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Security Nexus Perspectives

CHINA'S MANIPULATIVE USE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

By Deon Canyon*

In 2014, following a [climate deal](#) between the United States and China, President Obama [announced](#) his aim to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions 26-28% below 2005 levels by 2025, and President Xi Jinping of China reiterated the [Paris Agreement commitment](#) by saying that Chinese carbon dioxide emissions would peak by 2030 or earlier. China's [stance](#) was that the impacts of climate change "pose a huge challenge to the survival and development of the human race" and that China is "one of the most vulnerable countries to the adverse impacts of climate change." By 2016 the [results were positive](#), with China cutting the use of coal by 3.7% and reducing emissions by 1 to 2%. This was [attributed](#) to slower growth due to a shift from industrialization to service industries and the use of less carbon-intensive technology.

China has got away with being the [world's largest carbon dioxide emitter since 2006](#) by claiming that it is only fair to view pollution by per capita quantities. Using this flawed logic, [Palau](#), a tiny Pacific Island nation, would rank as a higher offender. The initial positive decreases and claims that China would shortly become a global leader in [grassroots green technology](#) took it off the climate change radar.

This clever framing was so effective that China began to be viewed as a [global leader](#) on climate change because of these goals and its [leadership](#) in solar power and electric car sales. However, [3 short years later](#), China's greenhouse gas emissions exceeded the emissions of all developed nations combined. The difference is so marked that the same is almost true even when making a [per capita comparison](#).

Although China made great advances in [renewable energy](#), its drive to industrialize and surpass the U.S. and European Union economically placed its climate and sustainability [agenda](#) firmly in the propaganda bin. Even as the world has progressively [reduced](#) its reliance on coal for energy, [China has taken advantage](#) of the lower demand for coal by increasing its reliance on coal. Half of all global coal development and a quarter of all new coal projects throughout the world are financed by China. At the same time, China has

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used its manufacturing capacity and failures of governance in western nations to [dominate the renewable energy](#) market, basically reaping all the economic rewards that stem from other nations leaving coal behind.

China [pledged](#) its desire in 2020 to increase emission reductions to reach carbon neutrality by 2060. However, the lack of details left some with the distinct impression that these [targets](#) would not be attained. In 2021, President Xi Jinping [continued to spin](#) China as a global leader beating its climate change targets, reporting a 48% reduction in “carbon intensity” compared to 2005 and a 15.3% non-fossil energy consumption rate. From 2021 to 2025, he announced, China plans to control and curb its coal consumption. Latest 2020 results from the [Rhodium Group on China's greenhouse gas emissions](#) show that this is simply not true. While China narrowly met its Copenhagen Accord goals of reducing carbon intensity, [it actually increased emissions by 40%](#) since the Accord in 2009! The Paris Agreement is in danger of failing because it basically allows China to “[emit with abandon until at least 2030](#)” despite China agreeing to [reduce 2030 emissions by 60-65%](#).

China has always believed that it should be [allowed to pollute without restraint](#) until it reaches the same state of development as other western nations. Now that China's economy has surpassed western nations, it could be expected that it would show some restraint and rapidly curb its emissions. However, now that the new U.S. administration seeks more cooperation in climate change with China, a recent commentator said, “[China might say there's a climate crisis in a non-binding joint statement with the United States, but its real goal is to become the world's dominant power](#)”. Put bluntly, China has ambitions of expansion that override any reduction in pollution, so why should we believe them again?

China's economic climate strategy runs deep and has taken advantage of legitimate climate concerns and changes in policies and practices in other nations. Rather than seeking ways to reign China into a sensible global climate agreement, the U.S. and other developed nations should recognize the fact that China is behaving as a rogue state in its use of irregular warfare tactics. Political agreements are only tools for manipulation to nations such as China, with such a strong Machiavellian attitude.

As usual, in their effort to do the right thing, U.S. policymakers are being taken advantage of and are far behind when it comes to [counter-Goldilocks Power](#) actions. As China [targets](#) U.S. defense, energy, and finance sectors and seeks control of essential materials used related technologies, the priority should be to proactively identify ways to mitigate China's economic climate engine.

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