

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 29, 2023

The Honorable John Kerry
Special Presidential Envoy for Climate
United States Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Special Envoy Kerry:

We read with interest your opinion article, co-authored with International Energy Agency Executive Director Fatih Birol, which appeared in the Washington Post September 19, 2023.

While lauding the progress that has been made to address climate change, you recognize that the continued construction coal-fired power plants to generate electricity in places like China and South Asia “threatens to negate any such advances.”

These countries desire what coal delivers—affordable, reliable, and secure power. China grew into the world’s second largest economy on the back of coal-fired electricity generation. Developing countries will always put economic growth, poverty eradication, and energy access ahead of addressing climate change. The best indicator of how well a country does in many measures of human welfare is the share of its population with access to electricity. That will not change.

China is acting within, and taking advantage of, the international framework you helped create—the Paris Agreement. The Chinese coal plants to which you object now power mines and refineries producing critical minerals. They drive factories building solar panels, wind turbines, and electric batteries and cars that the Biden Administration wants to force Americans to buy.

In 2015, you called this treaty “the turning point in the fight against climate change.” Far from a turning point, it represented little more than business as usual. It gave China a free ride—which you now seem to regret.

The Paris Agreement was a lost opportunity to bring some sense to international climate diplomacy by reforming the unjustifiable principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities,” which created artificial divisions of labor between developed and developing countries. It preserved a system where developing countries have few obligations to act. When they do, it is only with financial and other support from developed countries. Meanwhile, the United States and other developed countries are expected to adopt completely unrealistic emissions targets, like “net zero,” that put us at a severe competitive disadvantage.

At the time the Paris Agreement was signed, China was the world’s second largest economy, and had been so for many years. Nevertheless, the treaty you negotiated and agreed to locked into place China’s status as a developing country. That was as absurd then as it is now.

Since 1992, China's economy has grown more than 1,000 percent. Its emissions have more than quadrupled. Despite that tremendous economic growth, China still insists it deserves special treatment reserved for developing countries. That is how it justifies its flimsy Paris emissions commitment, which allows it to do virtually nothing to reduce emissions through 2030.

Instead of pushing back against Chinese duplicity, President Biden and you have focused on surrendering one of America's greatest geopolitical advantages—affordable, abundant, reliable energy—while making us more dependent on China. It need not be this way.

We should no longer allow China to abuse the international system. The United States must make it clear in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change that it will no longer tolerate China's status as a developing country. As the world's second largest economy, it must be included among the countries in Annex I of that treaty.


The Senate has voted unanimously to support a similar stand in the Montreal Protocol. During the debate on ratification of the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, the Senate voted 96-0 on an amendment stating that China is not a developing country. It further instructed the Secretary of State to initiate talks aimed at delisting China from the ranks of developing countries.

We hope that your belated recognition that China is capable of doing more will prompt tough action instead of more handwringing. At the upcoming meeting of the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties in the United Arab Emirates this December, we urge to you to begin the process of listing China with the other developed countries in that treaty. No longer should China be able to hide its inaction on emissions behind "common but differentiated responsibilities."


China is bent on global domination. It is the world's second largest economy and largest emitter of greenhouse gases. It is America's chief economic and geopolitical rival. It exploits forced labor. It manipulates global markets. It steals our technology. It is building hypersonic missiles and a blue-water navy. It should not get special treatment in international climate agreements.

There should be no more free rides for China. That should be non-negotiable.

Sincerely,



John Barrasso, M.D.
United States Senator



Josh Hawley
United States Senator