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MEMORANDUM FOR SCUSA 73

SUBJECT: CAN THE U.S. LEAD THE INTERNATIONAL FIGHT FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

1. **Issue:** The purpose of this memorandum is to recommend strategic options for promoting US leadership on international climate change action.

2. **Strategic Analysis:**

Vital: Ensure climate resiliency of homeland; secure food, water, mineral, and energy supplies; foster a collaborative relationship with large emitters, especially China and India.

Extremely Important: Ensure stability and security of strategic allies; pursue energy independence.

Important: Improve resilience and stability in less strategically important regions.

3. **Relevant National Interests:**

The emission of greenhouse gasses (GHGs) from anthropogenic sources has contributed to accelerating climate change disruptions that pose an existential threat to the U.S. Climate change is increasing sea level rise, causing more destructive natural disasters, and producing ecosystem collapse around the world. Such impacts will displace millions, disrupt the global economy, enhance food insecurity, and produce greater geopolitical instability.

The Paris Climate Accords established that the worst effects of climate change can be minimized by limiting atmospheric warming to well below 2°C.¹ To accomplish this goal, carbon emissions must be drastically reduced globally. In 2019, the three largest polluters – China, the U.S., the E.U. and India – account for more than half of the world's emissions. As the world's current second-largest emitter, the U.S. must take action to reduce domestic emissions to position itself as a credible international leader on climate change. To this effect, international action must be accompanied by domestic GHG mitigation. We recommend the following two-pronged domestic and international strategies:

4. **Domestic Strategic Options:**

- a. ***Federal Energy Improvement District (EID) Program:*** Federal government to create Energy Improvement Districts to fund locally tailored renewable (geothermal, hydroelectric, wind, solar) energy sourcing.

- b. ***Sustainable Investment and Incentives:*** Promote and supplement the U.S. Government's Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) by offering tax credits and state grant program incentives.
 - c. ***Trade Transitioning Initiative:*** Transition workers from non-renewable energy jobs to fossil-free employment through job retraining and educational opportunities.
5. **International Strategic Options:**
- a. ***US-Led Green Infrastructure Coalition (GIC):*** Department of State in collaboration with public-private partnerships to invest in clean technology transfers with strategic partners and develop green infrastructure at home and abroad; U.S. Office of Foreign Assistance will provide aid to climatically vulnerable regions.
 - b. ***Climate Diplomacy:*** Continue to leverage international institutions to negotiate more ambitious emission reduction goals with high emitters (i.e. China, India).
 - c. ***International Credibility:*** Establish credibility of U.S. climate commitment by remaining consistently involved in international climate agreements and foreign aid commitments.
6. **Implementation:**
- General Approach to Climate Policy:** The U.S. should take lessons from the Montreal Protocol when engaging with international actors. The Protocol was successful in large part because it addressed immediate concerns with a limited and concentrated focus. Identifying situations where an immediate impact can be addressed should be a key focus of U.S. climate policy.
- a. **International Implementation:**
- Climate Diplomacy:*** We recommend that the U.S. renew efforts to coordinate with the world's largest emitters to make stronger commitments to limit GHGs, specifically by leveraging increasingly visible, frequent, and disastrous climate disruption.
- International Credibility:*** U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 Paris Agreement weakened perceived commitment to global climate action and credibility among allies. The U.S. can reestablish its global reputation as a committed climate leader among strategic allies by engaging more actively in international institutions and fulfilling previously unfulfilled commitments to foreign aid.
- Green Infrastructure Coalition:*** The above-mentioned strategies are already being actively pursued by the current administration; however, more can always be done. To this end, we propose an alternative strategy to be jointly pursued. GIC, to be financed and coordinated by the U.S. Department of State, is a network of strategic partners participating in a transfer of clean energy technologies and materials. The U.S. can incentivize the sale and implementation of technologies to states with deposits of vital mineral reserves (i.e., the Lithium Triangle in Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile).² These technologies can improve local environmental and economic outcomes while ensuring the U.S. has access to minerals that reduce domestic GHGs.
- b. **Domestic Implementation:**
- Maintaining Domestic Commitments:*** To become an international leader on climate change, the U.S. must complement international action towards domestic emission mitigation and climate adaptation. The Biden Administration made steps in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which invests in renewable energy sources through tax credits and state grant programs.³ The U.S. government must continue to commit itself to new *and* existing domestic investment and incentive structures that target emissions.

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Energy Improvement Districts: Renewable energy currently serves only 12% of total consumption compared to fossil fuels' 80%. An effective policy targets this skewed distribution. We propose establishing Energy Improvement Districts (EIDs), similar to the existing Transportation Improvement Districts, that provide a framework for states to design renewable energy projects and form the mechanism for federal funding to be distributed to the states. A local lens will enable local governments, NGOs, and indigenous groups to submit proposals that fit their landscapes.

Green Job Transition: Efforts to transition to renewable energy can significantly alter the security of jobs in fossil fuel industries. However, clean energy is estimated to provide twice as many job opportunities as those from fossil fuel sectors.⁴⁵ Deliberate regional transitioning of individuals between fossil fuel hubs and renewables with the support of federal allocation of funds will effectively address concerns about job loss and security.

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¹ "The Paris Agreement | UNFCCC" Unfccc. <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>.

² Ahmad, Samar. "The Lithium Triangle: Where Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia Meet" Harvard International Review, 15 Jan. 2020, <https://hir.harvard.edu/lithium-triangle/>.

³ "Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 | Internal Revenue Service." Accessed November 4, 2022. <https://www.irs.gov/inflation-reduction-act-of-2022>.

⁴ George, Adie Tomer, Joseph Kane, and Caroline. "How Renewable Energy Jobs Can Uplift Fossil Fuel Communities and Remake Climate Politics." *Brookings* (blog), February 19, 2021.

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