

Rethinking leadership: Understanding the roles of the US and China in the negotiation of the Paris Agreement

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ABSTRACT

The study of leadership in International Relations has followed two different paths: work on hegemony and work on different leadership types in international negotiations. Yet there is little overlap between them and no agreement on the distinctive features of leadership and what connects leaders and followers in a collective pursuit. This article critically engages with both literatures and offers a reconceptualization of leadership as a form of legitimated asymmetrical influence that is marked off from domination and performs an important social function in facilitating collective agency towards common goals in a given community. This account is then operationalized in relation to multilateral negotiations to examine and clarify the roles of the US and China in the negotiation of the mitigation provisions of the Paris Agreement. It is shown that the US under the Obama administration performed a sustained but largely transactional leadership role in bringing the parties to an agreement while China's role was predominantly that of a defensive co-operator but with significant moments of shared leadership with the US towards the endgame. The analysis shows that, despite growing international expectations, China, unlike the US, did not see its role as leading the world.

Introduction

The demand for leadership is ubiquitous in international and domestic politics but the supply is invariably disappointing. Indeed, Foley has suggested that 'there is practically no problem that cannot be attributed to an alleged failure of leadership, and no solution that cannot be achieved through an alternative leadership' (Foley 2013, 3). Calls for leadership are pervasive in relation to collective action problems, especially in situations of political gridlock. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of climate change, where the demand for leadership has concentrated on developed states and major emitters and, above all, the US and China, who account for around 40 percent of aggregate CO2 emissions.

The United States (US) and China are both widely recognised as playing ‘a leading role’ in shaping the Paris Agreement 2015 (Parker and Karlsson 2018, 531), and their joint statement on climate change announced in November 2014 (The White House 2014) is commonly singled out as a game changer that enabled the historic agreement. Victor (2016, 138) has suggested that China was ‘[p]erhaps the most pivotal nation in making Paris feasible’ while Gao has claimed that China has moved from a ‘dead weight’ and ‘wrecker’ at Copenhagen to a climate leader at Paris (Gao 2018: 238). The widespread speculation on whether China will fill the ‘leadership vacuum’ created by the Trump administration’s defection from the Paris Agreement assumes that the previous administration had played a leadership role.

Yet these observations beg the crucial question: what exactly is leadership? China’s and the US’s status as the world’s two most significant great powers (G2) and the two biggest greenhouse gas emitters (E2) certainly makes their cooperation indispensable to the effectiveness of the Paris Agreement. But is their great power status, emissions profiles and/or the fact that they cooperated enough to qualify as leadership? In order to clarify their respective roles in the negotiations leading to Paris, this article revisits two fundamental questions: what is leadership, and what form does it take in multilateral negotiations?

The International Relations (IR) literature on leadership has tended to follow two parallel tracks: work on hegemony conducted from a wide range of different theoretical perspectives in IR, and work on diplomatic leadership in regime negotiations, which is mostly grounded in neoliberal institutionalism. The former has been more preoccupied with economic and security orders rather than specific environmental regimes. The latter, which has informed most of the research on leadership in the climate negotiations by global environmental governance (GEG) scholars, has been preoccupied with refining and applying a set of leadership types based on mechanisms of influence at the expense of examining the fundamental nature of the relationship between leaders and followers and what it is that brings them together in a collective pursuit. This article offers a reconceptualization of leadership that addresses this relationship and operationalizes it in relation to large-n, multilateral regime negotiations.

Leadership, in general, is defined as a process of interaction whereby one or more actors (the leaders) exercise asymmetric influence in attracting or negotiating the consent or acquiescence of other parties (the followers), either directly or indirectly, in ways that facilitate collective action towards the achievement of a common purpose in a given community. This conceptualisation understands leadership as a type of legitimated or socially sanctioned asymmetrical influence that is marked off from domination and performs an important social function in facilitating collective action. How leadership is legitimated, and what counts as consent by followers, depends on the collective problem that is addressed and the social and institutional context. In multilateral negotiations, leadership is understood as an artful practice by the political executive of a state, rather than a pre-given attribute of states based on superior capabilities. The political executive may include the Prime Minister or President, relevant ministers and/or lower level diplomats working as a team according to a negotiating strategy, which may be adjusted

over time. While the possession of superior capabilities of the state that is represented by the political executive shapes social expectations of leadership, to qualify as a leader the political executive must demonstrate a commitment to the common purpose and build followership for its proposals in ways that are consistent with the recognized practices and procedures of multilateralism. The virtues of this reconceptualized account of leadership is that, unlike existing accounts in IR, it can be analytically distinguished from domination, success in bargaining, norm entrepreneurship, pioneership and setting a national example.

The discussion unfolds in two parts. Part one highlights the problems with existing accounts of leadership and, drawing on a reinterpretation of the leadership dimension of hegemony, develops an alternative account of leadership and shows how it overcomes these problems. Part Two teases out the evidence that would be required to satisfy the core leadership criteria of asymmetric influence by leaders, common purpose and consent by followers in terms that are relevant to the social and institutional context of multilateral climate negotiations. These criteria are used to guide the empirical assessment of the respective roles of the US and China in the negotiations over the period 2013-2015 leading to the Paris Agreement. Given the large number of issues under negotiation, the empirical assessment and the claims upon which it is based are confined to their respective roles in shaping the architecture, form and content of the pivotal provisions on nationally determined contributions (NDCs). Utilising the new account of leadership shows that while China's national climate performance was stronger than the US's, the US nonetheless performed a much more sustained international leadership role over the period 2013-2015 in shaping the NDCs while China acted largely as a defensive co-operator until the last year of the negotiations. The conclusion draws together the key threads of the argument.

Rethinking Leadership

The terms 'leadership' and 'leader' occupy a wide semantic field in the English language, ranging from democratically elected leaders to dictators, from front-runners in a race to pioneers in a field, and from successful bargainers to moral advocates. The scholarly debates about climate leadership are equally wide-ranging, which has generated considerable conceptual confusion. However, it is possible to cut through this diversity of meanings by sorting leadership into two different categories, which I call front-runnership versus substantive leadership. These are analytically distinct but interact in practice.

Front-runnership is a type of positional leadership that refers to front-runners or first movers/pioneers in a performance field. For example, China is a 'world leader' in CO2 emissions as well as renewable energy investment. Within this broad category we can identify cooperative versus competitive front-runners. Cooperative front-runners are those who go first and/or do more in a field to set an example in the hope that others will follow or to induce cooperation and collective action. Competitive front-runners are those who seek to win a performance or race (e.g. a green technology race) at the expense of others. Competitive front-runners may attract followers but, as Liefferink and Wurzel

have argued (2017, 953) they are not leaders if they only seek to win and do not intend to attract followers. Conversely, while cooperative front-runners intend to attract followers, that do not qualify as leaders in the substantive sense if they fail to attract followers, despite their good intentions.

The second category refers to substantive leadership, which necessarily entails followership, and it is the primary focus here. It is a particular type of political agency, which may be practiced directly or indirectly and in formal or informal settings, and it entails asymmetric roles between leaders and followers in the collective pursuit of collective goals.

Efforts to produce more systematic, theoretically informed accounts of leadership in political science in this substantive sense are scattered across a variety of different sub-disciplines such that the collective effort has been described as ‘one of extraordinary dissipation’ (Foley, 2013: 18). Nonetheless, as Rhodes and Paul t’Hart (2014) have observed in their recent stocktaking of the field, the study of political leadership has moved beyond political biographies and a focus on individual *leaders* to the study of *leadership* as a process of interaction “between leaders and followers; institutions and their rules of the game; and the broader historical context” (Rhodes and t’Hart, 2014: 6). This has included identifying the key elements of a leadership relationship, including leaders, followers, how leaders influence followers, the goals of leadership and the relationship between the ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ for leaders (e.g. Parker and Karlson, 2014). Yet there is no settled understanding in IR of how to bring together these elements into a coherent account that can demonstrate the social function of leadership and explain what connects leaders and followers.

Leadership in regime negotiations

The central preoccupation of the GEG scholarship on leadership in regime negotiations has been on *how* leaders influence followers. This work has produced a range of leadership types, based on different ‘mechanisms of influence’, that build on the pioneering work of Oran Young (1991) and Arild Underdal (1994). The list of leadership types has grown to include ‘structural leadership’ (based on side-payments, threats and/or coercion); ‘directional’, ‘unilateral’ or ‘exemplary’ leadership (i.e., showing the way, moving first and setting an example to induce cooperation); ‘instrumental’, ‘entrepreneurial’ or ‘problem-solving’ leadership (the exercise of negotiating skill in resolving deadlocks); ‘intellectual’ or ‘cognitive’ leadership (providing expertise and new ideas); and ‘institutional leadership’ (supporting institutions that facilitate cooperation) (e.g. Andresen and Agrawala, 2002; Skodvin and Andresen, 2006; Saul and Seidel, 2011. Liefferink and Wurzel, 2017; Parker and Karlsson, 2018).

This work has provided a range of fine-grained insights on how leaders wield influence inside and outside multilateral negotiations. However, much less attention has been paid to probing leadership itself, including the nature of the relationship between leaders and followers in different institutional settings. Underdal’s (1994: 140) general definition of

leadership comes close: ‘an asymmetrical relationship of influence, where one actor guides or directs the behavior of others towards a certain goal over a certain period of time’. Young’s (1991: 285) definition, which is more specifically tailored to diplomatic leadership in international negotiations, is ‘the actions of individuals who endeavor to solve or circumvent the collective action problems that plague efforts of parties seeking to reap joint gains’. Both accounts include ‘structural power’ as a mechanism of influence by leaders, which means that consent by followers is merely a desirable but not a necessary condition of leadership.

There are two key problems with this approach, which has been uncritically carried forward in the GEG work on climate leadership. First, the inclusion of ‘structural power’ as a leadership mechanism reduces leadership to the application of material power and ignores the social and relational dimension of leadership, which includes expectations on the part of followers, responsibilities on the part of leaders and a social purpose. For example, the idea of side-payments is generally understood by rationalists to mean material inducements that bring on board a party that would not otherwise wish to cooperate. But there are many other social meanings that may attach to resource provision, one of which is that it may enable parties to do what they wish to do but cannot due to their limited capacity. To approach climate finance simply as a side-payment fails to acknowledge that it is socially recognised by the parties as a responsibility of developed states towards developing countries that enhances the latter’s capabilities and agency to pursue mitigation and adaptation and thereby further collective goals without undermining their development aspirations. It is the fulfilment of these expectations and responsibilities that enables collective action in furtherance of collective goals, rather than simply the leader’s goals.

Second, breaking down leadership into different types based on mechanisms of influence means that some leadership types cannot be analytically distinguished from domination or success in bargaining (e.g. structural leadership) or norm entrepreneurship (cognitive leadership) while others (such as directional leadership) rarely serves as the sole basis of successful leadership in highly contested negotiations. Insofar as structural leadership allows the primary goals of the leader-follower relationship to be reduced to the purely self-interested goals of the leader, then the concept of leadership provides no added value. Similar issues arise with Joseph Nye’s approach to leadership and power, which tends to focus on how leaders can best get their *own* way and build followership through soft power (attraction) and hard power (fear and side-payments), as if accommodating the concerns of others is somehow a failure of leadership, or at least a weaker or less successful variety (Nye 2008, chapter 2). However, as Malne (1995: 92) has argued, a leader acts on behalf of a larger group and seeks to promote collective goals. This is vindicated by Parker, Karlsson and Hjerpe’s (2015) survey of negotiators and observers at four consecutive COPs over the period 2008-2011, which tested the significance of structural, directional, ideational and instrumental leadership compared to commitment to the common good or self-interest in explaining leadership recognition. Their survey found that a perceived commitment to the common good emerged as the most important factor for any actor seeking recognition as a leader (Parker, Karlsson and Hjerpe, 2015: 444, 449, see also Saul and Seidel, 2011: 916). They also found that structural leadership, understood as ‘the

ability to provide resources and inducements to address a problem' was ranked the least important among the four leadership types (Parker, Karlsson and Hjerpe, 2015: 445).

Leadership and hegemony

Curiously, while the use of coercion, threats and bribery is largely unquestioned as part of the repertoire of 'structural leadership' in the scholarship on leadership in GEG, there are ongoing debates between and among different IR theories about the meaning and role of consent and coercion in the relationship between hegemon and subaltern states. Aside from structural realism, most approaches (including liberal, constructivist, neo-Gramscian, neoclassical realist and English School) understand hegemony as a type of leadership based on partially socialized power rather than merely material preponderance. This acknowledges, in varying degrees, the importance of the socialisation of secondary states so they come to accept or acquiesce in the hegemon(s)' preferred order or regime. However, there are differences over the degree to which coercion remains in play as a necessary element of hegemony, and whether consent is real, manipulated, or acquired as a result of agreement, beneficial public good outcomes and/or fair processes. Here I tease out two different ways in which hegemony, leadership, consent and coercion/domination may be conceptually linked.

The first and most common conceptual linkage is that *hegemony is a type of leadership* that is based on a mixture of consent and coercion, which means it is more or less socially sanctioned according to the degree to which it is not coercive. On this view, resort to coercion does not disqualify leadership; rather it simply means that the leader's purpose is only partly socialised. This understanding can get by with a rudimentary definition of leadership of the kind offered by Underdal, because it is open to all modes of influence and all manner of purposes. In theory, leadership can extend to dictatorship if it becomes necessary for the leader to prevail, while followers are simply those who comply, willingly or otherwise. The problem is that this understanding of leadership has no distinct, analytical value because it cannot be marked off from domination.

The second and less common conceptual linkage, which I defend, is that hegemony itself is not leadership. Rather, *hegemony is made up of a mixture of leadership plus coercion*, and the leadership component is based on consent, not coercion. However, it is hard work building consent and there is invariably some resistance, so coercion is necessary if the hegemon wishes to ensure 'compliance' by all within the relevant community. This account of hegemony rests on a more restrictive understanding of the leadership component, which requires linking leaders and followers to a common purpose or shared interests (rather than just the leader's goal), and a more restrictive understanding of followership based on assent or acquiescence to the common purpose.

Cox's neo-Gramscian account of hegemony (Cox 1983) is usually taken as exemplary of the first interpretation. Yet his discussion is ambiguous and can support both interpretations. Take the famous passage: 'To the extent that the consensual aspect of power is in the forefront, hegemony prevails. Coercion is always latent but is only applied

in marginal, deviant cases. Hegemony is enough to ensure conformity of behavior in most people most of the time' (Cox, 1983: 164). Here hegemony, understood as leadership, is juxtaposed to coercion, making it possible to distinguish between what is needed to lead and what may be necessary to ensure total compliance in a community. Leadership requires legitimation so that the interests and goals of the hegemon are seen as compatible with or serving collective interests and goals, even if all parties do not benefit to the same degree. This requires the hegemon to build followership by defending their goals *as collective goals* and making enough concessions to secondary states to win at least their acquiescence (Cox, 1983: 64 (my emphasis); Forgacs, 2000: 422-424). These concessions need not be extensive, *but they need to be enough to prevent defection*. As Cox has put it, 'Hegemony is like a pillow: It absorbs blows and sooner or later the would-be assailant will find it comfortable to rest on' (Cox, 1983: 139).

This account of consent provides a rather low bar for followership because it is grounded in a sociological understanding of what is minimally needed to acquire political acceptance, rather than what might be required to garner strong support according to a normative ideal of legitimacy based on full and free consent. However, coercion lies below this bar. This is because resort to coercion in order to hold sway *is a sign of legitimation failure and therefore a failure of leadership*. Those who are coerced are, by definition, not followers who support the hegemon's collective project and they therefore lie *outside* the hegemon's constituency of followers, even if they remain within the hegemon's larger sphere of influence.¹

Reinterpreting and extracting the leadership element from a neoGramscian account of hegemony provides a basis for a more general conceptualization of political leadership as a particular type of asymmetric influence that can be analytically marked off from domination. This requires linking leaders with those to whom leadership must be legitimated via collective goals. Leadership therefore may be formally defined as:

a type of social interaction whereby one or more parties (the leaders) exercise asymmetric influence in guiding, attracting or negotiating the consent or acquiescence of other parties (the followers), either directly or indirectly via institutions, in ways that enable or facilitate collective action towards the achievement of a common purpose in a given community.

This account presupposes that the goals and means to achieve them defended by the leaders are not seen as purely self-serving. Rather they must be successfully legitimated as furthering the collective goals of the community of leaders and followers. The term 'common purpose' serves as a placeholder for collective purpose, project, agenda or other collective task, including a pathway to a shared goal. 'Followers' refer to the constituency that has accepted or acquiesced in the common purpose. This presupposes that followers have *some capacity and opportunity to exercise agency* in conferring or withholding their consent. The 'community' may extend to an organization, social group, coalition or international society. In the case of the climate change negotiations, 'the community' is the community of 196 parties to the UNFCCC.

Conceptualising leadership is logically prior to determining the leader's mechanisms of influence because it sets the necessary boundary conditions for understanding

followership. Underdal's influential definition of leadership does not perform this boundary work and therefore allows any type of goal and no restriction on mechanisms of influence. That said, those mechanisms of influence identified in the GEG literature that respect the agency of potential followers to give or withhold consent to a collective pursuit would also be available to leaders in the reconceptualized account. This includes advocacy/persuasion, setting a national example, providing resources and other incentives, providing new ideas and developing creative proposals and brokering compromises that resolve deadlocks. Yet these different ways of building support must be located in their different political and institutional context.

The institution of multilateralism is based on state consent, and the meaning of consent and the ways in which it is achieved, are determined by the procedures and practices of multilateral negotiations. Typically, leaders build support for particular proposals by working within like-minded coalitions, and then negotiating with other coalitions and parties, to stitch together a series of compromises to produce a final text. Consent is taken as registered in the final plenary session by the President of the COP if there are no formal objections to the final text. Objections can be made on the basis of procedural irregularities or substantive issues. In line with the neoGramscian understanding of negotiated consent, absence of objection at this final stage does not necessarily signify strong approval or shared values, although it may for some parties. For others, it may merely indicate grudging acceptance of a workable set of compromises that includes sufficient concessions in relation to their 'red line' issues, and is considered preferable to the counter-factual of no agreement and therefore no collective action. This is often how weaker and vulnerable parties in the climate negotiations come to acquiesce to agreements. As Cipler (2015: 268) has noted, this is because bad rules are usually better than no rules. The reasons for support also provide clues to the relative strength or fragility of attachment to the common purposes and provisions that bind leaders and followers together in a joint pursuit.

The distinctiveness of leadership

There are five advantages of this revised conceptualisation of leadership when compared to the conventional GEG approach based on leadership types. First, it focuses more attention on the social and relational dimension of leadership, rather just the leaders' mechanisms of influence, by linking leaders with the constituencies to whom leadership must be legitimated. It is also general enough to stretch across and be adapted to international, transnational and national politics and not just multilateral negotiations.

Second, this account of leadership may overlap with, but can be distinguished from, political authority, understood as the recognized right to preside, manage, rule or make decisions. In the context of multilateral negotiations, political authority is exercised by the occupant of the office of COP President, who is officially appointed to oversee and manage the negotiations in accordance with the recognized principles and procedures of multilateralism. Parties defer to the COP President because of their commitment to the institution of multilateralism. In contrast, leadership in diplomacy and negotiations is a particular type of creative political agency (exercised by an individual or a team working together) that plays an influential role in facilitating the making of a collective agreement

to serve a collective purpose.² Acceptance of the leader's proposals by other parties need not be based on deference to the leader (although it may); more often it is based on pragmatic calculations. While leadership by a particular party or group of parties may stretch over many negotiations, it may also be short-lived and confined to particular crucial items in a negotiation, in contrast to more durable or official forms of political authority grounded in socially recognized rules. No party has a pre-given right to preside or lead, even if some parties may see themselves as fit for such a role; leadership must be earned by building support in ways that are consistent with the institution of multilateralism.

Third, this conceptualisation of leadership can be distinguished from mere success in bargaining, since pure bargaining treats the preferences of other parties to the negotiations merely as constraints on the strategic pursuit of the bargainer's individual interests and bargainers. There is no shared purpose and no attempt to find commonalities or shift preferences. In contrast, leaders, if they are to attract followers, must be able to demonstrate that their goals serve general interests. This may require concessions to incorporate the core concerns of others (which is not to argue that leaders must be purely altruistic). This is not a weakness but rather a requirement of leadership in non-like-minded communities, and it carries an explicit or implicit responsibility that the leaders will be answerable to followers in terms that are consistent with the collective project they have played a larger role in shaping and defending.

Fourth, successful norm entrepreneurship is one means by which leaders may seek to mobilise others around a common purpose, but it is not the only means of attracting and guiding a constituency of followers. In divided communities successful normative persuasion is rare, and we can expect to see contending leadership coalitions, uniting around different common interests, principles and goals (Dupont 1996) along with differentiation in the ways in which leadership is legitimated to differently situated sub-constituencies. If leadership is to emerge vis-à-vis the larger constituency, then it needs to focus more on bridging differences between coalitions and less on bonding with members of like-minded coalitions. Unpicking these processes can also shed light on varying depth of commitment by differently situated parties to collectively agreed goals. In these contexts, negotiations tend to produce transactional leadership that takes the form of developing acceptable compromise packages to differently situated parties with only minimal shifting of preferences. Transformational leadership through normative advocacy that transforms preferences, identities and interests and mobilises others to work towards a greater collective purpose is rare in large, complex and deeply divided multilateral negotiations and more common of leaders mobilising like-minded or similarly aggrieved constituencies that form a sub-group in a larger polity.³

Finally, the foregoing account of substantive leadership in international negotiations is analytically distinct from what I have called positional leadership exercised by cooperative national-front runners but there may be important empirical connections. For example, it is a normative expectation among the parties that developed countries *should* take the lead in mitigation (i.e. by acting as national front-runners relative to developing countries) on the basis of the UNFCCC's principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR). Yet diplomatic leadership on the

international stage is exercised by the political executive, while being a national front-runner or merely enhancing national climate action relative to past efforts presupposes the necessary political support at the domestic level. This can create problems for the political executive if its international leadership ambitions are not aligned with their domestic politics and it cannot muster a working majority in the legislature. The empirical analysis shows that these problems are not necessarily an obstacle to international leadership if a commitment to the common purpose can be demonstrated internationally in other ways and the political executive can find ways of artfully managing these tensions. As I show below, this explains the puzzle of why the US was able to play a more significant international leadership role than China, even though China's national climate policy performance was stronger than the US's.

The US, China and the negotiation of the Paris Agreement

Identifying leadership in large-n multilateral negotiations is challenging because it is typically highly distributed within and between different negotiating coalitions and the COP Presidency, as well as across different negotiating tracks. Given the kaleidoscopic nature of the negotiations, it is not always possible to identify an overall leader or leadership coalition that has exercised asymmetric influence in the final outcome, as distinct from particular items in particular negotiating tracks. To keep the discussion manageable, this examination focuses on the US's and China's respective roles in setting the agenda for, and shaping the form and content of, the core provisions on NDCs and how they relate to the principles of CBDR. To guide the evaluation of the respective roles of the US and China, the foregoing account of leadership is operationalised by employing the following three essential criteria.

First, there must be evidence of *asymmetric influence*. This requires demonstrating that the US and/or China exercised disproportionate influence in shaping the agenda, form and content of the NDCs, which constitute the parties' primary mitigation responsibilities. This requires evidence of a significant rather than minor imprint on the core provisions on NDCs that can be traced to the formal proposals and/or the most significant compromises that were brokered by one or both parties.

Second, there must be evidence of a *commitment to the common purpose*, which distinguishes leadership from domination or mere success in self-interested bargaining. However, this does not require the demonstration of pure altruism since no party in negotiations, including leaders, can afford to neglect their own interests; yet leaders cannot be seen as purely self-serving. The art of leadership in this context is for leaders to find ways of folding their own purposes into the larger purpose so that are seen as serving a common purpose, and this includes making necessary compromises. The primary purpose of the negotiations was to negotiate 'a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all Parties' (UNFCCC, 2011). This was to be a durable agreement that would fulfil the ultimate objective of the UNFCCC to reduce global emissions to safe levels. Success in reaching a durable agreement is a necessary condition for achieving the ultimate objective. Primary evidence of commitment

to reaching a durable agreement might include public statements of commitment, and a negotiating strategy that is creative, flexible, proactive and reaches out to all negotiators to achieve universal buy-in. This presupposes a commitment to finding ways of bringing all parties on board. In contrast, a negotiating strategy that is mainly focused on consistently blocking proposals that do not conform to national interests would not qualify. However, evidence of commitment to the ultimate objective of reducing emissions is also necessary to demonstrate good faith on the part of leaders, including how they manage the unavoidable political tensions between what might be necessary to secure agreement and what is needed to achieve the ultimate objective. This might include the credibility of a party's national climate action, the level of contribution to climate finance for developed countries, the presence of special bilateral and other initiatives to promote international cooperation on climate change and/or the vigor and sincerity of a party's climate advocacy. Contrary evidence would include national or international actions that manifestly contradict or undermine the collective goal of reducing emissions.

Third, there must be evidence of *consent*. This requires tracking how leaders build support for proposals with like-minded states and coalitions and how they bridge differences with other parties and coalitions. This includes identifying key concessions and commitments to provide resources and other incentives to induce cooperation. Building collective buy-in in the context of deep disagreement requires good timing, flexibility and artful judgment in providing enough accommodation of the core concerns or 'red lines' of differently situated coalitions to prevent defection. Since objections in the final plenary may be substantive or procedural, then avoiding procedural irregularities in brokering compromises is also important. The absence of any objections in the final plenary can then be taken as *prima facie* evidence of acquiescence (in the absence of evidence of coercion or bribery or procedural irregularities), which represents the minimal threshold of consent according to the rule-making processes of multilateralism.

The empirical evidence for the analysis is based on direct personal observation of the conferences of the parties (COPs) at Durban (COP17-2011) where the negotiating road map was agreed and launched, Doha (COP18-2012), Lima (COP20-2014) and Paris (COP21-2015); a detailed examination of the parties' submissions to the body managing the negotiations (called the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform on Enhanced Action), the Earth Negotiations Bulletin (an independent reporting service that has covered the UNFCCC negotiations since 1995), formal statements and press conferences by the US and China, media reports of the negotiations and a comprehensive review of the extensive scholarly literature on the negotiations.

Applying the foregoing criteria, I show that the US played a more sustained leadership role than China over the period 2013-2015. The US exerted much *greater influence* than any other party in setting the agenda for, and shaping the architecture of, the NDCs; it demonstrated a *greater commitment* than China to lead and to reconcile differences and guide parties to a durable agreement; and it showed a greater willingness to compromise to *win the consent* of differently situated parties. In contrast, China's leadership role vis-à-vis the entire community of negotiators, as distinct from developing countries, was

more sporadic and confined to key moments in the final year. Between these important moments, China's predominant role was that of a defensive co-operator.

Asymmetric influence

All parties were able to leave their mark on the Paris Agreement in different degrees but the EU, China and above all the US left the biggest imprint on the core mitigation provisions. Indeed, it is possible to trace a direct line from the key mitigation provisions in the Paris Agreement to a set of formal US submissions to the negotiating body in 2013, which was the crucial agenda setting year. The US's first submission had argued that the parties should 'define their own mitigation contributions, taking into account their national circumstances, capacity, and other factors they consider relevant' (US, 2013a: 1-2). The submission reasoned that '...Parties are in a unique position to judge their respective situations, [and] they are much more likely to participate in the agreement if they have designed their own contributions...and such an approach promotes an agreement that is applicable to all Parties' (US, 2013a: 1-2). The US argued that ambition could be built up over time and that '[a]n approach that imposes contributions from without is neither realistic nor likely to result in wide participation/implementation' (US 2013a, 2). This contrasted with the EU's more ambitious proposals for a dynamic, step-wise approach that entailed proposed commitments, a rigorous process of scientific and equity review, revision and then inscription as legally binding commitments in a treaty (EU, 2013a: 2, 2013b).

In its second submission leading up to COP19 in Warsaw (US, 2013b), the US sketched the elements of the new *hybrid* agreement: it would need to be concise and flexible so that it would not require constant amendment, containing a mix of legally binding and nonbinding provisions. The parties' specific mitigation commitments would be 'nationally determined' and contained outside the formal agreement but would form part of the package (with the clear implication that they would not be legally binding) (US, 2013b: 2). The US succeeded in getting all of these proposals into the Paris Agreement and the EU had to give up on its push for legally binding international commitments and a more rigorous process of *ex ante* review.

China made most of its submissions as a member of the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC), a diverse coalition of 18 developing countries including India, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Iraq, and Venezuela. This new bloc emerged in 2012 after the 2011 Durban COP as a sign of increasing divergence among the members of the BASIC group, which had acted in concert at Copenhagen but has been less cohesive thereafter (Hocksteter and Milkoreit, 2015). Positioning themselves within the LMDC, China and India adopted the traditionally defensive posture of the bloc, and reiterated their longstanding grievances that developed countries had failed to fulfil their leadership responsibilities according to CBDR given their greater historical responsibility for climate change (e.g. LMDC, 2013). They argued that only developed countries should have legally binding mitigation commitments while developing countries should have greater flexibility. China put this bluntly in one of its few individual submissions: 'The dichotomy between developed and developing countries is the very foundation of the Convention regime, and any attempts to modify the Annexes of the Convention or to re-categorise

developed and developing countries would delay progress in the Durban Platform process with nothing to come in the end' (China, 2013: 1). Yet the Annexes are noticeably absent from the Paris Agreement.

By the end of the negotiations at COP19 at Warsaw in 2013, the EU's long-standing efforts to secure 'internationally legally binding commitments' in relation to mitigation had failed to attract sufficient support. In contrast, the US's formula of 'nationally determined contributions' (NDCs) had much wider appeal, especially for China and India, and was adopted in the Warsaw decision. Parties were invited to begin preparing their 'intended nationally determined contributions' (INDCs) and communicate them in 2015 in the lead up to Paris. Moreover, efforts by the EU, the African Group, the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and the Alliance of Small Island States to ensure a rigorous *ex ante* equity and science review of all NDCs also languished (Ngwadla, 2014). The strongest opposition to these proposals came not from the US but rather the LMDC coalition (including China and India), which also insisted on differentiation on transparency and review according to the traditional Annex I/non-Annex I divide. China's INDC submission argued that transparency arrangements for developing countries would be 'non-intrusive, non-punitive and respecting national sovereignty' (China, 2015:19). The final compromise on review was that the more flexible and nonpunitive would apply to all parties.

However, it was in the lead-up to COP20 at Lima in 2014 that the negotiations received a considerable boost from the joint US-China announcement of their proposed post-2020 INDCs (The White House, 2014). This announcement signalled their commitment to the negotiations and a rapprochement on differentiation. It also qualified CBDR with the phrase 'in light of different national circumstances', which appeared in the joint statement, in the final Lima decision (UNFCCC, 2014: paragraph 3, author's emphasis) as well as the core provisions on NDCs in the Paris Agreement (in Articles 2.2 and 4.3). As Gallagher and Xuan (2018, 6) note, the announcement 'embodied a solution to CBDR because it acknowledged the principle and operationalized it with different types of targets for the two countries'. This saw China act independently of the LMDC and it put pressure on India to demonstrate commitment to a new treaty. It was followed up with a second US-China joint statement in Washington DC in September 2015 on further developments in their domestic policies and bilateral cooperation. This included the announcement of the US's Clean Power Plan, a 2017 start date for China's cap-and-trade program, a domestic policy dialogue and smart/low carbon cities summit. The US reaffirmed its USD 3 billion pledge to the Green Climate Fund while China announced it would commit ¥20 billion (around USD 3.1 billion) for setting up the China South-South Climate Cooperation (The White House 2015a).

The slight trumping by China of the US's finance commitment demonstrated an assumption of greater international responsibility and a desire for commensurate recognition, albeit working within alternative institutions. China's new role as a provider of climate finance was also acknowledged obliquely in Article 9.2 of the Paris Agreement, which declares that parties who are not developed countries may voluntarily provide financial assistance. This contrasts with Article 9(1), which provides that developed countries 'shall' rather than 'may' provide financial resources.

Yet after the first joint statement, China retreated inside the LMDC at the penultimate conference at Lima in 2014. In its INDC submission it continued to defend strict differentiation between developed and developing countries in relation to the binding nature of obligations, the content of NDCs, and transparency and reporting (China, 2015).

By early 2015, the broad ‘landing zone’ of the Agreement was already clear, and it had been largely shaped by the US, with the support of its key allies within the Umbrella Group (Canada, Australia, Japan, New Zealand). Since 2013, the US and EU also increasingly worked together on many matters relating to mitigation and transparency, and the US had found common cause with China over the framing of NDCs, despite ongoing differences on other matters. However, it was not until the final days of the Paris negotiations that the Chinese team shifted from its defensive mode and adopted a more overtly proactive role in working closely with the US and the COP President to help broker final compromises on cross-cutting issues. This role was also formally acknowledged by the Obama administration after the conclusion of the meeting (The White House, 2015b).

China, with the strong support of developing countries, was able to secure a provision that developed countries should continue to take the lead with absolute emissions reductions while developing countries could take a more flexible approach. China also argued that the special responsibilities of developed countries to provide climate finance ‘shall be of the same legal bindingness as their mitigation commitments’ (China, 2014: 2). Here China succeeded, with strong support from developing countries, and the word ‘shall’ found its way into Article 9.1 on finance.

Gao (2018: 229) has argued that the Paris Agreement reflects most of China’s proposals with some exceptions. However, on mitigation, these exceptions were significant given China’s 2013 agenda, particularly the disappearance of the Annexes, and the absence of legal differentiation in the obligation to submit NDCs. Overall, the US exerted much greater influence than other parties in shaping these pivotal provisions in the agreement.

Commitment to the common purpose

The US-China joint statement, announced during President Obama’s visit to Beijing in 2014 for a Presidential summit, provided a significant boost to the international negotiations and clearly signaled a joint commitment to a successful agreement, and the follow up joint statement maintained this momentum. To the world, this bilateral cooperation looked like shared leadership between the US and China, and that was certainly the intention. For the US, the statement provided an important signal, especially to the US Congress, that China acknowledged its growing responsibility as the world’s largest emitter and was prepared to make public undertakings contemporaneously with the US. For China, the statement provided international prestige and was compatible with national climate objectives as well as Xi Jinping’s commitment to greater bilateral cooperation with the US (Godbole 2016, 366). This was a significant response to the increasing pressure for China to play a greater leadership role in line with its changing emissions profile. China overtook the US as the world’s biggest aggregate emitter around

2007 while the US remains the world's largest cumulative emitter and a very high per capita emitter. However, by 2015, the final year of the Paris negotiations, China's aggregate emissions had grown to roughly *double* those of the US (29% compared to 14%) (Olivier et. al., 2016: 5) and its per capita emissions were also higher than some OECD countries. Yet the provisions in the coordinated statement also protected the domestic agenda and national flexibility of both parties, and their respective commitments were not justified in terms of equity and CBDR or the ultimate objective of the agreement (Christoff 2016: 771-72).

What is less well known is that the idea of a joint statement was a US initiative, and it had taken more than a year of planning and consultation as part of a larger effort to step up climate-energy diplomacy with China, India and many other countries (Gallagher and Xuan 2018, 5). This announcement also catalyzed Mexico to make joint announcements with the US (Gallagher and Xuan 2018, 7). While the 2014 joint statement represented a significant staging of co-leadership, a comparison of the US's and China's diplomatic roles and proposals over the longer span of the negotiations shows that it was the US that played the more sustained commitment to the common purpose of securing a durable agreement that was acceptable and 'applicable to all'.

China's proposals and its diplomacy were mainly defensive and focused on bonding with developing countries at various points, and especially the LMDCs, rather than bridging differences and winning the support of, and therefore leading, the entire community of negotiators. Moreover, compared to US negotiators, Chinese negotiators have traditionally had less scope to seek adjustments to their instructions and therefore less scope for, and experience in, brokering creative compromises. This helps to explain why, after the 2014 US-China joint statement, the Chinese negotiators reverted to the defensive posture of the LMDC at the Lima COP immediately. However, this clearly shifted during the endgame at Paris in ways that enabled the US and Chinese negotiators to work more closely together to address tensions and broker differences (The White House 2015b; Shen and Xie 2018a: 716).

While China succeeded in securing some important concessions for developing countries, these concessions also preserved its own national flexibility. China also blocked proposals that were important to the most vulnerable developing countries in the G77, such as proposals for an ex-ante review of INDCs. The US did this too on some issues (most notably on loss and damage), but the key difference is that it aspired to lead the community of negotiators in reaching a durable agreement, working initially within like-minded groups, then reaching beyond to bridge the deep divisions among the major emitters. This assessment is supported by Parker and Karlsson's (2018) survey of leadership recognition by delegates and observers over seven successive COPs (2008-2015). In the case of the Paris negotiations they found that the US enjoyed greater leadership recognition than China. Although leadership was not defined, their time series data indicates that respondents, when asked which countries, party groupings or organisations played a leading role, 'take into account an actor's commitment to addressing the climate change issue, rather than simply basing their answers on the aggregate power held by prospective leaders (2018: 528)

Nonetheless, when we turn to national climate action and the ambition of the parties' INDCs, China can claim much more credit. During the course of the negotiations China stepped up its energy and climate policies, including phasing out the dirtiest coal plants, piloting emissions trading schemes in the provinces and overseeing a massive expansion of renewable energy. China also embarked on a program to reduce coal's share of its national energy mix by closing down many smaller coal mines and announcing a three-year moratorium on new coal mines in December 2015 (Blondeel and Van de Graaf, 2018: 93). During this period, China gave increasing prominence, including in its 13th Five Year Plan, to the idea of building an 'ecological civilization' (Oswald, 2014). China's commitment to South-South climate finance also slightly exceeded the US's climate finance pledge to the GCF.

China's INDC also broke with the past by promising not just a reduction in emissions intensity but a peak and then *absolute decline* in its aggregate emissions no later than 2030. Indeed, it has been claimed that: 'China is greening at a rate and scale that bears comparison with the best in the world' (Mathews and Tan, 2017: 2). Some observers suggest that the peaking of China's national emissions is expected to occur well before 2025 given structural changes in the Chinese economy (Green and Stern, 2016).

The Obama administration also stepped up national climate action in its second term. By 2013, President Obama had launched a broad Climate Action Plan that included ramping up the use of its executive powers to circumvent a hostile Congress and drive progressive national climate policy. The centrepiece of this Plan was the Clean Power Plan, launched in June 2013 and finalised in August 2015, which extended the EPA's regulation of CO₂ to all existing power plants with the aim of reducing emissions from this sector by 32 percent from 2005 levels by 2030. The US also ended US public financing of new coal plants abroad except for very poor countries, and its pledge of 3 billion USD in climate finance was the largest single pledge to the Green Climate Fund (2016).

Climate change was also a legacy issue for President Obama, and he enjoyed very strong commitment and vigorous climate advocacy from his Secretary of State John Kerry. The irony is that while the Obama administration played a significant international leadership role, the President was unable to lead domestically in the face of a deeply divided Congress. This is reflected in the US's modest INDC of an emissions reduction of 26-28% below its 2005 levels by 2025. Although it was the most significant climate action of any administration thus far it still remained modest relative to the US's responsibility as a developed state to lead in mitigation as the world's biggest historical emitter. For example, the Climate Equity Reference Project's allocation framework judged China's INDC as a fair share for a developing country while the US's INDC was found to fall well short (Holz, Kartha and Athanasiou, 2018).

This raises an interesting puzzle: why did China not seek to capitalise more on its domestic achievements in the negotiations prior to Paris? Here I offer three mutually reinforcing explanations.

First, China's emission reduction strategy has been driven mainly (though certainly not exclusively) by domestic considerations such as energy security, rising public concern over the dangerous levels of air pollutions in major cities (e.g. Schreurs, 2016: 222; Blondeel and Van de Graaf, 2018; Shen and Xie 2018a), and planned structural reform of the Chinese economy to become more technology-intensive and service based. As Gallagher and Xuan (2018, 4) also note, a new climate agreement 'would strengthen the hand of the central government in implementing economic structural reforms domestically'.

Second, investment in fossil fuel sectors has also expanded in parallel with renewables given the high pace of economic growth and strong demand for energy in China, and this mutual expansion has been overseen by the same coalition of regulatory and business interests (Shen and Xie, 2018b: 414). This includes carbon emitting coal-to-chemical (including coal-to-gas) plants (Economy, 2017). Moreover, the 'golden era of renewable energy development' came to an end in 2014, before the conclusion of the Paris negotiations, with the slowing of growth and demand for energy, over-supply and growing competition between different sources of energy supply, and local preferences for thermal power to protect local workforces in the coal industry to maintain social stability (Shen and Xie, 2018b: 414). Like the US, China faced significant domestic challenges in transitioning away from fossil fuels.

Third, China's new vision of an ecological civilization is a vision for China, not the world, and this vision is contradicted by continued investments in fossil fuels domestically and abroad through the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China (Kong and Gallagher, 2017: 838). Chinese overseas financing of power generation over the period 2007-2014 has been overwhelmingly in coal (66%) compared to renewables (28%); by comparison to the World Bank had made no investments in coal fired power plants and 76% in renewable energy (Gallagher, Kamal and Want, 2016: Table 6). Unlike the US and World Bank public lending, China's development and export-import banks, which are centrally controlled by the Chinese Communist Party, do not attach policy conditions (Kong and Gallagher, 2017: 838). The massive infrastructure investments undertaken and planned under President Xi Jinping's signature Belt and Road Initiative, launched in 2013, includes the export of coal fired power plants and other energy intensive industries along the belt. These financing and investment trends contradict China's stated international commitment to the collective emission reduction goals (net zero by 2050) and temperature targets (1.5-2 degrees) of the Paris Agreement. So while China's INDC is more substantial than the US's INDC, and can be hailed as a 'new normal' in China's economic development (Hilton and Kerr, 2016), it needs to be understood in the context of China's larger development priorities, which include a significant 'export of emissions' to other developing countries.

There are also contradictions in the US's domestic policies. The most notable is that the Obama administration oversaw a massive expansion in the production of unconventional gas and crude oil production over the period 2013-2015. By 2015, the US had become the largest producer of natural gas and petroleum in the world (US EIA, 2016). However, diplomatic leadership is practiced by the US political executive, not Congress. Despite the limitations and contradictions in US climate and energy policy, the Obama administration

played a weak hand well because it had strong aspirations to lead the world and was able to demonstrate commitment in many other ways. The Chinese delegation had a stronger hand in terms of its national effort but played a more defensive diplomatic role until the end game because it did not share the same global leadership aspirations and had a more equivocal commitment to the long-term goals and targets. The collective purpose of the LMDC was focused more on upholding CBDR under the Annex system than orchestrating agreement or preventing dangerous climate change.

Winning consent

The US achieved most of its diplomatic goals and China achieved some in relation to NDCs but the key differences were that the US's proposals were more focused on bridging differences between developed and developing countries, while China's focused on bonding with the LMDC and developing countries. The US's negotiating strategy was to side-step the deep disagreements over CBDR that had plagued the post-Kyoto negotiation following the US's defection from the Kyoto Protocol by proposing greater national flexibility. Although a bottom-up pledge and review model had already appeared in the Copenhagen Accord 2009 and earlier in the UNFCCC 1992 (where the parties had made a voluntary commitment to reduce their emissions to 1990 levels by 2000, subject to further review) the US's Paris proposals represented a new, more dynamic and hybrid iteration of these models. The proposals were designed to achieve breadth of participation rather than depth of commitment in the first instance through a flexible and pragmatic accommodation of national differences to draw in all major emitters, and then build depth of commitment over time via a nationally determined approach to draw support for the more vulnerable parties. The proposals also enabled the US to improvise around international and domestic deadlock by enabling the President to sign the Agreement and implement it under its executive powers (Wirth, 2016), and by not overreaching on domestic ambition in the hope that a future Senate might find it appealing given that China had also undertaken commitments. The Byrd-Hagel resolution of the US Senate, passed unanimously in July 1997 prior to the Kyoto negotiations in December, had made it clear that the Senate would not ratify an agreement if developing countries did not make commitments in the same time period as the US, or if it resulted in serious harm to the US economy. These constraints were well-known to the negotiators. Indeed, as Cléménçon (2016: 6) put it, the US's great accomplishment was 'to have the world accept the domestic constraints in the US as a feature of international climate talks'.

The US's proposals were therefore much more focused on winning the support of major emitters, above all China but also India. But this would also present a legitimisation challenge if meaningful concessions were not made to the parties seeking greater mitigation ambition, such as the EU and the more climate vulnerable developing countries. Not surprisingly, there was strong push back from the latter in relation to their core concerns. The most significant development was the emergence of the High Ambition Coalition between the 28 members of the EU and 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific states (European Commission, 2015) – an idea initiated by Foreign Minister Tony de Brum of the Marshall Islands and co-led with the EU. The coalition demanded a range of measures, but its central and most publicised demand was for a more rigorous temperature target of

1.5 rather than 2 degrees Celsius in order drive mitigation ambition faster and higher. The 1.5 degrees target had not been part of the US's, China's or indeed the EU's initial proposals but all joined, at different stages, what was widely perceived as a 'moral coalition'. The US joined one week into the negotiations, and well ahead of China, thereby making a crucial concession to this front-runner coalition on ambition. By the closing days of the conference, the High Ambition Coalition's membership had grown considerably, and once Brazil joined, China then India followed (Climate Home News, 2015; Mathiesen and Harvey, 2015). By accepting the coalition's demand to strengthen the temperature target in the Paris Agreement to include 'pursuing efforts' to limit warming to 1.5°C, both the US and China dealt with a 'red line' issue of small island developing states. This concession helped to appease these and other parties who were concerned about the degree of national flexibility afforded by the NDCs provisions to the E2.

Turning to resource provision, the comparable commitments to climate finance made by the US and China in their second joint statement in Washington DC in September 2015 ahead of the Paris conference demonstrated a commitment to increasing the support of developing countries and expanding the collective capacity of the parties to pursue the ultimate objective of reducing emissions. This commitment was crucial, given that the INDCs of 110 developing countries submitted over the course of 2015 in the lead up to Paris were made conditional on adequate financial support (Pauw et al 2018: 6).

Finally, chastened by the criticisms they received for their conduct at the Copenhagen negotiations in 2009, the US and especially China were careful not to deviate from the recognized practices of negotiations. At Copenhagen, the US, China, India, Brazil and South Africa departed from the official negotiating text and forged a short political accord in a secret minilateral meeting. While further concessions were made to vulnerable parties before it was presented to the final plenary, it could not be gavelled through due to objections over the spectacular deviation from the normal negotiation process (Christoff, 2010). The Accord was also seen by many parties and observers as a self-interested bargain reached by major emitters. While the US-China joint statement of 2014 and the bilateral negotiations that produced it preserved the E2's national flexibility, this bilateral engagement was very different from their minilateral meeting at Copenhagen. The joint-statement simply declared each party's commitment to national action, to strengthened bilateral cooperation and to a successful treaty. It was primarily intended to galvanise the negotiations rather than pre-empt them, since the in-principle commitment to up-front NDCs had already been accepted by the parties at Warsaw in 2013. However, the joint statement also reflected a much needed rapprochement on CBDR and this shaped the subsequent negotiations and outcomes. Indeed, a key phrases from the joint statement - 'in light of different national circumstances' - subsequently appeared in the Lima final decision and the Paris Agreement (Articles 2.2 and 4.3).

While observers are justified in singling out the 2014 US-China joint statement as an important moment of shared leadership, the foregoing analysis has shown that the US played a more sustained leadership role over the period 2013-2015. The US shaped the agenda on NDCs and played a significant role in shaping their final form and content in ways that improvised around international and domestic deadlock and drew in the major

emitters. The US executive undertook significant bilateral initiatives, including with China that led to the joint statement; it provided the largest single contribution to the Green Climate Fund; it engaged in more vigorous international advocacy, especially the US secretary of state; and it oversaw new domestic initiatives on climate and energy policy that were credible enough to signal an ongoing commitment to reducing emissions and went further than any previous administration, despite the existence of significant contradictions in national energy policy. Consistent with a neo-Gramscian understanding of consent as acquiescence, the treaty clearly suits major emitters. However, it also suited many other parties and enough concessions were made to vulnerable parties to bring them on board in accordance with the recognised processes of negotiating consent.

China demonstrated a consistent commitment to the multilateral process and its cooperation with the US in the joint statements, comparable commitment to climate finance and endgame negotiations at Paris were crucial to the success of the Agreement. Aside from these moments, and despite its more credible national action, China's diplomatic role was generally more defensive and less proactive than the US's because it was reluctant to break ranks with the LMDCs. China resisted many proposals that were important to poorer and more vulnerable developing countries such as rigorous *ex ante* review of INDCs and it defended stricter *ex post* scrutiny only of developed countries' NDCs. It was also one of the last major emitters to join the High Ambition Coalition during the endgame. While China won many concessions for developing countries, this diplomatic performance can be linked to its solidarity with developing countries rather than to any aspirations to lead the larger negotiating community.

It is no small irony that the US under the Trump administration has become not only a laggard but also an active spoiler and this has led to a significant loss of momentum in the ongoing negotiations. Despite China's reaffirmation of its commitment to the Paris Agreement and providing South-South climate finance, it has not sought to compensate for the change in the US administration or fill the so-called 'leadership vacuum' created by the change of US administration. Instead it has continued with its defensive co-operator's position in the negotiation of the Paris rule book on implementation. At the Katowice COP in 2018, the US joined, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in refusing to welcome the IPCC's report on 1.5 degrees, and the final decision could only welcome 'its timely completion', but not the contents of the report (ENB, 2018: 4). There has been no advocacy from China in defence of the 1.5 degree target. While China has championed the needs of developing countries, it gives greater priority to development than climate change because it sees achieving a higher stage of development as a necessary prerequisite to managing climate change (Kopra, 2016: 33). This helps to explain the growing rift between China and the most climate vulnerable developing countries in the G77, which threatens the unity of the China/G77 alliance.

The civilisational challenge of climate change requires transformational leadership at all levels of governance, including civil society organisations. The complexities and divisions in large-n multilateral negotiations are such that, at best, only transactional leadership can be expected, and this is what the US delivered in the negotiations. Looking ahead, what is

most needed to ensure the success of the Paris Agreement are cooperative front-runners at the national level.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted problems in how leadership has been understood in IR and GEG scholarship on international negotiations and offered a reconceptualization of leadership that avoids these problems and demonstrates its added-value as a social scientific concept. This reconceptualized account of leadership is distinguishable from many closely allied concepts with which it is often conflated (especially domination and success in bargaining), and underscores its real world social function in facilitating collective agency. Leadership is an artful practice that entails not just asymmetric influence by the leader but also an intention to lead a collective pursuit; a recognizable commitment to a collective (rather than purely self-serving) purpose by the leader; and the building of consent for the collective purpose by followers, with consent understood in minimal terms as absence of defection. The case study shows that US leadership made a difference – indeed, was crucial to the success of the Paris Agreement – even if it was not the difference that climate vulnerable states, climate scientists and climate justice advocates would have hoped for. The case study also sheds light on why calls for international leadership are so ubiquitous (because leadership can make a difference), and why the supply of leadership is usually disappointing for many (because leadership can never satisfy all parties to the same degree). Leadership, no matter how committed, artful, well-resourced and well-timed, will always entail painful compromises in large and diverse communities made of contending leadership coalitions and deep disagreement. It is less challenging in smaller, like-minded groups or communities that share social bonds and/or a common purpose.

The account of leadership developed here has been fleshed out in ways that are relevant to large-n multilateral negotiations. However, the general formulation is broad enough to stretch across, and be adapted to, different social contexts and institutional settings at the international and transnational levels. This would require the core elements of leaders, followers, relevant community, collective problem and purpose, and the meaning of consent to be fleshed out differently in accordance with the relevant social and institutional context.

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Endnotes

¹ Destradi (2010, 924) likewise distinguishes leadership from hegemony by arguing that the former serves a common purpose and is based on voluntary participation by followers and not coercion. She also identifies two different legitimation models: endogenous learning and emulation. However, her focus is on regional powers, not leadership in negotiations, and her first model sets the bar too high for multilateral negotiations in requiring shared values or a common reaction to structural conditions. Her second model requires imitation by a follower of a leader's success without any intention on the part of the leader to attract followers. However, I argue that an intention to lead is a necessary element of substantive leadership.

² Of course, individuals occupying formal leadership positions, such as COP Presidents, can also demonstrate this kind of creative, agential leadership in exercising their formal powers.

³ The terms transactional and transformational leadership are widespread in the leadership literature and can be traced to James Burns' classic study of leadership (Burns 1978, especially pp. 4, 29 and 344).