



Climate Change and U.S. Security Priorities

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Climate change is challenging relations between the United States, other major powers, and international organizations in a variety of ways. Some of the main challenges will revolve around the following factors.

The need to cooperate with China on climate change mitigation even as China's geopolitical ambitions become increasingly inimical to U.S. interests. Mitigating climate change will be impossible without buy-in and cooperative leadership from China and the United States, both for practical and symbolic reasons. Despite this, the U.S. and China are increasingly at odds over a host of issues ranging from the South China Sea to the human rights situation in Xinjiang to increasingly confrontational economic relations. As Kurt Campbell, U.S. coordinator for Indo-Pacific affairs on the National Security Council, has said, "[The period that was broadly described as engagement has come to an end ... the dominant paradigm is going to be competition.](#)" Even if U.S.-China relations become increasingly competitive and tense, coordinating a joint response to this existential, global threat will be vital.

The need for a strong North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance to assist in moderating Chinese and Russian ambitions in the Arctic. Increasing Russian power projection into the Arctic domain will require a unified response from the United States and its Arctic-adjacent allies, most principally Canada. In particular, [resolving the languishing disputes with Canada over the Beaufort Sea and legal demarcation of the](#)

[Northwest Passage](#) will allow the two partners to coordinate more effectively around shared economic and national security interests in the polar region.

The viability of explicit and implicit security commitments to Gulf States whose economies and therefore political and social stability are threatened by climate change mitigation. The United States has large security commitments to oil-rich states of the Arabian Peninsula and a large presence in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and the Persian Gulf. Predicting energy markets is a difficult enterprise, but there is relatively strong consensus that the [present discounted value of hydrocarbon reserves is in decline and will decline further as global energy systems transition to renewables in earnest.](#) These developments may have cross-cutting effects for political stability and U.S. interests, making [energy exporters more prone to domestic instability](#) but [less prone to initiate international disputes.](#) The United States will need to weigh these ongoing commitments as the region becomes less geostrategically significant.

The need to promote good governance of transition to metals-based resource wealth. De-carbonizing global energy systems will shift geopolitical attention from hydrocarbon reserves to the metals that underpin solar, wind, geothermal, and other forms of renewable energy, as well as electric vehicles: aluminum, metallurgical coal, coltan, copper, aluminum, zinc, rare earths, lithium, and cobalt, among others. many countries with large reserves of transition metals—

like Guinea, in the case of bauxite, or the Democratic Republic of Congo, in the case of cobalt—[face internal conflicts, migration pressures, environmental stresses, and have comparatively weak institutions to manage these stresses.](#)

The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is a groundbreaking, multistakeholder initiative to prevent corruption, conflict, human rights violations, and environmental degradation while promoting good governance around extractive industries and helping these newly resource-rich countries avoid the resource curse. The United States had been working toward compliance since 2012, until the Trump administration backed away from the initiative in 2017. Re-dedicating the U.S. government to EITI will be a good first step, but it can and will need to go further and press for increasing transparency in the production and trade of the [35 critical minerals](#) identified by the United States Geological Survey in 2018.