

**CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT:
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Penn Project on the Future of U.S.-China Relations presents the following findings and recommendations from its Climate and Environment group. The [policy papers](#) on which they are based, a [video of the October 23rd webinar](#) featuring these authors, and additional information can be found on the Project [website](#).

Banning Coal: A Modest Proposal For U.S.-China Climate Cooperation

[Alex L. Wang](#), UCLA Law School

Findings:

1. China's ambitious target of carbon neutrality by 2060 stands in stark contrast to the Trump administration's climate change policies that include withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, rolling back domestic environmental standards, and rejecting the scientific consensus about global warming.
2. Although significant obstacles remain, China is more likely to be able to achieve carbon neutrality than commonly supposed. China's leaders see climate targets as a tool for achieving their own economic, political, and environmental objectives—especially as the fundamentals of renewable energy have improved dramatically, while coal has become less competitive.
3. Climate change is an area in which cooperation between the United States and China may be attractive and achievable. As China adopts measures to address climate change, the United States' continued failure to act, and cooperate with China, will weaken the economic and political standing of the U.S. relative to China. But even if the two countries cooperate on climate change, competition over the economic and political benefits of their efforts will continue.
4. The increasing severity of climate impacts (e.g., fires, storms, flooding, drought), the economic opportunities from a transition to a low-carbon economy, and the potential for each country to build political capital at home and abroad all render unilateral action more feasible and inaction more costly.

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Recommendations:

1. The United States and China should issue a joint climate change announcement in advance of the November 2020 UN climate meeting in Glasgow, Scotland (COP 26) to set mid-century carbon neutrality goals. Such a renewed effort at bilateral cooperation would provide a critical boost to global efforts at climate action.
2. The U.S. needs to regain the initiative in climate action by announcing its own 2045 carbon neutrality goal, and by implementing a domestic program that reduces carbon emissions, bolsters the economy, and benefits the U.S. workforce.
3. Although climate collaboration at the subnational level has continued during the Trump administration, U.S. efforts to achieve carbon neutrality should reinvigorate collaboration at all levels of government, as well as through academic institutions, civil society organizations, and private companies.

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Future U.S.-China Cooperation on Climate Change: Working Towards a Green New Deal

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Findings:

1. The U.S. government's decisions to withdraw from international agreements on climate change have undermined trust in the United States' engagement in global climate governance. Regardless of the outcome of the 2020 presidential election, the United States will not be able to quickly resume leadership of the international effort to address climate change. The key will be to demonstrate political will through rapid domestic action first.
2. China and other countries have moved ahead in addressing climate change without American leadership. Nevertheless, in the absence of U.S. engagement, progress globally has been slow. Without a step change in commitments, it will not be possible to meet global climate goals.
3. Despite these changes at the international level, U.S. cooperation with China on environmental concerns has continued at the subnational level, through state and local governments, business, and NGOs.
4. The U.S. and China have the opportunity to put forth more congruent policies through the increased interest in industrial policy in the United States. These policies are often under the rubric of the Green New Deal, but essentially refer to any group of policies that approach climate change by incentivizing climate-friendly businesses. Chinese policy has always leaned heavily in this direction.

Recommendations:

1. To rebuild trust and foster international cooperation on the issue of climate change, the United States should work to build winning coalitions in support of a green industrial policy. The U.S. should use policymaking to recover from the current recession as an opportunity to do so.
2. Bold U.S. domestic policy is the best foundation for resuming leadership in the international climate effort. A green industrial policy approach will ensure that the U.S. has domestic support for such leadership.
3. The United States should build on existing subnational cooperation with China on climate change, while acknowledging that the United States and China will be competing to advance their own green industrial policies. Such competition will benefit the global fight against climate change by reducing the costs of green options.

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Why We Can't Fix the Climate Crisis Without China

Jonas Nahm, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies

Findings:

1. China has unique skills in manufacturing innovation in clean tech industries necessary to quickly reverse carbon emissions trends. No other economy is likely to replicate these capacities in time to avoid the worst consequences of climate change.
2. To date, marketable clean energy technologies have resulted from international collaboration. Partnering with, and learning from, China's innovations will remain important even if there is a re-shoring of American manufacturing. The most efficient and effective approach in the near term will be for U.S. innovators to work with Chinese producers in bringing new energy technologies to market at prices that compete with existing energy infrastructure.
3. Although there are risks in collaborating with Chinese firms on the development and commercialization of clean energy technologies, intellectual property theft has not been, thus far, a serious problem in this sector. China has made some progress in leveling the playing field for foreign firms, but more needs to be done.

Recommendations:

1. The United States should build on its leadership in clean energy research and development. By accelerating these efforts—including next-generation solar technologies, advanced battery chemistries, new building materials, smart grid technologies, and software to manage complex energy systems—the U.S. will best defend its technological leadership in areas critical for addressing the climate crisis.
2. The United States should view the current recession as an opportunity to improve conditions for clean energy supply chains in the United States. Competition from, and a desire to reduce dependence on, China should motivate the United States to support domestic clean energy manufacturing. This requires increasing financial support for the effort, as well as investing in the vocational training and technical colleges necessary to provide skilled labor for expanding the domestic clean energy industry.
3. Washington should continue to press Beijing to end remaining discrimination against foreign firms and provide better support for American low carbon energy technology firms working with Chinese partners. The United States should continue investing in currently available clean energy technology to reduce carbon emissions—even if manufacturing is located in China—by upgrading the power grid, deploying new transportation systems, increasing the use of renewable energy, and retrofitting buildings. These efforts will create American jobs in construction, installation, maintenance, and related service industries.