit temperature rise, then India bears little responsibility. A study of GHG emissions from 1850 to 2012 concluded that cumulative emissions in that period from the USA, European Union (EU) and China will contribute to 50 percent of the temperature increase by 2100 with emissions from the US, EU, and China being 20 percent, 17 percent, and 12 percent respectively (Rocha et al. 2015). India's emissions in that same period contribute to just 5 percent (Rocha et al. 2015). In the UNFCCC, these differences in historical responsibility for causing the problem were acknowledged through the phrase 'Common But Differentiated Responsibilities' (CBDR) in Article 3 of the Convention (UNFCCC 1992).

India also continues to remain a poor country by global standards with a third of the population below the poverty line. GDP per capita in India in 2015 was roughly 1,600 USD per annum compared to 56,000 USD in the United States (World Bank 2016). Even China at 8,000 USD holds little relevance currently in comparisons with India (World Bank 2016). Furthermore, India's per capita emissions are low at around a third of the global average, and average Indian electricity consumption per capita is roughly a quarter of the global average and stood at just 10 percent of that of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in 2014 (World Resources Institute 2014; World Bank 2015). The difference in capabilities to address

climate change owing to the differences in material wealth between developed and developing countries was also noted in the UNFCCC in 1992, through the phrase Respective Capabilities (RC) in Article 3 (UNFCCC 1992).

On the other hand, if climate change is viewed through a different temporal lens and analysed as a problem of *current and future* GHG flows, India is the world's third largest emitter with rising emissions and therefore matters significantly to climate action. This duality in India's position – being simultaneously a large emitter currently but not bearing great historical responsibility for climate change, a problem to which it is highly vulnerable, means that India occupies a unique role in global climate politics (Dubash 2016).

The historical responsibility of the North and per capita rights to the global carbon budget were quickly adopted by India's climate negotiators as the bedrock of India's position in the first climate change negotiations (Dubash 2013 b). In the early years of Indian climate policy starting with the UNFCCC in 1992, India identified itself with the Group of 77 (G77), i.e. developing nations who urged developed countries to take action on climate change while arguing that developing nations might only take on voluntary commitments conditional on receipt of finance and technology transfers from industrialised nations (Dasgupta 2012). The principles of equity being reflected in the UNFCCC at Rio in 1992 through the phrases CBDR and RC were therefore important victories for developing nations (Hurrell & Sengupta 2012) and Indian negotiators claim significant influence over this intervention (Jakobsen 1999).

Following on from Rio, India continued to play an active role in global climate negotiations and its efforts were seen as crucial to securing the



Berlin mandate in 1995 which would guide two years of negotiating processes for the legal instrument focused on mitigation actions by developed countries. The negotiations eventually resulted in the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, which required Annex I parties of the UNFCCC, i.e. developed countries, to commit themselves to “quantified emission limitation and reduction objectives” while developing nations such as India were exempted from legally binding commitments (UNFCCC 1997). For India and other G77 nations, the Kyoto Protocol emphasised the continued relevance of the firewall differentiation between developed and developing nations with respect to the burden of responsibility for climate action. India was able to successfully protect its space for socio-economic development while simultaneously pushing for developed countries to take on more responsibilities (Hurrell & Sengupta 2012). This intellectual tradition, that prioritised economic development to eradicate poverty as most important for India and resisted the call to arms for climate action, all while calling upon principles of equity to push for stronger action by Annex I countries, has remained steady over the years and is the principal reason why India has acquired a reputation of being a difficult partner in climate negotiations (Vihma 2011).

### **Rise of BASIC and the Copenhagen Accord**

The first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol was to run from 2008-2012 and as such, negotiations during 2007-2009 focused on the agreement of a post-2012 climate governance regime. During this time, strong economic growth in the early years of the new millennium for developing countries such as China, India, Brazil and South Africa (together referred to as BASIC) had led to an increasing expectation on these countries to take the lead in influencing the outcomes of global governance (Hallding et al. 2013). These countries began to be termed

'emerging economies' and distinguished as different from the G77<sup>2</sup> bloc on the basis of their economic power and carbon footprint. Developed countries also began initiating dialogues with the emerging economies outside the UNFCCC process such as the G8+5 Dialogue on Climate and Energy in 2008 and the US-led Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate in 2009. The view that emerging economies should contribute to mitigation action began to hold sway (Hallding et al. 2013) and it was argued that Kyoto exemptions for developing countries should not apply to advanced developing countries such as India (Stern & Antholis 2008). Given the pressure to take on climate commitments as a result of their economic development, the BASIC countries began to pursue negotiating strategies independent of the G77 (Kasa et al. 2008) and more closely coordinate their climate policies with each other (Vihma et al. 2011).

In the lead-up to the COP 15 summit at Copenhagen in 2009, there were notable shifts in India's climate policy along with other emerging powers (Atteridge et al. 2012). At COP 13 in Bali in 2007, India surprisingly accepted that developing countries should participate in the global mitigation effort, at least on a voluntary basis in line with their capabilities (Michaelowa & Michaelowa 2012). On a domestic level, India also released its National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) in 2008. Moreover, ahead of the Copenhagen summit in late 2009, India along with other BASIC countries announced voluntary targets to reduce the emissions intensity of its GDP by 20-25 percent against 2005 levels by 2020 and never exceed the per capita emissions of Annex I countries. It is important to note that at the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, India had explicitly refused any notion of voluntary commitments (Hurrell & Sengupta 2012).

The Indian Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Jairam Ramesh, also publically articulated his position ahead of the

Copenhagen summit as 'per capita plus' and signalled his intention to change the 'narrative of India in climate change negotiations', arguing that India wanted to achieve a meaningful agreement in Copenhagen even if it meant compromising on some aspects of its traditional position (Vihma 2011).

The shifts in Indian climate policy were not frictionless. Senior members of India's negotiating team publically fell out with the Minister over what they perceived to be inexplicable concessions undoing years of careful Indian negotiating strategy (Vihma 2011; Thaker & Leserowitz 2014). Ramesh was also heavily criticised in domestic debates by the leading opposition party for his relaxation of India's conservative role in climate change negotiations and was forced to insist that the Copenhagen Accord did not compromise India's sovereignty (Parsai 2009).

In the end, the COP summit at Copenhagen was a failure in terms of agreeing upon a new climate agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol. The Copenhagen accord that was salvaged from the summit initiated the process of inverting the climate governance architecture from a top-down differentiated approach to that of bottom-up commitments with pledge and review (Hurrell & Sengupta 2012).

### **More Seismic Shifts**

If the shifts in India's engagement with global climate politics ahead of and during Copenhagen were surprising to old stalwarts of India's negotiating team, they were in for further rude shocks in 2010 at COP 16 in Cancún. Minister Ramesh broke with India's long established strategy by announcing that all countries ought to take on legally binding commitments under an appropriate legal form (Lahiri 2010).

While this left room for differentiation in commitments between countries and was therefore arguably a shift 'more in strategy than substance' (Michaelowa & Michaelowa 2012), it nevertheless caused furore in India given its contradiction with decades of intellectual tradition. Opposition parties in India accused Ramesh of selling out the country and compromising on India's sovereignty (Lahiri 2010). Chandrashekhara Dasgupta, a lead negotiator for India at the UNFCCC for several years, criticised Ramesh's decisions in Cancún in an editorial and called it 'mystifying' (Dasgupta 2011). Note that Dasgupta and two other senior members of India's negotiating team had been dropped from the delegation for a certain period in 2010 due to their differences with Minister Ramesh a year earlier at Copenhagen (Sethi 2010).

At Cancún, India also played a leading role in negotiating compromises on the issue of transparency, gaining widespread recognition and receiving personal thanks from the COP President during the closing plenary (Vihma 2011). This was another marker of the new-found flexibility in India's engagement as in previous years issues of transparency were a red line with Indian negotiators, who were reticent to discuss any measures that could impinge on the country's sovereignty.

### **Plus Ça Change...**

The following year, at COP 17 in Durban in 2011, India's delegation was led by a new Environment Minister for India, Jayanthi Natarajan, who quickly attempted to reverse the shifts in India's climate policy and fall back on traditional arguments (Michaelowa & Michaelowa 2012; Thaker & Leiserowitz 2014). In fact, in some quarters India was portrayed as a 'deal breaker' in Durban for refusing to sign a new legally binding framework including both developed and developing countries

(Thaker & Leiserowitz 2014). The push back may have helped stem the tide vis. a vis. India's rising ambitious engagement with the global climate regime but did little to change the course of broader developments in the negotiations (Michaelowa & Michaelowa 2012). At Durban, countries agreed to terminate the Bali Action Plan and replace it with a new process called the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action, which further unravelled the rapidly disintegrating firewall between North and South for climate action. Unlike the Copenhagen Accord and the Cancún Agreements which reemphasised the importance of equity and CBDR, the Durban Platform made no such reference to these founding principles, and instead called for negotiations towards a new global agreement applicable to all to be agreed upon by 2015, signalling a significant shift in global climate politics (Hurrell & Sengupta 2012). As an advisor to the US Chief Negotiator remarked, "There is no mention of historic responsibility or per capita emissions. There is no mention of economic development as the priority for developing countries. There is no mention of a difference between developed and developing country action (Broder 2012)." Therefore, despite Natarajan attempts to lock down the stables, the horse had evidently bolted and the process to invert the top down differentiated regime that started in Copenhagen had gained irreversible momentum.

## **COP 21 and the Paris Agreement**

The negotiating track that began in Durban in 2011 decisively marked a shift towards a bottom up architecture for climate governance wherein all countries would make pledges for climate action under a system of peer review. At COP 19 in Warsaw in 2013, the idea of Nationally Determined Commitments was first mooted and eventually led to the final version of Intended Nationally Determined Contributions

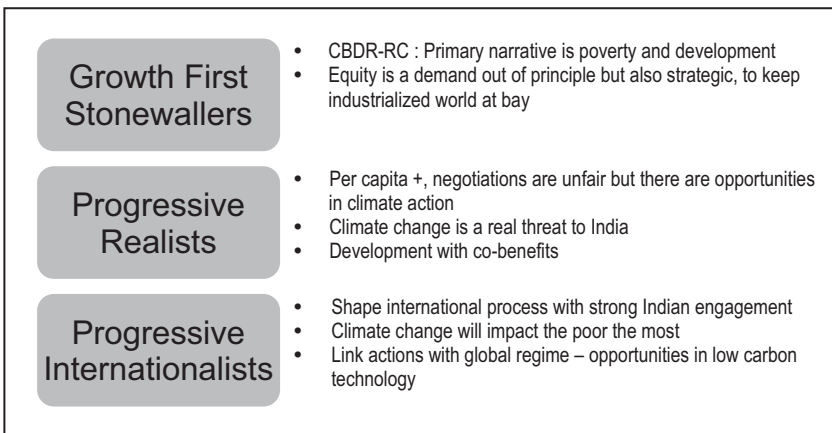
(INDCs) which was adopted by countries in 2014 at COP 20 in Lima. Prior to COP 21 in Paris, all countries were asked to submit INDCs outlining their plans for climate action up to 2030.

In its NDC submitted in October 2015, India committed to installing clean energy capacity equivalent to 40 percent of the total installed electrical capacity in the country by 2030, pledged to reduce the carbon intensity of its economy by 33-35 percent by 2030 compared to 2005 levels, and announced a goal to install carbon sinks worth an additional 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of Carbon Dioxide equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030 (Government of India 2015). In its own words, the Indian Government called its NDC 'fair and ambitious' even though India's contribution to climate change is 'limited' (Government of India 2015). At the Paris negotiations itself, India surprisingly accepted the 1.5 degrees goal for climate policy given that it could potentially be used to close the gates on carbon emissions from late industrialising nations such as itself, in the absence of more stringent emission reductions from developed countries (Dubash 2016). India also launched the global solar Alliance on the side lines of COP 21 and is aggressively pushing for expansion of its renewable energy program. Prime Minister Modi has announced a domestic goal of 175 GW renewable energy by 2022 in 2014, which if achieved would further demonstrate India's leadership in global climate action (Climate Action Tracker 2017; Allianz Climate Solutions et al. 2017). India also quickly ratified the Paris Agreement to help bring it into force, despite concerns that it would insist on developed countries first fulfilling their pre 2020 commitments under the second phase of the Kyoto Protocol. As a result of these actions, India's 'leadership' in global climate policy was praised by several commentators during the COP 21 negotiations (PTI 2016) and after its early ratification (Anon 2016).

## Indian climate policy narratives

Overall, viewed from the perspective of a longer timeline, the Paris Agreement marked the end of a move towards a bottom-up, self-differentiated global climate regime which began in Copenhagen in 2009 and reversed the top-down, differentiated model of the Kyoto Protocol. India was an active participant in this process and while there are debates over the magnitude of shift in Indian climate policy, the early narratives of Indian climate policy, which framed economic development as a competing interest with environmental protection, are no longer the dominant paradigm (Stevenson 2011).

Dubash (2009) has characterised the narratives of Indian climate policy as a tussle between Growth First Stonewallers; Progressive Realists; and Progressive Internationalists. The three categories and their respective worldviews are shown in Figure 1:



**Figure 1: Narratives of Indian Climate Policy (Dubash 2009)**

Intuitively, it is evident that Indian climate policy in the 1990s most strongly characterised the narrative of the Growth First Stonewallers

who wanted to protect India's right to socio-economic development and were deeply suspicious of western efforts to involve India in taking on climate commitments (Dubash 2009). Similarly, events at Copenhagen in 2009 and the Paris Agreement in 2015 roughly correspond to the pre-eminence of the narratives of the Progressive Realists and Progressive internationalists respectively.

India's departure from arguing for strict differentiation between developed and developing countries in the 1990s to leading the negotiations towards a loosely differentiated regime poses questions over what motivated this change. Why did the narrative of Indian climate policy change in favour of greater salience of the viewpoints of Progressive Internationalists? What accounts for the shifts in India's climate negotiating stance, first before Copenhagen and then in the lead up to the Paris Agreement? What were the reasons for the particular timing of the shifts in policy? The characterisation of the dominant narratives of Indian climate policy tell us little about why the emphasis has shifted from one to another at different points in time.

## **LINKS BETWEEN INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND CLIMATE POLICY**

### **Non-alignment and strategic autonomy**

Understanding the shifts and pivots in India's climate policy may be better served by examining its actions and engagement in global climate politics through the lens of its larger foreign policy agenda. During much of the Cold War, Indian foreign policy emphasised strongly on principles of national sovereignty and non-alignment with either of the two major powers, sought autonomy through non-interference of foreign powers in India's domestic affairs, and strove for



solidarity among fellow developing countries (Ollapally & Rajagopal 2011). India was one of the early leaders of the global non-aligned movement (NAM) - a group of states not formally aligned with either power bloc during the Cold War. The quest for autonomy and independence of choice and action above all formed the dominant worldview of early Indian foreign policy (Narang & Staniland 2012), perhaps motivated by the history of colonial subjugation (Ganguly & Pardesi 2009). Indira Gandhi, who was the Indian Prime Minister for much of the Cold War period (1965-77, 1980-84) consistently stressed the importance of independence in foreign policy and viewed strength in terms of independence (Narang & Staniland 2012). Indira Gandhi's view of global politics was that "the principles of non-interference by one State in the internal affairs of another, of scrupulous respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political integrity of all States are essential to the principle of political co-existence" (Gandhi 1975).

The prioritisation of non-alignment in India's relations with major powers, emphasis on self reliance in national security through pursuit of nuclear weapons, and blocking of any moves towards internationally supervised climate mitigation, can therefore all be imputed to the omnipresent strategic culture that set out to protect sovereignty and independence while criticising inequity in global regimes. As Rajan (1997) notes, India's approach in climate negotiations in the early 1990s 'reflected more vaguely the traditional developing country concerns about sovereignty, equity, and the importance of economic development.' Scholars have argued that initial Indian government positions on climate change served to protect India's sovereignty but also possible economic development pathways (Thaker & Leiserowitz 2014; Sengupta 2012; Atteridge et al. 2012). The desire for autonomy of choice is reflected in other foreign policy themes - on the question of nuclear weapons for instance it has been argued that India's emphasis

on universality in regimes served to protect its own options (Mohan 2010). Accordingly, the dominant narrative of India's ideological commitment to equity in early climate negotiations obscures other important motivations of Indian policymakers, which were to ensure sovereignty and strategic autonomy, in line with larger foreign policy goals. The implications of taking on carbon reduction commitments above all meant a compromise over its ability to choose, and secondly, a requirement to be under foreign oversight - both vehemently unacceptable to Indian policy elite at the time.

### **Shifts towards pragmatism in foreign policy**

Following on from the liberalisation of India's economy in 1991 after a balance of payments crisis and the end of the Cold War, Indian foreign policy began to slowly break loose from the ideological shackles of non-alignment and uncompromising strategic autonomy. Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao sought to chart a new course for Indian foreign policy (Ganguly & Pardesi 2009). The ideological shift in India's foreign policy away from strict Nehruvian non-alignment towards pragmatism, i.e. 'an unabashed consideration of the Indian national interest rather than global justice or ethics' (Ollapally & Rajagopal 2011) was animated by the reality of a unipolar world and growing economic and social relations between India and the US (Chiriyankandath 2004). As former Indian Prime Minister I.K. Gujral stated, "It is a mantra that we have to keep repeating, but who are you going to be nonaligned against?" (As quoted in Ganguly & Pardesi 2009). Certain Indian strategists also felt that India's stance in world affairs had thus far led to a series of strategic missteps and yielded little in terms of material gain (Ollapally & Rajagopal 2011). Pragmatists in Indian foreign policy therefore began to call for considerations of national interest to hold primacy in assessment of foreign policy strategy rather than sovereignty and

questions of equity and justice in global affairs (Ollapally & Rajagopal 2011).

The shift towards more realistic assessments of benefits and trade-offs was soon reflected in Indian climate policy. In 2002, India reversed its long standing scepticism of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the Kyoto Protocol and Indian entrepreneurs began to engage with the mechanism to gain funding for projects in India. To date, India has hosted the second largest number of projects under the CDM. While some analysts saw the reversal on CDM as a product of heavy lobbying by Indian businesses which changed government minds on the issue (Thaker & Leiserowitz 2014), the neoliberal shift towards engaging with global economic arrangements and securing material heft was clearly a process that had been long underway both in the wider economic and foreign policy sphere. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, economic growth rapidly picked up in India and other emerging economies such as South Africa, Brazil, Russia and China. The term 'BRICS' was coined in 2001 in a Goldman Sachs report referring to these economies and their growing political and economic clout (O'Neill 2001). India's economic transformation was mirrored by a general transition from acting like a 'porcupine' to acting like a 'tiger' in international relations (Mohan 2003) This meant that although India would continue to not give in easily or be docile, it would be flexible, confident, and looking to benefit from any opportunities in its interactions, rather than sticking to entrenched positions.

## **Explaining the lead-up to Copenhagen**

India's shifts in its climate negotiation position in the period up to Copenhagen in 2009 have been highlighted earlier and according to a former lead negotiator for India at the UNFCCC, represent the major

shift in its climate policy to date (Author interview with former Indian Lead Negotiator, Email, 12th May 2017). Much of the responsibility for the adjustments in India's climate policy and the softening of its defensive posture in climate negotiations has been attributed to the strong personality and worldview of the Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh (Michaelowa & Michaelowa 2012; Vihma 2011; Dubash 2013b), who held the post between 2009 - 2011 before his promotion to Cabinet Minister. However, while the influence of a strong personality such as Minister Ramesh was certainly a factor, it does not account for the full range of shifts in India's climate policy, both before and after Copenhagen. For instance, it's been argued that a general trend toward a more dynamic posture in India's climate negotiating strategy started in Bali in 2007 before Ramesh took office (Mathur & Varughese 2009; Michaelowa & Michaelowa 2012). Furthermore, India's flexibility in climate negotiations has continued after Ramesh left office, and even following a change in government in 2014, as evidenced by the praise for India subsequent to the Paris Agreement.

Some commentators have indicated that the widening of domestic debates in India on climate change has impacted its international negotiating position. For instance, Dubash (2013b) argues that while Indian climate policy has been consistently framed through the question of equity, domestic concerns over energy security and co-benefits of climate action have led India to engage more strongly with possibilities for climate mitigation. The NAPCC is seen as the cornerstone of these efforts (Dubash 2013b). Similarly, Thaker and Leiserowitz (2014) see the primary shift in the climate discourse in India as a result of a growing recognition of the co-benefits approach where policies to address climate change are mainstreamed into domestic priorities of poverty alleviation and economic growth, a process that gained momentum with Indian engagement with the

CDM. The logic of co-benefits and mainstreaming of climate action in domestic development plans and policies however have modest explanative value since they do little to explain the timing of India's shift in its negotiating stance. And as Hurrell and Sengupta (2012) have noted, the domestic debate was more of a consequence of the decisions taken independently by key policymakers pre-Copenhagen, rather than its cause.

Vihma (2011) has argued that the pressures of international climate negotiations may have affected Indian policy in fundamental ways between 2007 to 2009, causing its actions to change even if the rhetoric continued to be largely stable. However, while international pressure on India to take action on climate change grew in the early 2000s as a result of a significant upside in its carbon emissions since the early 1990s, it nevertheless retained excellent grounds for it to continue with its traditional negotiating position. Developed countries had to a large extent failed to meet their commitments under the first period of the Kyoto Protocol, and therefore had little moral high ground to pressure India. And despite strong economic growth, in per capita terms India still had at least as much in common economically with fellow G77 members such as the Least Developed Countries as with Brazil, South Africa or China (Hurrell & Sengupta 2012). As climate policy experts in India were to later observe, the shift in Copenhagen to the format of 'pledge and review' was an effective dismantling of the top down regime and a reopening of the basic issues that were thought to be resolved at the creation of the UNFCCC in 1992 (Dasgupta 2012). In fact, analysed through the prism of climate negotiations, India had much to lose and little to gain from a dilution of responsibility for climate action between developing and developing nations that was the bedrock of the Kyoto Protocol (Raghuandan 2012). Powerful voices in the Indian climate negotiating team clearly believed this and desired a continuation of the

tried and tested intellectual logic, given their public fall out with Minister Ramesh over his interventions at the time.

Seen through the prism of its broader foreign policy motivations at the time however, India's flexibility and concessions pre Copenhagen are more readily explained and in line with its other international actions. There are three ways in particular through which big picture Indian foreign policy objectives affected India's negotiating position before the Copenhagen summit. Firstly, the rapid economic growth posted by BRICS countries between 2002-2007 and subsequent strong performance both during and subsequent to the crisis by China and India strengthened their claims as international heavyweights (Kahler 2012). Global governance began to be characterised by a shift from unipolar US hegemony to one of 'emancipatory multipolarity', wherein the world's most populous countries now had a position at the head table of global affairs (Gray & Murphy 2013). With the clamour for greater power in global governance came the onus of responsibility for emerging powers such as India to contribute to solving global challenges (Rastogi 2011). In the aftermath of the financial crisis for instance, India's contribution to stabilising the global economy was seen as critical (Rastogi 2011). Then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh also alluded to the importance of taking on responsibilities a few months before Copenhagen, stating that India "should play a role in the international arena in a manner that makes a positive contribution in finding solutions to major global challenges, whether in the field of trade or climate change" (Anon 2009). India's flexibility at Copenhagen ensured that the perception of India being a responsible partner was successful. While much of the blame for the lack of an agreement was placed on emerging economies, especially China, India was seen in a more favourable light in some quarters given the flexibility it showed in its negotiating strategy (Michaelowa & Michaelowa 2012). In some

quarters it was even praised as a 'deal maker' for its efforts towards the Copenhagen Accord and help in finding middle ground between China and the United States (Rastogi 2011). Most pertinently, India's diplomatic interests were served well by the perception that it was 'part of the solution' at Copenhagen (Mukherjee & Malone 2011; Sengupta 2012).

More broadly, Copenhagen reflected the limited appetite of the largest emerging economies to undertake significant revisionism of the status quo in global governance regimes (Kahler 2012). Instead, for India at least, the motivation at Copenhagen seemed to be to minimise damage to its broader foreign policy ambitions. These ambitions included primarily a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) which it had been coveting since the early 2000s. India was counting on support from the G77 developing nations for its Security Council claims. Defending his decisions in Parliament, Jairam Ramesh had himself pointed to the criticism from climate vulnerable G77 countries such as Maldives and Bangladesh of India's intransigence in climate talks, as pertinent to his calculations in Copenhagen, as he worried about the dents to India's reputation among fellow G77 members if it failed to take on some level of climate commitments (Vihma 2011). Domestically, India's actions at Copenhagen were therefore analysed in the light of its quest to gain permanent UNSC membership (Gupta et al. 2015).

The third and final way in which broader Indian foreign policy initiatives brought to bear its pressure on India's climate change negotiating stance at the time was its blossoming strategic partnership with the US. Note that in 2008, India with strong support from the US following the Indo-US civilian nuclear deal in 2005, had successfully negotiated a Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) waiver to engage in global

nuclear commerce despite being a nuclear weapons state that had not signed the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Some accordingly felt that India's concessions in the negotiations leading up to the Copenhagen summit were a reflection of the increasingly close Indo-US bilateral ties (Raghuandan 2012; Dubash 2013b).

Incidentally, in signing the waiver and accepting help from the US to gain an exemption from the NSG, India had opened itself to working with the non-proliferation regime even though it considered the NPT unacceptable (Ollapally & Rajagopal 2011). In other words, with growing appreciation of the value of pragmatism in Indian foreign policy circles, India became compelled to shed some of its 'past baggage about equity and justice' in global regimes (Mohan 2010). Furthermore, as a result of US pressure, India went against the rest of the NAM nations and voted for sanctions against Iran for its nuclear program in 2006 (Chenoy & Chenoy 2007), helping implement the rules against some of its 'fellow Third World travellers' (Mohan 2010). The locus of objectives of Indian foreign policy had therefore decisively moved from pure strategic autonomy to pursuit of arrangements that yielded material heft.

These strategic recalculations were far from smooth, as described previously. The shift was accompanied by stringent criticism by certain domestic actors who felt that India was compromising on its independence in international affairs (Atteridge et al. 2012). Interestingly, this had been the same line of argument used to attack the Indo-US nuclear deal. The Communist Party of India (CPI) which was part of the coalition government at the time, had criticised the deal as impinging on India's sovereignty (Zaheer 2007).

The tension between the old focus on strategic autonomy and new



directions in foreign policy towards pragmatism was also evident in Durban at COP 17. As discussed previously, India tried to reverse some of its concessions but with little success due to global negotiations now reconfigured in a new paradigm. This cognitive dissonance within the Indian climate policy establishment led to India being isolated in Durban, caught between old arguments and allies such as the G77 and new realities and groupings such as BASIC (Hurrell & Sengupta 2012).

### **High ground to high table**

Following on from the election of the Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in 2014, Indian foreign policy has taken on yet more decisive turns. Much of the renewed vigour and energy in Indian foreign policy has been credited to the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi who has scored a list of foreign policy 'firsts' including articulating the need for India to lead the fight against climate change (Sidhu & Godbole 2015). Under the Modi government, India is looking to play a greater role in solving global challenges and shaping the rules, norms and processes that guide those efforts (Sidhu 2015). This is an even bigger departure from the previous shift in Indian foreign policy wherein pragmatism and tangible gains were the primary motivating factor in diluting the emphasis on autonomy and global justice. In short, India has transitioned from the 'role of a global opposition to that of a global agenda setter' (Saran 2015).

Perhaps as a result of this new strategic vision, India was perceived at its most progressive and flexible in climate change negotiations after the Modi government came to power (Author in-person interview with LDC Delegate, Bonn, 11th May 2017). Interestingly however, the appreciation abroad for India's progressive stance was contrasted with captious reactions at home. The Paris Agreement was criticised for reducing equity to 'sweet nothings' (Narain 2017) and India's

participation in the Agreement was seen at home as completely contrary to the traditional logic of Indian climate policy (Dubash 2016).

India's foreign policy endeavours in recent years however lend ample rationale to India's leadership towards the Paris Agreement. The Paris Agreement has signalled the dominance of the Progressive Internationalists narrative (Dubash 2009) in Indian climate policy, as the paradigm of rule setting and regime building takes centre stage. This shift in narrative has mirrored an indistinguishable shift in India's overall diplomatic strategy towards taking on leadership and responsibility in the management of the global commons, which began following the financial crisis in 2008 and has been reenergised under the present BJP-led government.

### **Who decides? Key actors in Indian climate policy**

The revisions in India's negotiating stance over the years and shifts in the competing and yet equally compelling narratives of Indian climate policy beg the obvious question - who decides? A glimpse into the actors involved in India's climate policy establishment can also provide answers as to the motivations behind the changes, or validate the arguments provided in this paper.

The first thing to note is that the Indian climate policymaking apparatus is a closed, tight knit and relatively small group (Sengupta 2012). Perhaps as a result, India's negotiating team at UNFCCC meetings is actually small compared to nations of a similar size. At Copenhagen for instance, India only sent 77 delegates as part of the delegation compared to over 300 for China and Indonesia respectively (Michaelowa & Michaelowa 2012). India's small negotiating team has in fact been a frequent point of criticism in analysis of India's

engagement with global climate governance (see for instance Dubash 2013a).

Negotiating teams are usually comprised of a mixture of personnel from different ministries such as the Ministries of Environment, Power, Commerce, and External Affairs. As a long-time member of India's UNFCCC negotiating team explained in an interview:

"The Indian delegation was always much smaller than the requirement or even compared to delegations of other similar countries. Briefs for climate change meetings were prepared jointly by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). Political negotiations had MEA officials in the lead with MoEFCC and other ministries playing this role during particular substantive negotiations but it was a team effort. While the Prime Minister's Office was always in the loop given the importance of climate change negotiations, right from the time of finalising the delegation; post 2014 it was the PM I believe who took a more direct role" (Author interview with former Indian Negotiator & Senior Civil Servant, Email, 30th April 2017).

The intellectual godfathering of Indian climate policy by its overall foreign policy has therefore transpired mainly because limited capacity being deployed for climate negotiations has meant that the MEA, India's foreign ministry, has played a critical role in India's climate negotiating team. As a result, the continuum of intellectual mores across different arenas of global diplomatic negotiations has been steady and ensured a consistency of principles and objectives across

issues such as nuclear weapons, climate change, and global economic co-operation. The introduction of new actors such as Jairam Ramesh in 2009 and PM Modi in 2014 helped stimulate fresh ideas for these shifts to take place, but only in so much as those were attuned to wider diplomatic objectives. The same cerebral strands that drove India's focus on strategic autonomy, its shift to material based pragmatism, and its more recent moves towards norm setting and leadership in global governance issues in the conduct of its foreign policy, have influenced India's climate negotiating stance.

## **CONCLUSION: LOOKING AHEAD**

Indian climate policy in the literature has predominantly been portrayed as a tussle primarily between two narratives - equity concerns and co-benefits - with equity concerns being dominant. The analysis presented in this paper suggests that this is insufficient to explain the full shift in India's involvement in global climate policy in recent years, particularly India's actions in the build up to Copenhagen and subsequently, its role in the negotiations that led to the Paris Agreement and its early ratification. Instead, this paper has attempted to explain Indian climate policy as a subset of its larger foreign policy agenda. In early climate negotiations leading up to the UNFCCC, the didactic arguments of equity and CBDR were useful rhetorical pivots supporting underlying motivations of sovereignty and independence of choice that were a central pillar of Indian foreign policy at the time. Similarly, since the turn of the millennium, India's geopolitical shift towards pragmatism and then later norm setting has been reflected in its engagement with climate negotiations. The big departure from previous arguments took place between 2007 - 2009 in the negotiating track to COP 15, stimulated by broad-ranging diplomatic initiatives that were looking to relocate India's role in global affairs. Furthermore,


more recently under Prime Minister Modi, India has fully taken on the role of a responsible steward in the management of the global commons and this was reflected in its contribution towards the Paris Agreement.

One of the limitations in offering explanatory theories for events that have tightly coupled multiple causalities is that focusing on one set of rationale - in this case foreign policy - naturally underplays other factors. It is entirely reasonable to argue for instance that India's climate policy was also affected by the disintegrating logic of the Annex and Non Annex differentiation (Oberghassel et al. 2016), the growing business opportunities in climate action through the development of low carbon technologies, and related changes in the paradigm of global climate politics in favour of a global transformation approach (Hermwille 2016). In summary, external events played their part in as much as India's own foreign policy calculus and while it is always tricky to disentangle the sequence of logic in such situations, i.e. which of the two impacted climate policy first, it is certain that by its very nature, foreign policy decisions are not made in a vacuum but are sensitive and responsive to external determinants. Identifying the foreign policy signal in India's decision making in climate negotiations therefore need not be irreconcilable with the influence of changing dynamics in global climate politics.

In any case, the understanding that Indian foreign policy goals and objectives drive its climate policy naturally holds value in its predictive utility. What can the directions in Indian foreign policy tell us about how India will behave in climate negotiations going forward? The reasoning of this paper suggests that India's machinations in the broader global diplomatic realm have foreshadowed India's actions in climate negotiations. India's climate policy must be located within the

map of its overall geopolitical calculations (Atteridge et al. 2012; Dubash 2013a). Tracking the strategic aims of Indian foreign policy may yield clues as to how India will engage in global climate governance. Applying this framework in retrospect for instance behoves one to wonder if a compromise from developed countries in the early days of climate negotiations, perhaps demanding voluntary goals from developing nations but with little to no oversight and accountability, may have been palatable to India. Debates over equity and justice were to some degree proxy politics, but ended up overwhelming negotiations at the time and perhaps myopically preventing an understanding of the deeper underlying concern of economic independence and sovereignty for developing countries.

In the case of the present and the foreseeable future, Indian climate leadership looks set to continue. In the case of the Paris Agreement, the Trump administration's declaration to pull out the United States from the Agreement has not led to any change in climate policy from India. On the contrary, statements indicating a willingness to increase the ambition of domestic climate action even further have been issued by leading Indian officials (see for instance IANS 2017; Vishnoi & Chaudhury 2017). As outlined previously, Indian foreign policy is increasingly placing emphasis on India's responsibility to protect norms in global governance. As long as India's hard power grows on the back of strong economic growth rates, its soft power ambitions will likely follow suit. Nevertheless, it would be remiss to not insert a note of caution - the transformation in Indian foreign and climate policy is far from a linear process, there is a continuous tension between the competing narratives and the recrudescence of a pull back towards a more parochial engagement in global affairs very much exists. If such a development does occur however, it will likely manifest first in India's wider diplomatic outreach before influencing Indian climate policy.

Lastly, greater understanding of a country's climate and foreign policy strategy going forward will require more participation from scholars of international relations. In general, global environmental governance has been an understudied field in international relations - just 2 percent of articles in top journals in the field are on environmental subjects and only 1.2 percent address global environmental politics (Green & Hale 2017). The study of global climate politics will benefit from the unique disciplinary attributes that are housed under the field of international relations and political science. Insights from these disciplines can help break deadlocks in climate negotiations by revealing the deeper strategic preferences of critical actors, which may help to increase the collective ambition of action to take on one of the most pressing challenges of our times. 

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## ENDNOTES:

1. I use the phrase "Indian climate policy" in the paper as a synecdoche to refer to India's engagement with the UNFCCC and associated climate negotiations. This is not to be confused with India's domestic actions on climate change.
2. The G77 does not include China but China has commonly associated itself with the G77 on many issues leading to the grouping sometimes being called G77+China.
3. INDCs are now NDCs after the successful ratification of the Paris Agreement.

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