**Deepen the Climate and Clean Energy Partnership with India**

We cannot solve climate change without India’s active participation, and the US-India climate and clean energy relationship is critical to achieving that aim. Beyond the global climate impacts, robust US-India climate and clean energy cooperation is in each government’s national interest. The two countries have long-standing scientific and technical research partnerships that have led to advances in climate science and clean energy development. India also represents an enormous market for US clean energy technologies and investment opportunities. Climate change cooperation can also serve as a positive pillar in our deepening strategic, but complicated, bilateral relationship.

India’s energy demand and emissions in a business-as-usual scenario are projected to double if not triple by 2050, despite the current COVID-19 economic downturn. While per capita emissions are low, India is the third largest single-country emitter of greenhouse gases and has the second largest population in the world at over 1.3 billion. That said, India is a leader in clean energy deployment, especially solar and wind energy. Shortly after he was elected in the spring of 2014, and well before countries were asked to make their first commitments under the emerging Paris Agreement, Prime Minister Narendra Modi quadrupled India’s existing solar targets from 20 gigawatts (GW) to 100 GW by 2022 and created a 175 GW goal for renewable energy by 2022. Under Modi, India has an even more ambitious and achievable climate plan under the Paris Agreement.

India is critical in international negotiations, often explicitly or effectively the leading representative among developing countries determined to maintain strict differences in expectations on climate action with developed countries. Achieving meaningful bilateral cooperation with India can go a long way toward moving toward a common approach to this global problem, while respecting the pressures of global inequality. Moreover, if climate solutions can work in India, they are likely to work in other developing countries. India is also the largest democracy in the world and often positioned as a major counterbalance to China in Asia. The peoples of the United States and India have a shared commonality from a large Indian diaspora in the United States as well as many knowledge exchange programs, such as the Nehru-Fulbright program and the Fulbright-Kalam Climate Fellowship. Therefore, India is a vital partner to the United States in making progress on climate change.

The India agenda could be focused around three priority strategies:

1. Convene a high-level U.S.-India bilateral summit in the first 100 days;
2. Revive the U.S.-India Joint Working Group for Combating Climate Change; and
3. Support India in announcing a strengthened 2030 nationally determined contribution (NDC).
Priority administrative and legislative strategies

The Obama Administration was slow to develop ambitious bilateral cooperation with India, with relatively little emerging before Modi’s election in 2014. Nonetheless, by the end of 2016 the US and India had over 15 bilateral climate and clean energy programs fully in place or in progress, representing the second largest set of bilateral programs of this type with any country other than China. The Trump Administration ended or downgraded most of these, shifting the US-India relationship to focus on three main areas: strategic defense, economic relations and energy, especially natural gas. Building on these programs, the new Administration could redirect the third pillar away from its predominant fossil fuel focus to orient toward sustainability and climate cooperation in a very natural way.

All of these programs were in service of helping India to get on a sustainable path in the face of their massive energy poverty challenges -- India has as many people without reliable access to energy as the total US population -- and to encourage them to join the Paris Agreement with an ambitious commitment. With respect to the Paris calendar which asks for new 2030 commitments from Parties by 2020, by inauguration day 2021 it is highly unlikely that India will have submitted an enhancement of its 2030 target. India signaled in a joint statement last summer with France that while they would enhance their Paris target, they refused to commit to a time frame. Separately, the Finance Ministry circulated a detailed paper last September arguing that India would need support to achieve its current goals under Paris, let alone consider an enhancement, suggesting that they were not now considering additional commitments. We note that there was a very similar dynamic prior to Paris, but in the end the Indian government delivered, and Prime Minister Modi continues to announce increases in India’s clean energy goals despite these other signals. As we have seen in the past, the hesitancy with India is more on enshrining their domestic policies in international commitments rather than committing to ambitious policies themselves.

With all of that in mind, the next UN Framework Convention on Climate Change meeting moving to later in 2021, will give a new Administration more time to engage India. On that time frame, the US will be in a position to challenge India by putting out our own ambitious target for 2030 that could be used to draw out the Modi government to meet them with comparable ambition. Engaging India early on may be critical to getting some of the harder large emerging economies to move forward as well.

Our initial recommendations are as follows:

- **High-Level summit with India and possible joint announcement** – In the first 100 days, the new Administration should schedule a high-level US-India bilateral summit, certainly at the ministerial level and possibly at the leader level, and make climate change a central agenda issue. To prepare for the bilateral, the administration should undertake a bilateral climate policy review (see below), evaluating the pre-existing 15 programs and considering new directions of engagement, including a filter to examine the COVID-19 implications. See Joint Statement: The United States and India: Enduring Global Partners
This summit could be a vehicle for a possible joint announcement with India on our top-line targets for enhanced Paris commitments to 2030. While we can’t duplicate the surprise US-China joint announcement of top line climate targets under Paris from November 2014 (over a year before the final negotiation session commenced), a joint announcement of some sort with India should be considered prior to the Glasgow COP. It could yield significant results if India is recognized as a priority country, notwithstanding enhanced climate cooperation with China and other countries. (The Obama Administration aspired to a similar announcement with India in January 2015 featuring a joint announcement on power sector targets when President Obama was in Delhi for Republic Day, but it did not progress in large part because the US had so recently made the major joint announcement with China.) This would be dependent on understanding the progress made by India since announcing its initial commitment under Paris, which has been substantial, especially on deploying solar energy and developing a cooling action plan. It will also require a careful mapping of the positioning of the new class of Indian negotiators, and the entry points in the Foreign Ministry, Power Ministry, the Prime Minister’s office, and elsewhere in the government.

- **State Department programs** – Revive the US-India Joint Working Group for Combating Climate Change through the State Department, review its prior existing programs -- climate resilience, air quality, and diplomatic cooperation -- and potentially propose new ones.

- **DOE PACE-R (Partnership to Advance Clean Energy-Research) programs**: At the end of the Obama Administration, the United States and India were conducting joint clean energy research in four areas under PACE-R. Modi regularly cited it as one of his favorite bilateral initiatives with the United States. The new Administration should rehabilitate and evaluate previous and potential new research areas. The Trump Administration has continued work under battery storage, which should be ramped up. Of the discontinued programs, the administration should revamp work on energy efficiency and evaluate whether solar energy work merits reconstituting to take in a different direction. The biofuels program should not be restarted as it was yielding minimal advances.

- **Climate resilience, climate resilient infrastructure, sustainable finance, air quality, and electric mobility** are all areas that show promise for progress and cooperation on climate change and have the potential to increase in magnitude.

- **Gas infrastructure development and gas trade deals** were central to US-India cooperation under the Trump Administration. It is critical for the new Administration to act decisively to end such cooperation, particularly since gas is increasingly uncompetitive vis-a-vis renewables and emphasize cooperation on clean energy and climate change.
• **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** – Prime Minister Modi personally launched the ISA at the start of the meeting of the UNFCCC COP that created the Paris Agreement. It is intended to link together equatorial countries in an overarching alliance to advance solar energy on multiple platforms. Modi sees the ISA as one of his signature accomplishments. The US supported its creation but never joined it, since the ISA was initiated as a formal international organization which would require Senate ratification. The US did launch a small-scale technical cooperation program under the ISA. It is important for the US to meet India where it is. The new Administration should scale up its existing program connected to the ISA and explore new areas of involvement, potentially creating some hybrid form of membership which would be less politically difficult in the US.

• **HFC reductions** – The US led in negotiation of the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol in 2016 which create a global phase-down of hydrofluorocarbons, an incredibly potent class of climate pollutants. By itself, Kigali will avoid at least half a degree Celsius of warming by the end of the century. The Trump administration has never sent the Kigali Amendment to the Senate for ratification, despite the support of over a dozen Republican Senators and the universal support for the agreement among the chemical industry (which holds patents for some of the primary proprietary replacements, and the biggest consumers among refrigeration and air conditioning industries. India and China have also not yet ratified the Kigali Amendment. US ratification would accelerate momentum toward ratification in these countries. The US can also initiate more specific avenues of cooperation with India, such as in the so-called “cold-chain” -- moving food from farms to markets, mobility, and other areas. This is another area where a joint announcement could yield mutual benefit.

• **EX-IM, Development Finance Corporation** – The Obama administration pushed billions of dollars into India to support the clean energy targets through OPIC and the Export-Import Bank. While shifting away from gas, these agencies should prioritize clean energy trade with India. Much can be done to pick now defunct working groups that the State Department had created to try to create a more uniform business environment in India across states to pave the way for more overseas investment.

• **Opportunities for other global partnerships** – USAID has been trying to do more work with India on energy in the region and could build into this an active program on regional climate resilience. The US could also seek opportunities for partnerships with India where they have mutual membership in global platforms such as the Clean Energy Ministerial and Mission Innovation.

• **Nuclear cooperation** – The last administration spent a considerable amount of time trying to finish the last few stumbling blocks on the US-India Civilian Nuclear partnership. Spending more time to stand up projects under this agreement is not recommended. Nuclear is a cost prohibitive energy option in India without massive
subsidies, and the legacy of Bhopal still looms large across the political spectrum as a hurdle for large-scale nuclear investment.

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1 This section is based upon input from the following individuals (section leads are noted with an asterisk and additional contributors are listed in alphabetical order): Anjali Jaiswal (Natural Resources Defense Council)*; Andrew Light (World Resources Institute)*; Jake Schmidt (Natural Resources Defense Council); and Alan Yu (Center for American Progress). The views reflected in this document are not intended to be consensus perspectives and do not reflect the views of the individuals’ organizations.