

USA or China? Which is the more important for the future of humanity in the 21st century?

Introduction:

We propose to take global warming and global development as two issues of major importance and compare and contrast the two sides' positions and actions to evaluate which might be the best contributor to the future of humanity.

Global Warming:

Regarded by climate (and other) scientists as the single greatest long term threat to the survival of the human race let us examine the actions of both parties' global initiatives, investment and legislation directed towards addressing the issue. As a reminder, Dr James Hansen who testified on the subject before the US Congress during the 1980' and 1990's summarised the state of climate research in 2009 thus: 'The startling conclusion is that continued exploitation of all fossil fuels on Earth threatens not only the other millions of species on the planet but also the survival of humanity itself.'¹

Global Development:

After taking action to ensure the survival of the species, then we can look towards the quality of life for all, and as a directional indicator for the 21st century, the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals set out eight very specific verifiable goals, which were superseded in 2015 by the Sustainable Development Goals. The goals elevate 'human development – poverty and people and their lives' above 'growth' as the main objective of development, September 2000.² Hence we can evaluate poverty alleviation programs and their opposites.

A Statement On Methodology And Cognitive Bias:

Most researchers tend to find the results they are looking for³. Two of the most common research biases are congruence and confirmation bias; congruence bias 'tests ideas by seeking evidence that supports rather than refutes an idea' and confirmation bias is 'preferentially seeking and recalling information that confirms your preconceptions'⁴. To maintain a fair and balanced view, we have tried to find comparable evidence, but where comparable evidence is not available we have selected other evidence to attempt to provide a broader, more complete picture.

Global Warming:

The two main international agreements regarding climate change are the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement: both targeted at limiting global warming increases to below 2^oC and as close as possible to 1.5^oC by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. I am using them as the standard for measuring CO₂ emissions, noting that the Kyoto Protocol allowed for international CO₂ emissions trading⁵ – a practice entirely favourable to the rich nations, no endorsement inferred. As one dissenting US analyst observed:

¹ James Hansen, *Storms Of My Grandchildren* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), Preface, p. IX.

² Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, 'Millennium Development Goals: Why They Matter', *Global Governance*, 10, (2004) 395 – 402. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/glogo10&div=37&id=&page=> .

³ New Scientist, *Lifting The Lid On The Unconscious* (2018) <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg23931880-400-lifting-the-lid-on-the-unconscious/>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ United Nations, *Emissions Trading* ((2005) <https://unfccc.int/process/the-kyoto-protocol/mechanisms/emissions-trading> .

I'm not sure what Paris actually accomplishes, in terms of getting to the end of the century, if the goal is to reduce global temperatures, it just can't be done on the backs of the industrialised world. No matter what you think about global warming, and the nature of it, the pace of it, you have to take these growing economies seriously, and help them and I just didn't see Paris getting to that end, in any efficient or constructive manner.⁶

Without wishing to detract from the agreements, their intention were/are designed to reduce, inhibit and if possible prevent catastrophic climate change and so we are looking for concrete actions towards those ends when assessing the impact on the future of humanity.

Historically the USA is the largest consumer of fossil fuels world-wide,⁷ their cumulative 420 billion tons of CO₂ emissions is almost double that of China's 240 billion tons⁸. This significance of this is that the US bears greatest responsibility for climate change and should be expected to make proportionally large efforts to mitigate it. Currently China is the largest CO₂ emitter, at an estimated 11,680 million tons per year, compared to the USA's 4,535 million tons per year, but China has four times the population of the USA, plus they manufacture more. China's annual contribution grew by a factor of five over the last thirty years from 2.17 billion tons p.a. in 1990 to 10.7 billion by 2019⁹. So in fairness per capita consumption is a better metric.

China:

On 28th March 2018 the UN announced that China had 'reached its 2020 carbon trading emission target three years ahead of schedule'¹⁰ which for a small country would have been an achievement, but for China was incredible. They had succeeded in reducing CO₂ emissions (per unit GDP) by 46% from the 2005 levels. The UN's Executive Secretary For Climate Change, Patricia Espinosa, tweeted¹¹:

"Excellent news coming out of China - very encouraging as the international community seeks to accelerate the transition to low carbon and to raise ambition to achieve the #ParisAgreement #climate goals."

To be precise expressed as a 'percentage of GDP' emissions were down, but GDP went up. Even so, it is a unique improvement in its own right, compared to the USA, where 'energy use has increased annually for the past six years'¹².

China has taken the transition to renewable energy seriously. Its National Energy Administration has promoted the creation of thirty six low carbon pilot cities, eighty one new energy model cities and

⁶ BBC News. BBC News, *Climate Change: The US Formally Withdraws From The Paris Agreement* (2020) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-54797743> .

⁷ Statista, *Cumulative Carbon Dioxide Emissions From Fossil Fuels Worldwide From 1750 To 2020, By Major Country* (2022) <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1007454/cumulative-co2-emissions-worldwide-by-country/> .

⁸ Simon Evans, Carbon Brief, *Analysis: Which Countries Are Responsible For Climate Change?* ((2021) <https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-which-countries-are-historically-responsible-for-climate-change/>).

⁹ Macrotrends, *China Carbon (CO₂) Emissions 1990 – 2002* (2022) <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/CHN/china/carbon-co2-emissions> .

¹⁰ United Nations, *China Meets 2020 Carbon Target Three Years Ahead Of Schedule* (2018) <https://unfccc.int/news/china-meets-2020-carbon-target-three-years-ahead-of-schedule> .

¹¹ United Nations, *China Meets 2020 Carbon Target Three Years Ahead Of Schedule* (2018) <https://unfccc.int/news/china-meets-2020-carbon-target-three-years-ahead-of-schedule> .

¹² World Population Review, *CO₂ Emissions By Country for 2022*, (2022) <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/co2-emissions-by-country> .

eight new energy industrial parks¹³. In addition, China's forest coverage increased from 157 to 220 million hectares between 1990 and 2020, according to a UN report.¹⁴ It plans to further increase its forest coverage by 24% by 2025.¹⁵

On July 21st 2022 Reuters reported that in the first half of this year, China had installed 31 gigawatts of photo voltaic solar power capacity, up 137% from the previous year. It brought the total to 340 gigawatts, up 25.8% from 2021. Their target is achieve a combined solar / wind capacity of 1,200 Gigawatts by 2030.¹⁶

So we can see evidence that the Chinese take the threat of global warming seriously, they have committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2060¹⁷, and have actively committed serious resources for the development of alternative, low carbon energy sources.

USA:

On the 13th July 2014, Rupert Murdoch gave a very widely publicised "interview" to Sky News, denying the scientific proof for climate change and thus setting the stage for a new wave of climate change denialism across mainstream America and particularly amongst members of the Republican Party.¹⁸ In June 2017 after a delay of three years, the US announced its withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement¹⁹ as the BBC reported at the time:

President Trump made leaving Paris a key part of his election platform in 2016, tying it into his vision of a revitalised US with booming energy production, especially coal and oil.²⁰

This evidence suggests that the USA is not only ideologically opposed to the notion of containing the use of fossil fuels but also taking active steps to extract the maximum amount from the ground for the sole benefit of the US economy. For example, they continue to this day to steal oil from occupied Syrian oil fields²¹. Another important feature of the American economy is that the 'military-industrial complex' (MIC) accounts for about 37% of its total GDP²² but more worryingly:

¹³ Journal of Cleaner Production, *China's Energy Transition Strategy At The City Level: The Role Of Renewable Energy* Volume 205, 20 December 2018, Pages 980 – 986. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.09.162>.

¹⁴ Food And Agriculture Organisation Of The United Nations, *The Unfolding Forest Transition In China And Lessons For The Future* (2021) (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.09.162>).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Reuters, Shanghai, July 21st 2022, *China Solar Installations More Than Double In The First Half*. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/china-solar-installations-more-than-double-first-half-assn-2022-07-21/>.

¹⁷ The New York Times, *China's Pledge To Become Carbon Neutral By 2060: What It Means* (202) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/23/world/asia/china-climate-change.html>.

¹⁸ Skeptical Science, *Rupert Murdoch Doesn't Understand Climate Change Basics And That's A Problem* <https://skepticalscience.com/rupert-murdoch-doesnt-understand-climate-basics.html> Missing video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6LaCDnIcSg>.

¹⁹ BBC News, *Climate Change: The US Formally Withdraws From The Paris Agreement* (2020) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-54797743>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Global Times, *US Stealing Syrian National Treasure Is A Long-term Crime*: (14th Sept 2022) <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202209/1275233.shtml>.

²² World Bank, *GDP Current US\$ United States* (2022) <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=US>.

Research by social scientists from Durham University and Lancaster University shows the US military is one of the largest climate polluters in history, consuming more liquid fuels and emitting more CO₂ than most countries.²³

The US military is the biggest single consumer of fossil fuels worldwide and the vigour with which it promotes and defends its own self-interest within American politics is a testament to the constitutional tolerance of the 'lobbying' industry²⁴.

In the US Supreme Court's ruling of *Citizens United VS Federal Electoral Commission (FEC)* 2010 the individual's First Amendment right to free speech was bestowed upon the corporation, allowing unlimited private funding for political campaigns, followed by *McCutcheon Vs FEC* (2014) which removed the limits on individual political campaign contributions.

The net result of this can be seen in the lowering of standards of political discourse since 2010. There is no evidence of any 'green' thinking or environmentally conscious policies enacted by the US government since 2010, the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill notwithstanding²⁵, that being more of a PR exercise, adding "incentives" to already existing programmes with literally trillions of as yet unprinted US\$'s.

The USA's unilateral withdrawal from the Paris Agreement set back the international effort to combat global warming dramatically, instead it leads the world in per capita oil consumption at 29,476 kWh per annum, six times higher than China's 5885 kWh²⁶. According to the Economist 'green power is not just failing to boom, it is going bust'²⁷ so any attempt at a market driven approach to the development of green power has failed.

So, even though there are criticisms of the Chinese approach, China demonstrates commitment to long term concrete actions mitigating climate change, whereas the USA does not the USA demonstrates the opposite.

Global Development.

Having used the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement as yardsticks for commitment to environmental issues, for this section we will use the Millennium Development Goals as our standard for developmental excellence.²⁸ These very specific set of goals produced 'the most successful anti-poverty movement in history'²⁹ and since they were established for the millennium and measured 15 years later, provide real evidence that that was in fact the case.

There were originally 8 goals, re-iterated here for reference: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, to achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women (ensure the education of girls), to reduce child mortality, to improve maternal health, to combat

²³ Lancaster University, <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/news/us-military-consumes-more-hydrocarbons-than-most-countries-with-a-massive-hidden-impact-on-the-climate>.

²⁴ Federal election Commission, *Citizens United VS FEC* (2010) <https://www.fec.gov/legal-resources/court-cases/citizens-united-v-fec/>.

²⁵ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/10/28/build-back-better-framework/>.

²⁶ Our World In Data, *Per Capita Oil Consumption, 2021* <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/per-capita-oil>.

²⁷ The Economist, *Why America's Clean Energy Movement Is Stuck* (may 19th 2022) <https://www.economist.com/business/2022/05/19/why-americas-clean-energy-industry-is-stuck>.

²⁸ United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals And Beyond* (2015) <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>.

²⁹ Ibid.

HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, to ensure environmental stability and establish a global partnership for development.

That will render a historic view of this century's achievements, going forward it is worth using the revised and updated 2030 Agenda for sustainable development³⁰ which aims to continue that work with 17 sustainable development goals and 169 different targets, announced in 2015 and targeting 2030 at this stage in the plan we should be able to find evidence of commitment and support.

China:

On April 1st 2022 the World Bank reported that the number of people in China with incomes below \$1.90 per day had fallen by close to 800 million. They said: 'With this, China has contributed close to three-quarters of the global reduction in the number of people living in extreme poverty'³¹ which is why the UN's Millennium Goals succeeded.

It is worth considering the collateral benefits of poverty reduction on some of the other development goals: for example alleviating poverty reduces child mortality and improves maternal health; which in turn inhibits the spread of disease, but not to forget that the greatest return on investment was the education of girls.³² Eastern, Southern and South East Asia have achieved gender parity in primary and secondary education³³ all of these efforts improve the collective well-being.

There are many factors behind the Chinese success in poverty alleviation some of the efforts predating the establishment of the Millennium Goals and all of them tied intricately into the development of China which was going on apace at the time with record levels of urbanisation and industrialisation throughout the 21st Century.

The One Belt One Road (一带一路 yi da yi lu) (OBOR) initiative also contributes to global and particularly Asian and African development. Commerce between China and the Maritime Silk Road countries now accounts for 20% of China's foreign trade.³⁴ The Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) launched with a capitalisation of US\$ 100 billion, underpins the activities of the 150 or so members of OBOR. This is world changing in its magnitude, the World Bank estimates grudgingly a 4.1% increase in trade between the members and predicts that by 2040 it will be adding US\$7.1 trillion to global GDP annually

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³⁰ UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda For Sustainable Development* (25th September 2015) <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/291/89/PDF/N1529189.pdf?OpenElement>.

³¹ World Bank, *Lifting 800 Million People Out Of Poverty* <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/04/01/lifting-800-million-people-out-of-poverty-new-report-looks-at-lessons-from-china-s-experience>.

³² Reference here:

³³ United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report* (2015) p.1. https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20PR%20Regional%20Asia.pdf.

³⁴ Nipuni Perera, 'China's One Road One Belt Initiative: Implications For Sri Lanka' *Talking Economics* (22nd June 2016) <https://www.ips.lk/talkingeconomics/2016/06/22/chinas-one-belt-one-road-initiative-implications-for-sri-lanka/>.

USA:

In May 2022 Joe Biden toured the ASEAN countries offering the “Indo Pacific Economic Framework” in order to “compete” with the “threat” of OBOR. It wasn’t an economic treaty rather an agreement that ‘seeks to set standards on supply chains, worker protections, decarbonisation and anti-corruption’. It didn’t carry much in the way of funding support, there were no takers.³⁵

External development efforts aside has the USA’s own economic growth contributed to the development of the world? The USA’s economic development has been in decline. The number of Americans living in middle income families declined from 61% in 1971 to 50% by 2015 whilst the lowest income tier grew from 16% in 1971 to 20%. The number of upper income bracket grew from 4% to 9% whilst *their* income grew by 47%.³⁶

The Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) was the Obama Administration’s serious attempt to provide an umbrella trade organisation³⁷ between the USA and Asia (excluding China) but it failed despite the high hopes attached to it. Admiral Samuel Locklear of the US Navy’s Pacific Command said:

.....
‘The TPP establishes a rules-based economic order that will become the foundation for the world we want – a world governed by rule of law, transparent and predictable procedures and in a climate free of intimidation’.³⁸
.....

Had it succeeded it would have been represented about 40% of global GDP, the would be signatories were Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. Nobody wanted to sign it for two main reasons, firstly its content was secret and secondly, it mainly focussed on intellectual property and financial regulations and it elevated the rights of American corporations above the rights of the nation state. Julian Assange described it thus:

.....
‘If you read, write, publish, think, listen, dance, sing or invent; if you farm or consume food; if you’re ill now or might one day be ill, the TPP has you in its crosshairs’.³⁹
.....

Other than Biden’s Indo Pacific Framework, there are currently no instances of US external development oriented infrastructure projects anywhere in the world to my knowledge. But there have been some major infrastructure destruction projects for consideration:

Iraq:

On 19th March 2003 the USA together with others invaded Iraq causing subsequently between 100,000 and 700,000 unnecessary civilian deaths, including many children. The USA bombed civilian infrastructure including, electricity supply installations, Iraqi Media Outlets, (civilian)

³⁵AljaZeera News, *Biden Begins Asia Tour Aimed At Boosting Indo-Pacific Ties* (20th May 2022) <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/20/biden-heads-to-asia-to-show-us-commitment-despite-ukraine-crisis>.

³⁶ Pew Trusts.org, *How The American Middle Class Has Changed In The Past Five Decades* <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/trust/archive/fall-2022/how-the-american-middle-class-has-changed-in-the-past-five-decades>.

³⁷The White House: *What You Need To Know About President Obama’s Trade Agreement*, (2017) <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/economy/trade>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Jana Kasperkevic, ‘You Down With TPP? An Explainer On Obama’s ‘Secret’ Trade Pact’ *The Guardian*, (12th May 2015) (<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/may/12/trans-pacific-partnership-explainer>).

telecommunications, government facilities and others using both precision guided missiles and (illegal) cluster munitions⁴⁰.

Syria:

Estimates vary between 400,000 and 600,000 civilians deaths, not to mention the refugee crisis caused by the destruction of housing, electricity, water and telecommunications utilities, described as ‘the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis in our time’⁴¹ by the UN’s High Commissioner For Refugees. Between 2010 and 2018 Syria’s annual GDP had been reduced by 50%. 17.5% of the nation’s housing had been destroyed and the infrastructure damage is estimated at US\$ 117.7 billion.⁴² The bulk of the infrastructure damage was caused by the US Air Forces, the remainder by its allies.⁴³

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⁴⁰ Off Target, *The Conduct Of The War And Civilian Casualties In Iraq* (Dec 2003)
<https://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/usa1203/4.5.htm>.

⁴¹ Vision Of Humanity, *The Economic Cost Of The War In Syria From 2007 to 2019*. (2021)
<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/the-economic-cost-of-conflict-in-syria/>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

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Conclusion:

In attempting to evaluate this question we have looked at recent history, current actions and policies and future planning.

Global warming mitigation:

China has taken many concrete steps to switch its economy to renewable energy with the goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2060 including plans for 36 low carbon cities, 81 new energy cities and 8 new energy industrial parks. In 2022, 31% of new car production was EVs.⁴⁴

The USA's 2022 Climate, Health and Tax Bill aims to reduce carbon emissions by 40% of 2005 levels by 2030 (China had already achieved a 46% reduction in 2018) with the use of incentives and tax breaks, but it lacks any concrete plans to promote the development of low carbon energy. In 2022 only 4% of North American car production was EVs.⁴⁵

Global Development:

China's Belt And Road initiative has already been instrumental in the development of road and rail infrastructure all over Asia and in parts of Africa resulting in economic growth, the expansion of trade and job creation. By March 2022 147 countries had joined the BRI, 25 from East Asia & Pacific, 6 from South East Asia, 35 from Europe and Central Asia, 18 from the Middle East and North Africa and 43 countries from Sub-Saharan Africa.⁴⁶

America has literally nothing to show. Katie Tubb⁴⁷ the US analyst referenced in the introduction to this document, pointed out the need to help the growing economies of the world as a necessary part of a low carbon future, which ironically is precisely what the BRI is doing. If the USA wants to compete with China, why doesn't it compete in this field? It doesn't.

General Conclusion:

Within the framework of globally agreed to and measurable goals, China is the most engaged and therefore China will be the most important to the future of humanity in the 21st Century. China, even with all its flaws, is a country run not only for the benefit of its own people, but also for the people of the world, especially the developing world.

⁴⁴Mark Kane, 'China: Plug-In Car Sales Climbed To Over 400,00 In May 2022', *Inside EVs*, (2022)
<https://insideevs.com/news/594260/china-plugin-car-sales-may-2022/>.

⁴⁵ Bloomberg. *Just 4% of North American Car Production Is Electric* (27th Sept 2022)
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-09-27/just-4-of-north-american-car-production-is-electric?leadSource=uverify%20wall>.

⁴⁶ Green Finance And Development Centre, *Countries of the Belt And Road Initiative*. (2022)
<https://greenfdc.org/countries-of-the-belt-and-road-initiative-bri/?cookie-state-change=1665316588956>.

⁴⁷BBC News, *Climate Change: US Formally Withdraws From The Paris Agreement*, (2020)
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