

Tackling the Scourge of Climate Change: Pakistan's Engagements in Climate Diplomacy

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Abstract: Climate change is one of the most destructive phenomena affecting and shaping regional and global landscapes. Its effects are wide-ranging, permeating important domains like agriculture, economics, inter-state relations, and armed conflicts, to name a few. All this makes climate change a major security threat, one that cannot be navigated without concerted global efforts. This realization has engendered the concept and practice of climate diplomacy. This paper traces the genesis and evolution of climate diplomacy, casting light on how arrangements like the Montreal and Kyoto Protocols, and the Paris Agreement came to the fore. The paper then looks at Pakistan's engagements in climate diplomacy as part of the country's overall climate action during the tenure of former Prime Minister, Imran Khan. The paper's research methodology is centered on an analysis of secondary sources as well as a structured interview with one of the key ministers who dealt with climate change-related issues under the Khan government.

Keywords: Climate Change, Climate Diplomacy, Conflict Paris Agreement, Security

INTRODUCTION

Climate change refers to the longer-time shifts that take place in both temperatures and weather patterns as a result of several natural occurrences and human activities. Primarily caused by the burning of fossil fuels, greenhouse gas emissions heavily contribute towards climate change. The greenhouse gases that are emitted as a result of wide-ranging human activities are carbon dioxide and methane (Ebert, 2023). This underscores the role that humans play in causing climate change. Climate change manifests itself in a consistent rise in temperature, severe droughts, water scarcity, wildfires, flooding, and a loss of biodiversity, among others. These occurrences have disastrous impacts on human beings. They affect their health profiles, capacities to produce food, and the ability to counter a bevy of threats to their lives and livelihoods. These threats are only likely to increase, not least because glaciers are melting precipitously, sea levels are rising, and heatwaves are becoming more common and long. All this is likely to increase the numbers of climate refugees, something which will add to the even otherwise high levels of risks associated with migrations (The United Nations World Water Development Report, 2023). Taken together, these effects translate into, and fall in the realm of, existential threats as they affect and impede healthy human interactions and sustainable development. Therefore, United Nations' (UN) reports focus on efforts to ensure that the temperature does not cross 1.5°C (Craig, 2022). Climate diplomacy represents such diplomatic endeavors, which aim to negotiate and reach a global consensus to mitigate, and adapt to, climate change. Thus, one of the aims of climate diplomacy is to facilitate sustainable development practices (Uday, 2023). Given its growing importance in combating climate change, this research paper delves into the concept of climate diplomacy, evaluating its effectiveness in fostering international

cooperation against the said phenomenon. The paper conducts this inquiry by looking at Pakistan's approach to climate diplomacy as part of its spectrum of policies to deal with climate change. We have chosen Pakistan because it is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change, as evidenced by, among other events, recent floods that have added to its economic troubles. However, to keep our research focused, we have chosen a specific period: the tenure of former Pakistani Prime Minister, Imran Khan.

Methodology

This research draws on secondary sources to understand the origins of climate diplomacy and its contemporary relevance to the fight against climate change. In addition, to understand Pakistan's climate action, we have conducted a structured interview of Zartaj Gul Wazir, the former Minister of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination. Wazir's interview adds strength to our research given that she is one of the foremost primary sources of the period under study. However, it has its limitations, too. One of the glaring ones is that, as a practitioner, Wazir's narration suffers from a lack of nuance. That being said, as our research is the first one that specifically focuses on Pakistan's climate diplomacy, this methodology is useful. Therefore, our research will not only add to the body of work on climate diplomacy but also help policymakers make informed choices with regard to it.

CLIMATE DIPLOMACY

Climate diplomacy centers on using diplomatic means and approaches to help the international community build consensus to devise joint mechanisms to deal with climate change. It also includes ensconcing the theme of climate change within broader foreign

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policy actions in both bilateral and multilateral fora. Its remit also includes developing proper strategies for assessing and managing risks. This can be done by placing climate change high on the agenda in discussions with global partners during diplomatic parleys, public engagements, and also while leveraging policy tools that affect other countries (Salik, 2022).

Climate diplomacy links climate change to other foreign policy issues such as peace and stability. However, for climate diplomacy to be effective, comprehensive risk-assessment and risk-management strategies must be adopted at all levels (Mabey, 2013). Besides prioritizing climate action with allies around the globe, engaging in public diplomacy, using external policy instruments, and carrying out diplomatic discussions are paramount. This implies that by engaging, bilaterally and multilaterally, with allies and agreeing on the need for taking more decisive climate action, the issue of climate change can be managed. One of the key pitches of climate diplomacy is focused on the pervasive threats emanating from climate change, which cannot be met without substantive, consistent global cooperation. Robust climate diplomacy cannot be conducted absent the involvement of a range of stakeholders. They include national, provincial, and local governments, private and public sector firms, civil society and advocacy groups, and media. Doing this could help improve strategic communications on climate and climate change, contributing to attenuating threats and augmenting regional and global stability (Purvis, 2010). The active participation of these stakeholders is also of great importance because the existing national actions and responses to climate change are inadequate (Saerbeck, 2020).

PAST DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS: AN APPRAISAL

A number of international arrangements have been put in place, aiming to both mitigate, and adapt to, climate change. The 1987 Montreal Protocol, born as a convention on ozone layer's depletion, not climate change, became a model of tackling environmental problems. The Protocol has been overwhelmingly successful; to-date, over 99 % of the ozone-depleting chemicals have been eliminated. The Protocol expanded its ambit as a result of the passage of the Kigali Amendment in 2016. The Amendment called upon parties to endorse an agreement to reduce their productions of hydrofluorocarbons, a group of greenhouse gases that are harmful to the environment (Protocol, 1987).

Adopted in 1992, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is a near-universal agreement. Given this, it is dubbed a major landmark as far as climate diplomacy is concerned. It introduced a yearly conclave, famously termed the

Conference of the Parties (COP). The Conference centers on holding discussions and negotiations on the most effective mechanisms to counter climate change. COP has produced both the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement (Parry, 2009).

The Kyoto Protocol became the first legally binding climate treaty after its adoption in 1997. The Protocol enjoined upon developed countries to reduce emissions by an average of 5% compared to 1990 levels. This was supplemented by putting in place a system of monitoring progress. While the Protocol did not require any developing countries, including China and India, which are major emitters of carbon dioxide, to take action, it placed an obligation on all other countries to reduce their levels of carbon dioxide emission. The United States signed the Protocol in 1998, but the U.S. Congress did not ratify it (Breidenich, 1998).

PARIS AGREEMENT: AN ASSESSMENT

One of the cornerstones of modern-day climate diplomacy happens to be the Paris Agreement. Negotiated in 2015, the Agreement aims to collectively fight the scourge of climate change. The signatories to the Agreement have committed to ensuring that the global temperature remains below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Therefore, it aims at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and encouraging the use of renewable energy. The Agreement not only focuses on mitigation and adaptation but also financing (Streck, 2016). Further, the Agreement requires its signatories to submit their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which embody national efforts to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. The submissions of NDCs lie at the heart of the Agreement. All in all, the Agreement can be termed as a major milestone in global climate diplomacy, not least because it has increased transparency and monitoring, partly contributing to the creation of a norm against climate change.

REGIONAL APPROACHES TO CLIMATE DIPLOMACY: A MISSING LINK

Given the complexities associated with navigating the effects of climate change, climate diplomacy cannot be effective without focusing on intra-and interregional approaches. Although devising region-centered strategies is extremely important, it is a tall order. This is primarily due to a plethora of geopolitical tensions as well as inadequate awareness about climate change at both local and regional levels. Further, countries like Pakistan, who, despite contributing insignificantly to greenhouse emissions, are reeling from the effects of climate change, do not have the resources and capacities to protect themselves. Therefore, a regional focus is of great import. That being said, some positive developments are noteworthy in this regard. Notably,

the European Union (EU) is fast-becoming a leading player in climate diplomacy, as evidenced by its internal policies and diplomatic actions in international climate negotiations. The EU's regional market regime for greenhouse gases, which includes the Emissions Trading System (ETS), is regarded as an important contribution to tackling climate change. However, little attention has been paid to the external dimensions of EU's climate policy (Petri, 2020).

STRENGTHENING CLIMATE DIPLOMACY

With the centrality of climate diplomacy being more or less established, it is important to make it more constructive. There are a number of ways to do that. First, countries should forge coalitions and alliances under their preferred and valuable interests and goals. Through cooperation, countries can encourage synergies in allocating and utilizing resources for both mitigation and adaptation purposes. Second, collaborations with civil society organizations, the corporate world, academia, and indigenous groups are imperative as they help generate a discourse and consensus-driven action against climate change. Third, climate finance and capacity-building must lie at the heart of climate diplomacy. Industrialized nations must be convinced to take the mantle of responsibility for financing and capacity-building, especially because they are the biggest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. Concomitantly, technology-transfer is critical to building the capacities of affected states. Last but not least, the practitioners of climate diplomacy must be informed by scientific research and evidence. Proper data analysis, accurate modeling, and expert analysis should drive policy discussions and negotiations, something which will meaningfully contribute towards informed decision-making and ensuring the efficacy of climate action plans (Islam, 2022).

CLIMATE DIPLOMACY AND PAKISTAN

Located at the crossroads of South, West, and Central Asia, Pakistan has to reduce its vulnerability to climate change. Floods, heatwaves, and the melting of glaciers are some of the ways climate change has manifested itself in Pakistan. This puts more pressure on the country, which is already marred by a crippled economy. Pakistan's geographic and typographic characteristics both help and impede its fight against climate change (Mahnoor, 2023). Cognizant of all this, Pakistan has made efforts to combat climate change. Climate diplomacy is certainly an important part of its climate action. This is primarily because it allows the country to showcase its commitment to taking a series of tangible climate actions. Moreover, championing and leading climate action at regional and global platforms will help Pakistan push its case for getting necessary espousal and succor to meet climate change-related challenges.

The Government of Pakistan has further engaged with groupings, including the Group of 77 Plus China, as well as the Climate Vulnerability Forum which is a group of 68 countries. Notably, Pakistan was the Chair of the Group of 77 Plus China, a position that allowed it to lead efforts to build a somewhat elusive consensus on climate action. Further, engagements within these groupings enabled Pakistan to advocate for collective climate action, voice the interests of the most vulnerable countries, and advance initiatives on mitigation, adaptation, and resilience-building (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). At COP 27, for example, Pakistan advocated and successfully pushed for the establishment of an international Loss and Damage fund.

Pakistan's active participation in climate diplomacy has been complemented by a host of anti-climate change efforts and policies at the domestic level. In July 2023, Pakistan released its first-ever seven-year National Adaptation Plan (NAP). The release of the Plan shows Pakistan's policy level commitment to fighting climate change (Shahid, 2023).

Imran Khan, who remained Pakistan's Prime Minister from August 2018 until April 2022, can be, however, credited with taking some monumental steps to deal with climate change. They included the Billion Tree Tsunami, the restrictions on the use of plastic bags, increasing forest cover, and leading the global debate in favor of climate action. These efforts were partly led by the Minister for Climate Change, Zartaj Gul Wazir. She was one of the rare Ministers who handled only one portfolio during the Khan government, something which made her responsible for climate action-related policies throughout Khan's tenure. Pakistan was seemingly committed to taking domestic climate actions and then highlighting those to build a strong case at global fora.

In order to better understand this linkage, we conducted a 30-minute structured interview with her. In response to our question on the Ministry of Climate Change, she said "our target was to reduce the country's carbon emission to 70% by 2030." Similarly, when we inquired about the key initiatives taken during her government, she remarked that the Green Initiative was the largest project. When we asked her for more details about the Initiative, she said the Danish government took a lot of interest in it, adding that it signed a Memorandum of Understanding to accelerate reforestation, the use of renewable energy, and water and disaster management (Zartaj Gul Wazir, personal communication, February 21, 2024).

Pakistan accentuated these domestic measures as exemplars of good practices in its parleys with foreign actors. Wazir recalled that Danish Ambassador was impressed with the Ten Billion Tree Tsunami.

Furthermore, she said Saudi Arabia's tree-plantation drive was styled on that of Pakistan. As a matter of fact, Saudi Arabia signed a Memorandum of Understanding to plant 40 billion trees in the Middle East based on the Pakistani model. Similarly, she also highlighted other initiatives like the Ecosystem Restoration Initiative that aimed to promote nature-based solutions to climate change-related problems. While recalling the initiatives that were taken under her, she described the Protected Area Initiative launched in 2020 under the Green Initiative, which could generate 58,000 green job opportunities across the country. Furthermore, she discussed the post-COVID-19 Green Economy Recovery Initiative, which was aimed at creating job opportunities for those who became unemployed as a result of the pandemic. She said "through this Initiative, 87,000 jobs were created across the country. Moreover, in response to our question regarding women's participation, she said, "education about, and mobilization for, countering climate change are paramount, and they would have positive impacts on their lives." She emphasized that climate change was an important part of Khan's reform agenda, adding that this is one reason why it was included in the country's first-ever National Security Policy (NSP). In response to our question on the future, she said "Pakistan and other countries need to make collective efforts to deal with the issue of climate change," while adding that projects like the Billion Tree Tsunami, coupled with use of biodegradable material, recycling of plastics and waste material, are very important (Zartaj Gul, Interview on phone, February 21, 2024)." As abundantly clear from Wazir's interview, the Khan government introduced a number of initiatives to give a good account of itself, internationally.

Ex-PM Imran Khan communicated his government's climate actions to the international community all by himself. In his inaugural speech at the United Nations General Assembly, in September 2019, Khan focused on four themes, with climate change being the first one. Pakistan's climate diplomacy during the Khan government was centered on two main points. First, the phenomenon of climate change is one of the most serious, urgent threats to global security. Two, the international community, especially countries that have created this ticking time bomb, must take concrete actions rather than make pledges alone. These vociferous enunciations and the policies adopted at home were duly recognized by the United Nations and the World Economic Forum, among others. However, this might not be sustainable given the country's political and economic crises. While Pakistan has certainly embraced the idea of climate diplomacy, there is lot more that needs to be done.

Our research has collated and analyzed the steps that Pakistan has taken in the realm of climate diplomacy, which should open up avenues for future research on it.

One question that scholars can center their inquiries on is this: How can strategic communications be leveraged by Pakistan to conduct effective climate diplomacy, especially given that the economic cushion it has to take climate action is shrinking?

CONCLUSION

As aforementioned, climate change is a global curse brought about by both natural processes and human activities. Its effects will engulf every country and region. This is why climate diplomacy is gaining a lot of traction in international politics. This paper has looked at the antecedents of the concept and conduct of climate diplomacy. It has also seen climate diplomacy as part of the efforts aimed at building strong norms against climate inaction. Against this global backdrop, Pakistan's approach to climate diplomacy, under its overarching fight against climate change, has been traced and analyzed. This research finds that Pakistan, under Imran Khan, centered its climate diplomacy on showing its set of impressive initiatives to tackle climate change. We argue, however, that this approach might not be sustainable going forward, necessitating further research on ways to strengthen Pakistan's climate diplomacy.

Declaration

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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