

Example of european and american approach to international climate change researc...

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European and American Approach to International Climate Change

The issue pertaining to climate change has been a long-standing problem to the international community since the onset of scientific studies showcasing that anthropogenic climate change is gradually destroying the ozone layer, causing havoc in the weather patterns and fostering what is now known as climate change. With the studies revealing horrendous predictions pertaining to climate change should it continue in the next few years, the international community immediately sprang into action and formulated plans to ensure that climate change's impact is reduced around the globe. While the international community had indeed begun to create methods to reduce the impact of such issue, the leadership of the movement is confused between the United States and the European Union as both nations have shown great influence over the international climate change action. However, the European Union is considered the leader in climate change initiative for the international community today as the United States had stirred against a unified international approach to climate change due to domestic foreign policy influences and a change in national interests.

The United States was primarily the leader in international efforts against climate change especially in the 1970s and 1980s as US environmentalists provided the required pressure to influence the government to adopt the most 'ambitious domestic environmental regulations' that has yet to be seen in the globe. With the adoption of such environmental regulation, the US had enforced a strict enforcement of policies regarding climate change even in the international arena. These strict efforts and active enthusiasm

over climate change policies is reflected in the US' support over the 1972 United Nations Conference on Human Environment and with treaties such as the 1972 London Convention on Dumping at Sea, 1973 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, and the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. The Montreal Protocol is considered the cornerstone of environmental protection in the period as it specifies protection of the stratospheric ozone layer, a policy amplified by the US' support as the EU, then, was indecisive over its position over the issue. The US Central Intelligence Agency had even commissioned separate climate change studies to ensure that the studies were not faked given the 1970s global cooling scare that shook the international community and to assert its presence over the problem. The reports have signaled that food production would indeed fall around the globe, which the US can use as a means to promote their global authority in aiding ailing nations. It is then believed that aside from the environmentalist presence in the US, the US' international action on climate change is also influenced by its fantasies of dominate the perceived food shortage as the major donor for food aid. However, the US slowly lost its voice over the international climate change policies on the onset of the 1990s, removing the backing of the country to several important international environmental treaties already present in the international arena. The decline of power can be attributed to the losing influence of environmentalists within the United States legislative and the changing interest of the US regarding such policy. Coincidentally, the decline of the US interest on climate change protection is also the beginning for the US' growing interest to adopt countermeasures to stop the growth of

international policies pertaining to climate change to develop significantly. With the US opposition against the international climate change action threatening the current leadership (now held by the EU), the country had opposed several international environmental treaties which amplified its growing military and political dominance over the rest of the international community. Some of the treaties the US had vehemently ignored after its change of heart over climate change are the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Anti-Personnel Land Mine Treaty, and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. The lapse in the US action is also shaped by the domestic foreign policy strategies of the administrations in the period. In the case for both Republican presidents Richard Nixon and Gerard Ford, who both had Democrats leading the Congress, their action against climate change both internationally and domestically were pressured due to the green lobbies, especially around 1969 to 1976. Both administrations were mostly concerned with improving the US' political and economic standing in their reigns, only putting climate change as a minor priority .

In the early 1990s, the US' international environmental policy leadership greatly distanced itself with the European Union in the tenure of George Bush as he refused to accept stronger climate change policies that other signatories from the 1992 UN Conference on the Environment and Development had agreed upon. Bush also refused to sign the International Convention on Biodiversity, clearly emphasizing his domestic foreign policy scheme to be against any policy making that may affect America's economy. Sadly, despite the fact the successors to Bush had pushed for support over biodiversity and climate change policies both in the international and

domestic arena, both Clinton and Gore had to stop their efforts as the US Congress and Senate did not approve several key policies such as the Convention on Biodiversity and the iconic 1997 Kyoto Protocol. The Clinton Administration also had failed in convincing the Congress into supporting emission proposal goals administered throughout the international community, clearly forcing the US to remain as an observer and act on its own accord . The “ observer” and reluctance to environmental policies was also adhered to by George W. Bush and his Republican-dominated Congress as his tenure concentrated on political policies, even being seen as a threat to the international efforts to secure emission reduction. Bush had even used the US’ diplomatic clout to reject the Kyoto Protocol . Currently, the US plays a very conflicted role regarding international climate change action as assessed by analysts as the Obama administration now finds itself in the middle of enduring commitments to stronger climate change action and of sustaining such policies back home as legislation for climate change has significantly diminished. The US Senate and the US Congress now concentrates itself to more immediate concerns such as the economic recession and the lingering war on terror. With the lack of support from the US legislative assemblies, the Obama administration may not have the same fighting power in aiding international climate change initiatives as it would also need to sustain foreign aid and the economic recession .

In the case of the European Union, it had first played a reluctant and indecisive actor when it came to international action against climate change in the early 1960s to the 1980s. The EU only ratified international treaties regarding climate change in the period because the US, who was then

leading the talks on environmental protection, stated that the EU was a reluctant actor to the ongoing negotiations. The reluctance of the EU is yet again reflected in the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer as the EU had only supported the premise of the Protocol because in that period, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy had been staunch supporters of the United States and would mirror their actions on the US' position regarding the issue. In a domestic aspect, the EU's approach to international climate change was mostly subdued on the US' reign in the issue as environmentalists did not have much power as that of the lobbyists in the US. Regulations on environmental protection were also less stringent in the 1970s. However, as the US waned in their leadership role over international climate change, the EU slowly developed its own form of environmental protection advocacies which was shaped by the domestic policies and reform called by the member states. Similar to the US in the 1970s, European green parties slowly dominated the political arena, influencing the government to push for stronger European action on climate change.

The transference of leadership from the US to the EU in the 1990s continued to show as to how much the European green parties influenced the EU's position over climate change. The EU adopted several environmental regulations that is considered today ambitious due to its emission reduction goals and other climate change policies. The EU, through its member states and their legislative assemblies, also ensured that the treaties sustaining the EU would make environmental protection their political and competitive interest both regionally and internationally. As a result, the EU and its

member states made environmental protection the core of its most concerted programs to replace national control over climate change to adhere to international standards. This is all possible due to the EU's capacity to bind its members into adopting a unified policy . Several amendments, directives, and the European Court of Justice Rulings are a testament to the EU's growing international role in climate change as it provided the EU the power to represent all member countries in climate change talks. The unified power of the EU was immediately represented in the 1992 in Rio, backing powerful environmental treaties in the process . The 1997 Kyoto Protocol became the lynchpin that cemented the EU's role as the leader in environmental protection and climate change prevention as the EU pushed for the idealism that ' the main responsibility for global warming lay with the developed states and that therefore, they should set an example for the rest of the world by cutting down emissions'. The EU's member states immediately set their GHG level goals, pressuring other countries to follow the same initiative. The EU also defied the US in pushing for the mandatory emission cuts regionally as flexible mechanisms pushed by the US can use the mechanisms to buy their way out of their commitments . At present, the EU continues to act actively against the problem of climate change as the institutions sustaining the Union's position have been sustained by environmental competences that implicates that the EU's action on external environmental policy is supported by the treaties and represents the entire Union .

While both nations clearly led in specific periods as leaders in the international action against climate change, it is clearly visible that their

approaches had greatly varied throughout the years. In the case of the United States, it had changed from an active country fighting against climate change to a country that prefers to concentrate on improving its image as a political/economic power and have its own means in aiding climate change reduction. The US Congress and the Senate, plus the past administrations also influenced the American initiative as the ruling party and President influenced as to how the US would act internationally. The changing ruling party in the US Congress and Senate also affected the US' domestic foreign policy over environmental protection, ensuring that national interest is to benefit the US' international image. On the other hand, the EU had evolved from a reluctant actor to an international leader in international climate change as it took over the helm of leadership from the US. With the member states supporting the EU through its unified environmental policies, its international approach is stronger and well-supported given that its domestic foreign policy cements the importance of environmental protection to the European region. Clearly, this separates the EU to the US as an active and strong leader in environmental protection.

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