

Pakistan's floods, China's heatwave and the climate crisis

written by Scott Scheffer

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The heatwave in China is the most severe ever recorded in the world. Above, the bed of the Jialing river in Chongqing, China.

The next international climate change conference will start on November 4 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.

Tens of millions are struggling to recover from extreme weather disasters that spanned the entire world in 2022. Just a little more than a month will have passed by the time the delegates gather since two of the worst-known weather catastrophes in human history happened in Pakistan and China.

Indeed, this will place more importance on the issue of climate finance at Sharm el-Sheikh, and the conference may become a flashpoint for a long-simmering international dispute. In 2009, at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-15) to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Denmark, the developed industrialized countries were forced to commit to raising \$100 billion per year to assist the Global South in adapting to the effects of climate change.

They have not met the obligation. The website of the World Resources Institute reports that by October of 2021, “Three major economies — the United States, Australia, and Canada — provided less than half their share of the financial effort.”

A fraction of the funds handed over to the Pentagon each year would cover the U.S.’s commitment. But solidarity with the Global South is not on the imperialist agenda.

While the Western media was reporting every detail of Queen Elizabeth’s funeral for weeks on end, they woefully neglected news of two of the most destructive climate change-related events in history that occurred in Pakistan and China almost concurrently.

Pakistan floods

Southern Pakistan was hit by rains that lasted for weeks beginning in June, killing 1,500 or more people. More than one-third of the deaths were children. Crops were

destroyed; at least a million homes were damaged or washed away completely.

Farmers usually welcome the monsoon season. However, this year, melting glaciers from rising global temperatures turned it into a super-monsoon catastrophe. Some 33 million people were affected, most of them tenant farmers. It will take six months for the water to recede so agriculture can become viable again. Estimates of recovery costs are now at about \$30 billion.

So far, international aid pledged is paltry compared to the need. The World Bank has pledged \$2 billion, and a few governments have pledged \$160 million via the United Nations.

A recent study by economist Utsa Patnaik, published by Columbia University Press, shows that the narrative that British colonization of India was at a cost to the empire turns the truth on its head. Using two centuries of data, Patnaik calculated that Britain robbed India of \$45 trillion between 1765 and 1938. Pakistan was part of India until 1947.

China heatwave

Around the same time as the floods in Pakistan, a heatwave hit China that lasted 70 days. Rivers dried up, hydroelectric power plants stopped working, factories closed, and infrastructure crumbled under the intense heat. As the heatwave continued, water became scarce.

During what the Chinese people know as the “century of humiliation” between 1839 and 1949 when the country was pillaged by Western and Japanese imperialism, weather statistics were not kept. China’s climate record-keeping system only began in 1961 as socialist planning was getting the country back on its feet. This year’s heatwave was the worst in the six decades since then. Many scientists say it may be the worst ever recorded anywhere on the globe, not just in terms of its intensity but

also due to its duration.

China has invested heavily in the mitigation of the effects of climate change. While not always in sync with the goals set at the international conferences where the U.S. and other imperialist delegates tried to obligate countries of the Global South equally with rich imperialist countries, President Xi Jinping has pledged that China would be carbon neutral by 2060. While still forced to rely heavily on coal for power generation and manufacturing, they have made strides in other ways of lowering their “carbon footprint” and are world leaders in impressive innovation.

China’s focus on producing solar panels and wind power components has driven down the price on the world market, making renewables more viable for the entire world. The world’s largest Pumped-Hydro Facility, built by state-owned State Grid Corporation, supplies energy to Beijing and other areas. This technology uses excess solar energy to pump water to a higher elevation when the sun is out. Then when the power demand exceeds the ability of solar panels to provide enough, water is released to run generators on the way back down. China plans to increase its capacity by four times by 2025.

Another state-owned company is in the research and development stage of positioning solar panels 22,000 miles above the earth because solar energy on the ground is only 20% efficient compared to 98% in space. They can get the equipment up, and the next challenge is the transportation of the energy back to the ground. The payoff on the project is likely in the distant future, but it speaks volumes about the determination of the Chinese leadership.

These are examples of working toward mitigation – slowing and then stopping the emissions of CO₂, methane and other greenhouse gasses, an important contribution to the global effort.

Adaptation is the other half of dealing with climate change for every nation in the

world. Protecting one's country from the effects of extreme weather is a more difficult and immediate challenge. Even though China is a world leader in mitigating climate change, rising global temperatures can cause crises in any country. Working hard and investing in mitigation won't protect China from the inevitable extreme weather from climate change. Conversely, the emissions from the use of coal that China is, to a large extent, still forced to rely on are not what brought about the terrible heatwave of 2022.

To affix blame for every climate change disaster, look to the United States and Britain, which historically contributed most of the greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere. Even today, on a per capita basis, the U.S. and Britain are the first and second greatest emitters of greenhouse gasses. But the crisis for the Global South is the result of colonial subjugation, imperialist warfare and other forms of dominance.

At the very least, the imperialist countries must be forced to meet the agreed-on obligations to help the Global South with adaptation. As delegates from the Global South prepare to travel to Sharm el-Sheikh in November to make their case, progressive movement activists worldwide, especially in the U.S., should be planning for an all-out campaign of solidarity. The struggle to succeed against climate change is an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist struggle. Capitalism and imperialism must be abolished, root and branch, to save the planet!



<https://www.struggle-la-lucha.org/2022/10/18/pakistans-floods-chinas-heatwave-and-the-capitalist-climate-crisis/>