



Shifting Power Landscapes in a Changing Climate

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Climate change, like all the other environmental manifestations of the Anthropocene, will have [implications for the current liberal international order](#). The state-centric, militaristic, and capital-driven model of the current order is incompatible with the measures required for addressing global environmental challenges, particularly the [“triple planetary emergency”](#) of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. These challenges demand a radical rethinking of state-centrism, militarization, and global consumption.

Rethinking state-centrism, militarism, and capitalism

States will continue their roles in multilateral cooperation and national implementation of climate action. Machinery designed for national security could be used for disaster response and conflicts exacerbated by climate change. However, policy discourse amidst climate change would need to [pay more attention to threats facing vulnerable human populations](#). As such, human security provides a more ecologically aligned framework needed for climate action.

An international order that places human security above state security will no longer find militarization relevant. Securing the state often results in unnecessary wars, and building nuclear arsenals has become a deterrent strategy against other states. In fact, one of the proposed starting dates for the Anthropocene was the [first nuclear test in 1945](#). Since then, nuclear weapons have released radioactive elements harmful to people and the planet.

The consumption-driven and unlimited growth model of the global economy [pushes the Earth system beyond the limits for human habitability](#). Although capital-driven economic development led to many improvements in human well-being, it also allowed environmental degradation that undermines human well-being. More than that, capitalism has also created vast inequalities in human societies where the marginalized and the poorest suffer the most in times of catastrophes. Economic models that promote human well-being without destroying the environment are imperative for climate action.

Several policy options are available within the current world order without immediately eliminating the state-centric, militaristic, and capital-driven sources of power. National governments can channel some military spending to environmentally sustainable projects. They can also subsidize capital for small and medium-sized enterprises that are environmentally sustainable. Meanwhile, higher taxes must be imposed on multinational corporations that do not comply with environmental standards. Foreign policies must re-orient from military assistance for national security toward financial and technological assistance for climate action. The short-term birth pains from these policies must be endured for long-term survival of human societies.

Redoing sources of power

Climate change is becoming an area of either conflict or cooperation between major powers, most notably the United States and China, the most powerful

countries and the largest emitters of greenhouse gases in the world. Whether through [cooperation or healthy competition](#), the major powers that will emerge from a transformed world order are not those with the most wealth and military might, but those with the technology and moral leadership to support climate action.

What would this power shift mean for [the Asia Pacific region](#), a potential hotbed for conflict or competition between major powers, amidst global environmental changes? In the Asia Pacific, demilitarization is a risky move for smaller states given the history of aggression and ongoing geopolitical tensions, especially in the South China Sea and South Asia. The most realistic option is to allocate a percentage of military spending to social and environmental protection. This gradual move from militarism toward environmentalism will give governments sufficient time to adapt to the changing geopolitics of the region.

Although much is yet to be done to effectively integrate sustainable environmental practices into national economies, there are signs of optimism in the region. China continues to develop practices that promote a circular economy, while several [Asian cities](#) are adopting a circular approach to plastic production and use. This is an opportunity for China and other major economies to exercise legitimate leadership by supporting these initiatives.

Climate action demands cooperation not just among states but also among non-governmental and international organizations, large corporations, advocacy groups, and individuals. This is

an opportunity for the UN to reform in order to re-assert its relevance in these shifting power landscapes while responding effectively to complex global problems. This reform necessitates breaking away from [pathological path dependent decision-making agents and processes](#) that are unable to anticipate and slow to react to abrupt changes. The Anthropocene, after all, demands not just a radical rethinking of values and practices but also a redo of institutions and systems that stall climate action.