Territorializing the Issue of Climate Change: Creating a climate Space

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***Abstract*—** The impact of climate change is faced by the world together and does not affect people within limited boundaries. It is sometimes known as the problem which is "beyond borders". But the problem of Climate Change has been territorialized by the world nations and today the issue has been securitized. The blame game exists since the negotiations over the Climate Change have been started on international front. The United Nations Framework Conventions on Climate Change have never really resolved the issue; the failure of recent Doha round is one such example where some of the developed countries have backed out the Kyoto Protocol. Their construction of climate spaces by analyzing the impact, mitigation and management of climate change from a nation's perspective have further increased the problem. The greed of economic game has augmented the problem by demanding the emission cuts from the other nations despite of the higher emission of carbon in one's own country. The paper attempts to show the ways in which the issue of Climate Change has been territorialized in the world politics. It tries to present the issue by analyzing the present debate between developed and developing nations through the UNFCCs over the period of time.

***Keywords*—** Borders, Climate Change, Green House Gas emissions, Territorialization

I. Introduction

TODAY, the thinking on environment rests on the notion of the boundary. For instance, deterioration of forests, soil, and freshwater ecosystems are local problems because they are within a boundary. But some problems are not limited to a certain boundary but are beyond borders. For example, issues like air pollution, ozone depletion and global environment problems including climate change are all cross border problems. Therefore, the location of a certain issue or problem within a boundary labels its character. The International Relation discipline grew its interest in environment only when the issue of climate change and environment related problems started overstepping the national boundaries.

In a bordered world, governing the climate has become a main challenge for the making of climate policy. The report of World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) stated that "The Earth is one, but the world is not". This is visible in the idea of the mismatch between the environment and the politics, where the environment (Earth) is one, but the politics (world) is not. It is quite clear that there have been ample differences among countries over the responsibility for Green House Gases((GHG) emissions, their commitment to reduce GHGs under the Kyoto Protocol (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,1992) and their complications in meeting these commitments.

The role of UNFCCC in dealing with the Climate Change issue in a bordered world has been remarkable. The UNFCCC is an international treaty which was formulated at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) also known as 'Earth Summit' at Rio de Janerio, June, 1992. This treaty aims at stabilizing GHG concentrations in the atmosphere at the level which would prevent the climate system. It is legally non-binding treaty which sets no mandatory limits on individual nations for reducing GHG emissions. Rather, the treaty includes Kyoto protocol and updates to provide legally binding agreements for developed countries to reduce their green house emissions. The countries who are members of this treaty are known as 'Parties', which meet annually in Conferences of the Parties (COP) to deal with the issue of climate change. Currently there are 192 parties. The key aspect of UNFCCC is that the parties should step in to protect the climate system "on the basis of equality and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities". The principle of 'common but differentiated responsibility' includes, first, the common responsibilities of the parties to protect the environment or a part of it at regional and global levels, second, the need to take into account the contributions of each party to the problem and its ability to reduce, control and prevent the threat. Another aspect underlining the UNFCCC is the 'polluter pays principle'. This means that the party or parties responsible for producing maximum pollution is/are also responsible for the damage done to the climate system.

Under UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol (KP) was designed towards developing global strategies to deal with climate change. But this mechanism did not work as expected and failed on a global level during several COP meetings. These failures can be explained in a few ways that KP was seeking in order that the national policies be adapted to global needs. It did not consider the economic, social, political and other problems which could hinder the policies to meet the goal. The national governments were not willing to implement the protocol due to either conflicts with civil society, local authorities and business community. Another reason for its failure was that some of the developing countries, most contributing to the emissions, were not included in the Annex 1 (including the list of developed countries contributing the most to the GHG emissions) list and hence it became the issue

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of arguments in the protocol.

In December of 1997, 160 members of UNFCCC met in Kyoto, Japan for the COP 3 to line up some targets that would help mitigate the effects of climate change through limiting the GHG emissions. Majority of the countries signed the Kyoto Protocol. The general approach was that U.S. would have a 3 per cent GHG reduction. Most of the Annex 1 countries like Canada, Japan and European Union (EU) also took commitments. EU took the regional approach to combat climate change. Whereas, Canada negotiated by staying 1 per cent behind the U.S. and set a goal of 2 per cent reduction in emissions. In 2001. U.S. announced not to ratify the KP due to the fact that potential pollutant countries like China and India were not included in Annex 1. In this scenario, the Annex 1 countries would need to pay for these countries' responsibilities. The back out by the leader, USA, who was going to absorb the high cost, exposed this protocol to a setback. At the COP 7 in Canada, Canadian government pledged for receiving credits to export natural gas to U.S. so that America doesn't burn more GHG intensive oil and coal. But from the beginning Canada and other commercial parties of U.S. failed to reach the KP targets. EU had committed their goals because it had negotiated as a region rather than separate countries.

At the COP 13 in Bali, the only achievement was to draft a 'roadmap' for future agreements. Similarly, at COP 15, in Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009, the results were not as expected. The final deal pledged for maintaining the temperature change under 2 degree Celsius. China and India refused to committing reduction goals, even though both had considerably increased GHGs. Brazil proposed to reduce deforestation up to 80 per cent by 2030; whereas, Mexico offered the Green Fund to help developing economies adapt and mitigate the climate change problem. This COP committed to support projects to avoid deforestation and degradation, and to develop financial mechanisms as Green Fund like Mexico. COP 16 organized in Cancun, Mexico, tried to deal with the topics that were not discussed deeply in the earlier meeting. The goal was to draft a new version of KP. But this meeting too was not as successful as expected.

COP 18 in Doha, Qatar, 2012, failed again to fight concretely against rising temperatures, droughts, heat waves, and rising sea levels. The historic KP treaty was hit by a setback by the withdrawal of Russia, Japan and Canada. The UN climate talks failed to deliver increased cuts to carbon pollution. Whereas, nations pulling out- Russia, Japan and Canada said it is meaningless to take on new targets when emerging nations have none.

The recent 19th COP in Warsaw, Poland, 2013, was supposed to be a stepping-stone towards a new global deal to cut emissions. The meeting actually went ahead and all countries agreed to turn up again in Peru, it was a stepping-stone of sorts. The steps taken in the Warsaw looked more like difficult dragging of feet on the same old path.

The lack of legitimacy of the Kyoto Protocol resulted in its failure. If we try to see a broader picture of this climate issue and the blame game that has ensued, than most of the countries are not yet ready to take the blame for climate change and GHG emissions. This blame game has been a persistent irritant between the developed and developing nations.

From the dawn of the global discussions on dealing with climate change, approach of equity have been the centre of the debate. But the term equity has been interpreted differently by different nations and has evolved over time beyond the borders. During the UNFCCC's negotiations , the argument was made by the developing countries that the developed countries have been responsible for the historic emissions of GHGs from the very beginning of the industrial revolution and have economically benefitted from the fossil fuels' burning. Hence, they should carry the greatest responsibility to reduce GHG emissions and not the developing countries. This argument by developing countries led to the adoption of "common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR) in the UNFCCC. The developed countries accepted this principle of CBDR in the UNFCCC and than were listed in the Annex 1 of the convention. This argument was further admitted in the Kyoto Protocol, 1997, where the developed countries (with the exception of USA) accepted the binding targets for reductions in GHG emissions. This time developed countries were expected to provide funding and other resources to developing countries to help them reduce their emissions and also helping them adapt to Climate change. But over time, developed countries argued that major emitters, whether they are included in Annex 1 or not, should be held to binding commitments to take action on climate change. The U.S., while committing to a target at Kyoto (under the administration of Clinton), withdrew its agreement after G. Bush became president. Interestingly, as mentioned earlier, before withdrawing they asked why should they take on a binding target when China was excused even after it has become the biggest emitter. Similarly, the developed countries pointed out the emission trends of developing countries over the past two decades: In 1990, the developing countries produced one-third of annual global emissions, and today they emit about 50 per cent of them. Projections also indicate that by 2030 developing countries could produce as much as 7 per cent of total global emissions. But some developing countered that the accumulation of emissions since the industrial revolution created our current climate problems-between 1880 and 2000, 79 per cent of GHG emissions came from the developed countries. The counter argument from developed countries is that they had been responsible for three quarters of global emissions in last two decades, but now they are responsible for less than half emissions, while now the BASIC countries (China, India, Brazil and South Africa), a new group of rapidly developing countries, account for about half of global emissions (where China has overtaken the U.S. as the world's biggest emitter). Therefore, their argument is that it would be fair if the BASIC countries also take on legal binding commitment in the future.

There is another group of countries apart from the developed and developing countries which contribute little to emissions and lack financial and other resources to adapt to climate change. These countries are called the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Alliance of small island states. The addition of this third group in this argument divides

the world on a different basis. The demand of these countries, which account for less than 5 per cent of global emissions, is that all the other countries who are responsible for the 95 per cent of emissions (including BASIC countries) must take on the responsibility to cut their emissions.

Such realities and contradictions raise questions about how to judge between the victim and the culprit and how can equity be practiced by doing so. The issue of climate change has become the prime example of global scale ecological interdependence. International relation takes the concept of bounded space as its point of departure since climate change is not just a transboundary issue, it is an issue beyond borders. Some transboundary pollution problems can be framed in terms of foreign interventions and clashes among competing sovereignty claims (Litfin, 1998). For instance, a study published in Nature magazine, by V. Ramanathan, an atmospheric scientist in California, reported that aerosols locked up in 'Brown Clouds' over Asia are significantly contributing to regional warming. Atmospheric brown clouds originate in urban centres of Beijing to Los Angeles and are known to travel thousands of kilometers, transported by the high winds. Ramanathan wrote "we are each a backyard to someone else, and we are polluting every other person's backyard". This clearly shows how pollution is essentially an evil that moves swiftly beyond borders.

Similarly, the climate change issue and the UNFCCC wrestle between the tension of sovereign territoriality and responsibility beyond borders. Degradation as linked to forests, freshwater and soils are seen as local problems, acidification is seen as a transboundary pollution and ozone depletion is seen as the global environmental problem. The fact that oceans and terrestrial land act as 'sinks' for GHGs, this idea has recently been the subject of negotiations in the climate conventions. The political logic that enters these spaces is that while the Ocean is an 'outside space' owned by nobody, terrestrial land is claimed by some 'states'. The territorialization of space can be comprehensible with climate negotiations by transforming the global cycles into national sinks. It was argued by the Annex 1 parties that by actively enhancing the natural sinks in biomass within national borders could fight the buildup of atmospheric carbon and buy time for the development of low emission technologies. Therefore, in the climate issue, the atmosphere becomes controlled, managed, viewed and bordered as a limited resource. The movement of money, people and pollution across boundaries are interpreted as indicators of a post- westphalian world, specified and stereotyped as a deterritorialized and borderless political space. Climate change is thus contradicted in this discourse with a spatiality of global politics which is composed as territorial, the distributing up of the world into various political units.

II. Conclusion

Climate change, being a universal problem, tends to get bounded by territories during the efforts to mitigate this problem on a regional level by individual states' efforts. This approach to territorize this issue and compartmentalize nations into different boxes has failed us. The concept of "common but differentiated responsibility" has been used, abused and misused by all parties to extract mazimum advantage for themselves. The basic premise of CBDR was to take into account the practical aspect of the role of nations in fighting climate change but it has rather been used as a tool to wash their hands off from this noble cause. What is now needed is a fresh approach to climate change which involves communities more than political entities called 'states'. We need to move from the existing approach to an approach where civil society, local communities, disadvantaged groups, and people play a pivotal role, in both – forming strategies with a global outlook as well as moving their respective governments to look at this issue as an issue of human existence and not political one-upmanship in global realpolitik. Boundaries cannot cease to exist, but differences can. And that can only happen when, for this common cause, boundaries cease to matter, while existing.

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