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**“UN Climate Talks and Power Politics: It’s Not About the Weather”**  
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Must U.S. climate diplomacy be a wedge rather than a bridge between the United States and key international partners? Arguably, poor American diplomacy combined with the flaws of the United Nations-led climate-change negotiations have had the effect of isolating the United States from important friends and allies rather than enabling it to build like-minded coalitions on environmental issues of shared concern. A more effective approach would integrate U.S. interests in mitigating climate change with broader strategic concerns vis-à-vis both allies and rising powers. It would work to produce positive-sum outcomes to climate negotiations facilitated by joint development and deployment of key energy and environmental technologies, rather than succumbing to a zero-sum logic pitting the developed world against the developing world in global, U.N.-led multinational arenas.

***Transatlantic relations: Copenhagen’s negative example***

An instructive example of an unfortunate outcome for broader U.S. interests was the United Nations’ Copenhagen climate conference of December 2009. American diplomacy and the flaws inherent in a multilateral conference with universal membership undermined Washington’s ties with its European allies and with rising powers including China, Brazil, and India. The merits of such an approach would be debatable if a binding international framework with tangible provisions to mitigate the effects of global climate change had resulted. Such an outcome did not come to fruition, with a weak agreement failing to compensate for the diplomatic cleavages produced by the negotiations process.

The United States entered the conference aligned with Europe on key goals, including securing binding commitments on greenhouse-gas reductions from rising economies like China and India which had been exempt from such obligations under the Kyoto Accord. Indeed, President Obama’s strong commitment to climate-change mitigation was touted in Europe following his election as an issue that would bring the transatlantic allies back together after the cleavages caused by different approaches to climate change during the George W. Bush administration. In turn, American and European unity at Copenhagen was expected to produce a more environmentally robust outcome than the flawed Kyoto framework that preceded it.

Unfortunately, the Copenhagen endgame produced a crisis in transatlantic relations. Faced with the collapse of the talks, President Obama ended up forging the Copenhagen agreement in back-room talks from which America’s core European allies were excluded. In negotiations with the leaders of Brazil, South Africa, India, and China – the “BASIC” countries – the U.S. president struck the key outlines of the Copenhagen Accord: major emitting nations agreed to limit temperature increases to two degrees Celsius, to implement mitigation actions toward this goal, and to register and report their actions to the international community;

developed nations pledged to register mitigation targets for 2020 and to mobilize public and private funds to assist developing nations in stemming global warming.

European leaders were shocked that, after decades in which Europe was the global pacesetter in managing climate change, the decisive agreement on a post-Kyoto framework was struck without Europe in the room. European leaders were relegated to being briefed by President Obama after his conclave with the leaders of the BASIC group. Many European officials openly pondered a global future in which the United States and China managed a “G2” consortium to handle global issues, or one in which Washington conclave with other rising powers even as it decoupled from its traditional allies to set the global governance agenda. In this way, the Copenhagen process weakened transatlantic comity even as it produced an outcome that was unlikely to substantially mitigate global climate change.

### ***The toxic G-77 dynamic in global climate negotiations***

The “developed versus developing world” quality of multilateral climate change negotiations with universal membership also compromises U.S. interests with a range of key emerging powers. Among the most damaging spillover from such global processes under the U.N. mandate is the G-77 dynamic, a phenomenon familiar to those who follow the workings of the United Nations General Assembly. The Copenhagen process enabled South Africa and other “non-aligned” ringleaders to generate and organize opposition to the developed Western nations by mobilizing a large coalition of developing states to oppose U.S. and European climate goals.

As at the General Assembly, a U.N.-led multilateral process with universal membership creates a situation in which smaller states can exercise power without responsibility – employing opposition to the objectives of the United States and its traditional allies as a mobilizational tool to disproportionately exercise international clout in ways non-global processes and forums render more difficult. By effectively giving smaller nations veto power and enabling them to obstruct great-power leadership, the Copenhagen framework in some respects turns the international order on its head, rendering great powers susceptible to pressure from lesser states and giving smaller countries a blocking role they would not normally have in international politics. These phenomena, in turn, complicate U.S. relations with important developing states and can flip smaller nations generally friendly to America into an oppositional role.

G-77 dynamics also create opportunities for great power competitors to the United States to make mischief. In Copenhagen, China took an early strategic position to conclave with the South Africa-led G-77 grouping, extending rhetorical support for its oppositional stand against the United States and Europe and providing the coalition with an important measure of legitimacy. China’s stance served multiple objectives: it earned Beijing considerable goodwill among smaller developing nations; tweaked the United States and created cleavages between Washington and other important powers; obscured China’s status as the world’s leading polluter and second-largest economy by positioning it as a “developing” economy alongside Nicaragua, Cuba, and other poor states; and gave China critical leverage as a spokesman for a large bloc of states in the Copenhagen endgame. Of course, these strategic benefits accrued to China because it opposed the goals of the United States and its allies; G-77 dynamics may be said to have

encouraged Chinese obstreperousness, as seen when a lower-ranking Chinese negotiator had a heated, finger-wagging exchange with the President of the United States, a hitherto unforeseen occurrence at such global conclaves.

### ***Unnecessary cleavages with India and other potentially like-minded rising powers***

A third negative dynamic produced by global climate change negotiations in a United Nations context is the unnatural wedge it introduces into U.S.-India relations. For over a decade, Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama invested significantly in constructing a new strategic partnership with the world's largest democracy following half a century of troubled relations stemming from disputes over Cold War politics and India's nuclear program. For their part, successive Indian administrations of different political persuasions have gradually re-oriented their country's foreign policy away from outdated notions of non-alignment and in the direction of strategic cooperation with the United States. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh even subjected his government to a no-confidence vote in parliament over deepening India's relations with America through the civil-nuclear agreement, an unprecedented development in Indian politics.

From managing China's rise to defeating Islamic terrorism to building a stable Afghanistan to sustaining freedom of the seas, few countries have such a congruence of long-term interests as do the United States and India. The possibilities for partnership between the world's biggest democracies – and the role of Indo-American entente in sustaining a world safe for free peoples and free markets – are promising indeed. It is therefore unfortunate that U.S. climate diplomacy has created unnecessary cleavages between India and the United States that have spilled over into other areas of the relationship.

In the run-up to Copenhagen, India had a revealing internal debate over how to balance its growing role as a partner of the West and an international stakeholder with its older identity as a non-aligned developing power. Would India play its traditional role as obstructionist to the West in a global conclave, or would it assume its seat at the high table of world politics by helping shape a positive-sum outcome that would align it more closely with the developed democracies? In an internal memo, Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh spelled out the tensions between India's G-20 identity as an increasingly prosperous, responsible global steward and India's G-77 identity as a poor, non-aligned nation that defines its interests in opposition to the West. He favored the G-20 approach, given India's equities with the West and with a Western-led international order that lately has been highly conducive to India's economic development. But Indian politics and the pressures of a global multilateral process combined with a missed opportunity for American diplomacy to move India into the BASIC camp at Copenhagen.

India's tactical alliance with China and smaller developing countries at Copenhagen was unnatural. China is the world's largest carbon emitter; the scale of manufacturing in China dwarfs that of India, which registers a much lower share of carbon emissions. India would have benefited more from China's isolation at Copenhagen rather than giving China the cover of avoiding binding climate commitments by aligning with it. New Delhi could have spoken for large parts of the developing world that are not significant carbon emitters; it could have led an

alternative coalition focused on expanding technology transfer between the West and poorer countries interested in acquiring energy technologies to offset fossil fuel consumption.

Technology transfer and joint development, including in the realms of energy and the environment, has been an important element of Indo-U.S. relations since 2005. U.S. diplomacy could have been more effective in developing with India a program of activities to generate green technologies and alternative energy investments in a way that kept India onside during the Copenhagen negotiations. The same is true with Brazil, Indonesia, and other friendly states with which Washington is comfortable sharing technologies; none of these countries are necessary adversaries in climate talks but could be constructive players if given the right incentives.

In the run-up to Copenhagen, the West, led by the United States, could have been more effective in disaggregating the developing world in a way that split the G-77 and decoupled key rising democracies with serious equities in collaborating with the West from less constructive players. Given its size and status, India should have been the centerpiece of such a strategy. Instead, by virtue of its own short-sighted calculations and the shortcomings of U.S. and U.N. diplomacy, India was pushed into making common cause with its leading strategic competitor – China – against its most important international friend and ally – the United States.

### *Looking ahead*

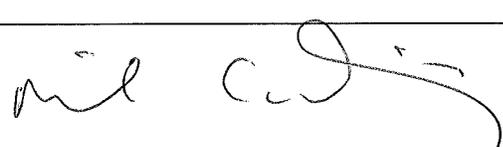
Both U.S. diplomacy and the cause of managing climate change would benefit from a different approach to tackling global warming: one that was not U.N.-led with universal membership in which small countries can play the role of spoilers and global consensus is achieved only with lowest-common-denominator results that please no one. Climate negotiations instead could take the form of smaller groupings led by the great powers, as the world's largest emitters, in closed-door negotiations that could encourage countries like China to be constructive rather than to grand-stand. From a U.S. perspective, joint development and application of key energy and environmental technologies with friendly emerging economies could replace the setting of vague environmental targets without action plans to meet them. Although tech-transfer concerns unquestionably apply to China, American businesses and officials are far more comfortable with the possibilities for collaboration and talent-sharing with Indian, Brazilian, Indonesian, and other counterparts in ways that could produce new flows of clean energy and protect natural resources in these countries.

American diplomacy could also expand climate-mitigation partnerships as part of its broader bilateral agendas with key powers like China, India, and Brazil, rather than attempting to bring these countries onside in the more difficult context of global, multilateral climate negotiations. Finally, prioritizing climate concerns at the expense of broader strategic ties puts the cart before the horse: in the case of countries like India, both U.S. interests and the wider climate agenda might be better served by building comprehensive strategic partnerships that develop over time the mutual trust necessary for hard but necessary collaboration on managing climate change. Because climate change is expected to hit countries like India especially hard, New Delhi and other emerging centers of power do have an incentive to become constructive players on this issue. The United States can and should help them do so.

United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Foreign Affairs

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<b>3. Date of Committee hearing:</b>  MAY 25, 2011	
<b>4. Have you received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<b>5. Have any of the organizations you are representing received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>6. If you answered yes to either item 4 or 5, please list the source and amount of each grant or contract, and indicate whether the recipient of such grant was you or the organization(s) you are representing. You may list additional grants or contracts on additional sheets.</b>	
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