



RCAS Commentary

COP30 in Amazon: Fossil Fuel Pact vs National Interests

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RCAS aims to become a leading research institute and think tank on Asian affairs in the Indo-Pacific region. To date, RCAS has conducted research programs on maritime disputes in the South China Sea (SCS), China's relations with the Indo-Pacific states, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), terrorism/counterterrorism in the Afg-Pak region, and so on. It is committed to promoting maritime cooperation, regional integration, and regional peace in the Indo-Pacific region at large.

RCAS has published nearly ten books in Chinese and English and more than 20 papers in SSCI/SCOPUS/CSSCI-indexed journals. Recent English publications include *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2022); *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Contemporary Developments and Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 2022); *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *Territorial Disputes, The Role of Leaders and The Impact of Quad: A Triangular Explanation of China-India Border Escalations* (2023); *Managing the South China Sea Dispute: Multilateral and Bilateral Approaches* (2022); *China-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghanistan: Assessing Key Interests and Implementing Strategies* (2022); *Hedging Against the Dragon: Myanmar's Tangled Relations with China since 1988* (2021); and *China-Pakistan Conventional Arms Trade: An Appraisal of Supplier's and Recipient's Motives* (2020).

RCAS has also published hundreds of articles, and its researchers have been interviewed in various local and international media outlets, such as *The Diplomat* in the United States, *East Asian Forum (EAF)* in Australia, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Jakarta Post* in Indonesia, *Lian He Zao Bao*, *Think China* in Singapore, *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *CGTN*, *Global Times*, *World Affairs* in China. RCAS researchers have actively participated in international conferences or study visits in the United States, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, and other places.

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The COP30 conference, held in Belém, was marked by its location on the outskirts of the Amazon River, which symbolised a shift in global climate politics. Therein, a United Nations climate conference (popularly known as the lungs of the Earth) was organised, in the biggest rainforest on Earth that ever existed. Having high expectations was only natural. Many people hoped that the ecological significance of the Amazon would force the negotiators to take the most drastic step ever: recognising fossil fuels as the culprits of global warming and devising an ultimate means to eliminate them. Instead, COP30 was a cautious, voluntary decision that, in addition to demonstrating the limitations of climate diplomacy, also reflects the continued tug-of-war between collective climate responsibility and national interests.



▲Photo: Collected.

The haggling process was sad, and the 12-hour negotiation took a long time and paved the way for a deal involving 194 countries and territories. The agreement provides additional funding to needy nations and calls on developed nations to triple climate financing to developing nations by 2035. It is a wide success. Countries that are vulnerable to climate change, such as rising sea levels, storms, and drought, have long lamented their inability to adapt and mitigate climate change without adequate financial support. However, the agreement's triumph is deeply deceptive. The deal is not binding, and any party to the contract can opt out at any time. Voluntary undertakings, especially to most developing countries, and, most significantly, to the least developed and small island states, do not offer much assurance against the growing climate crisis.

More to the point, what the agreement fails to state. Although the deal was pushed by over 80 countries vulnerable to climate change, the U.K. and the European Union, the pact does not explicitly address fossil fuels. This omission is not accidental; it was strongly resisted by powerful actors in the fossil fuel industry, such as Saudi Arabia and Russia, who believe that any direct reference to oil, gas, or coal would be an existential threat to their economic status quo. Ultimately, the summit produced no

better than an empty pledge to initiate negotiations to reduce the rate of consumption of fossil fuels. It is a hollow promise that is nowhere near the kind of revolutionary move that scientists have been calling on.

The fact that fossil fuels are not given any specification compromises the entire essence of COP meetings. The UN climate process has been circling the naming of fossil fuels for decades, even though the preponderance of evidence shows they are the primary cause of global warming. They grow increasingly hopeful that the tide will turn; geopolitics and the interests of nations intersect. COP30 was not an exception. The world was again placed in the spotlight on how the security of energy, export sales, and geopolitical leverage are outwitted in the calculus of great powers.

The summit was also inappropriate in its position. The vision of COP30 was one long held by Brazil: an Amazon-centered conference in which the protection of forests, indigenous rights, and the conservation of ecosystems would have been central to climate policy. Nonetheless, the final agreement fails to provide a roadmap for stopping deforestation. This omission was disappointing to Brazil and to environmental groups, which have argued that deforestation reduction cannot be achieved without broader climate mitigation. The Amazon rainforest is gradually approaching its ecological breaking point under increasing pressure from agriculture, mining, and illegal logging. It is contradictory, and more or less paradoxical, that there should be a climate assembling in the Amazon, where deforestation is not discussed, except as a strategy.

The political relations among Latin American states were also evident. Colombia, Panama, and Uruguay denounced the negotiation process, saying there was insufficient transparency during the Brazilian COP presidency and no plenary discussion. Their anger is a manifestation of the building of fault lines in the global South, fault lines that are frequently ignored in mainstream climate politics, which generally demands that the global South be considered as a unit. Instead, COP30 highlighted the divided nature of developing countries regarding the volume and pace of climate ambition, especially within their development agendas.

The other colour that fell upon the top was, more importantly, the absence of the United States, the world's most significant historical carbon emitter and one of the world's most powerful geopolitical actors. Washington's failure to dispatch a representative cast doubt on the agreement's viability. Will the rest of the world cooperate when one of the major emitters is not addressed? Is climate finance a reality? Not only was the morale of diplomats shattered by this, but it also underscored the unpredictability of the great powers' climate pledges.

However, despite the deficiency, the financial investment is an incremental advantage, at least on paper. The developing nations will receive an annual sum of \$120 billion,

pegged to a higher figure of \$300 billion that the wealthy states have already committed. However, this was not a sufficient financial injection. The needy nations were hoping that the \$120 billion would be translated into new funds, not the redistribution of funds already promised. The shift towards deferring additional funding contributed to overall disillusionment, and it is dubious whether COP funding will be delivered at the scale of the climate crisis.

Ultimately, the contradiction revealed at COP30 is the eternal dilemma in the world: the scientific imperative to stop using fossil fuels and the economic interests of nation-states that keep them reliant on them. In the Amazon venue, this contradiction could not be overcome. The necessities of science, which were urgent, came into conflict with political reality, and political realism prevailed. Amid global power struggles, the green transformation of Europe, the expansion of coal in China, the oil politics of the Gulf countries, and the various developmental models of the Latin American region, people are not in unison about what a transition from fossil fuels ought to entail.

Naturally, incrementalism will go on strike and fail to do the job. According to climate scientists, the world is rapidly losing time to keep warming below 1.5 °C. Nevertheless, COP 0 proves that the global society is still missing the most essential step that can be made, the one against fossil fuels. Summits will continue to generate lengthy papers, high hopes, and little action until climate diplomacy becomes honest, grounded in national interests, and establishes institutions strong enough to make powerful states feel their responsibility.

Again, having finished COP30, the Amazon rainforest may be understood as a cause for hope and a caution. Its ecological significance is on a phenomenal scale. However, the reluctance of nations to commit to reducing the use of fossil fuels beyond the frames of sovereignty, profit, and geopolitics should be regarded not only as a sign that climate talks remain behind the curtain of these factors. The world could have agreed, and then the real battle, the one between fossil fuel addiction and the life of the world, would not have been won.

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